

Chapter 2

Sunset: They Walk

Amir Baghira New York, NY

I found the most expensive hotel I could think of in Manhattan and made it my palace. I now call the Ritz Carlton that overlooks Central Park my home. When I arrived here two days ago, the elevator was still functioning. I gathered as many supplies as I could find such as bottles of water, non perishable food items and flashlights with batteries. I also raided the bar for its supply of whiskey. I know this is a sin, but I am still not sure if I am dead or alive. The power went out this morning so I have to climb thirty three flights to get to the penthouse. I may need to rethink this decision very soon as I grow tiresome of stair climbing.

It took almost an entire day but I cleared the bodies away from where I spend most of my time. There were about twenty in the lobby area. I moved them into the back rooms where I would not have to look at them. I also found two in the elevator and I did the same with those. There was a staff of five manning the kitchen. I drug those bodies out the back service doors to the alley. The penthouse was empty so I did not have any work to do when I reached it. I unpacked my food and set the place up the way I like it.

There are eight foot floor to ceiling windows in the large living room of the suite. I pulled the dark red velvety couch across the burgundy carpet and over near the panes where I could relax and enjoy the view. At night you can see the fires blazing for miles. It is a beautiful sight. There are also two large bedrooms with a king bed in each and a small kitchenette with a stove, refrigerator, oven and microwave.

I must have been overly intoxicated last night because I thought I could hear movement in other parts of the hotel. The shuffling and bumping noises seemed to come from within the walls. From now on I will take it easy with the alcohol.

I was starting to get really bored sitting in my room all day so I decided today when my hangover wore off I would go down to the parking garage. While scavenging for supplies I noticed the key locker the valet parking attendant would use to lock up the hotel patrons car keys. I opened it with the key I found in the drawer of the manager's office and rummaged through the sets of keys. I found keys emblazoned with many logos but was only interested in the ones labeled with BMW and Mercedes Benz. I knew I had found my new ride when one of the last keys I inspected was marked with a Corvette logo.

I grabbed my flashlight and made my way down the stairs to the parking garage. It was pitch black and very hard to see in the staircase even with the flashlight. The garage was only one flight down, so I didn't have to spend too much time fumbling in the dark. I reached a blue steel door at the bottom of the concrete stairs that had a sign on it which read "Parking Garage" so I knew I was on the right path. I opened the door and was greeted with a blast of hot air and more darkness.

I stepped into the garage and was a little spooked at the noise my footsteps made as they echoed off the concrete walls. I shined my flashlight around and could see a few cars parked nearby. On the concrete wall behind a white Lincoln Continental to my left was a number seventeen painted in white six inch numbers. I looked down at the keys I had brought with me. The keys for the car I wanted were tagged with the number thirty seven. I walked forward scanning the wall as the numbers rose. When I

reached stall thirty seven, the car was almost as I had imagined it. The only difference was that my mind had painted a picture of a cherry red Corvette. This one was black.

I pressed the unlock button on the remote control attached to the keys. The parking lights blinked twice and lit up my surroundings for a split second. Yellow light filled my eyes and the beam cast quick and elusive shadows that abruptly disappeared. I could hear the locks inside the car pop open as I went to the driver side door, opened it and sat down behind the wheel. I was beginning to get excited and my heart thumped eagerly with the anticipation of realizing a dream.

The first time I had seen one of these machines I knew I wanted to drive one. I had just arrived in America and was on a bus going to New Jersey. We had stopped at a red light and I was watching the sheep conduct their morning walk to their prison cells. I heard a low, growling noise from behind me and as I turned around to look out the opposite side of the bus, my eyes were filled with the cherry red brightness of a brand new Corvette. The paint gleamed and the alloy rims shined against the deep blackness of the tires. The woman behind the steering wheel had short blond hair and the lipstick she wore matched the paint. She had a look of confidence I could feel although I could not see her eyes through her dark sunglasses. The beauty of the woman, while stunningly attractive, could not compare to the car. My eyes were easily diverted back to the gleaming crimson metal which was crafted to perfection as it disappeared down the busy New York street.

My daydream was interrupted as I remembered I was sitting in one of these beautiful machines. I started the engine and revved it a few times. The noise scared me but the powerful purring of the engine was stimulating and nerve wracking at the same time as it echoed off the cement cavern walls and ceiling.

It took me a few seconds but eventually I found the headlights and flipped them on. The beams cast a clean and clear white light across the gray walls. I put the car in gear slowly eased out of the stall. The headlights found a red exit sign painted on the concrete wall with an arrow underneath it. I followed the exit signs upward and was relieved when I could see some daylight penetrating the darkness from around the next turn.

Luckily, the gate which would normally be closed to deny entry to the garage was open. I eased the powerful machine between the exit poles and out of the garage. I sat in the street looking at the open road in front of me. There were no cars blocking my path for at least two blocks. I pressed down hard on the brake and eased down on the accelerator at the same time. I could feel the powerful engine trying to lurch the car forward. In one quick motion, I released the brake and slammed the gas pedal to the floor. The engine screamed while the tires squealed and smoked. The back end fish tailed out a bit to the right but I corrected by turning into the skid. I was doing sixty in a matter of seconds. The abandoned cars were getting heavier now and I had to weave in and out of them. A huge smile was tattooed on my face. I was feeling more alive than I ever had. Buildings and cars flashed by with amazing speed.

Suddenly, there was a road block ahead. A huge pileup had occurred and there was nowhere for me zip through. I slammed my foot down on the brake and pulled the steering wheel hard to the left. The Corvette came screeching to a halt inches from a garbage truck which had plowed into the back end of a cab.

My heart was racing at a thousand beats a minute. I sat there trying to catch my breath and wiped the sweat from my forehead. That was a close one.

I eased the car forward and returned the way I had come deciding to spend the next few hours exploring the city. Eventually I found a nearby grocery store and stopped for dinner. The store was small but well stocked with non perishable items. First I ate some beef jerky and opened a bag of Cheese Puffs. I washed it all down with a warm Gatorade. Then I loaded the back end of the Corvette with eight cases of bottled water. I grabbed as much canned food as I could carry and loaded that also. Once I was loaded, I headed south west toward Hudson River Park. I knew that the Port Authority building was nearby and would be stocked with weapons and ammunition. It would also serve as a stronghold if needed. I knew there had to be other survivors. When I met up with one or a group of them, I wanted to be able to defend myself if necessary.

It took much longer than I anticipated reaching the Hudson River Park area. I had to weave and backtrack constantly when I would come upon wreckage or a street that was impassible due to a traffic jam of vehicles. It was starting to get dark when I drew near the park. I drove slowly down the street with the park stretching out to my right. I knew I had to be getting close. I scanned the buildings on both sides of the street looking at the entryways and signs posted in front and on the doors. I finally spotted a sign which read Port Authority of N.Y. posted above a number of large doors and windows of a good sized building.

I hit the brakes and came to a stop at the curb of the building when suddenly I noticed movement in my rear view mirror. I stopped the car and leaned closer to mirror. My eyes had to be mistaken. There were people coming out of the buildings behind me and walking in my direction. I turned my head and looked out the rear window. The sun had set completely so it was very hard to see but there was enough light left to make out the shapes of people coming toward me. Where had all these people been the last few days? Why were they hiding inside these buildings? They staggered and some fell to the ground as the crowd drew near. Some were dressed in torn and tattered clothing while others were barely clothed.

A loud thump on the driver's side window startled me and I almost let my bladder loose in my pants. I turned and saw a man looking in at me from the curb. His face was pressed up against the glass and he was beating weakly at the window with his fist. The man was missing his nose and blood ran from the corners of his eyes. His mouth was open as if in a scream but he produced no sound. If all of that wasn't enough to send me into a state of shock, the eyes of the thing were glowing a fiery blood red.

It took me at least five seconds to be able to tear my eyes away from the stare down I was having with the creature. The terror I felt was like nothing I had ever felt before. My hands were numb and I felt as if my legs were made of rubber. The thing kept beating on the window, smearing grease and bodily fluids on the glass as I sat there continuing to stare at it. Before I realized it, the creatures that approached from behind had reached the car. The red glow of the taillights made them appear as if they were caked in blood. They beat their fists on the taillights and rear window while more appeared at the passenger side of the car. I looked ahead and more were coming out of buildings in front of me and making their way toward my car.

Finally, my head cleared and I realized I needed to get out of there fast. I slammed my foot down on the accelerator and sped away from the group of bodies. They cried out in anger as they realized their prey was getting away. The bodies in the street ahead of me made no attempt to avoid the Corvette. The ones unlucky enough to be in my path were flipped up and over the car, some being thrown to the side. As I looked in the rear view mirror, I could see some that had just been run over struggle to get up then continue their pursuit of me. It was an unbelievable sight. What were these things and how did they continue to survive? What the hell did they want from me? The only thing I was sure of was that they were no longer human.

More bodies came out of the surrounding buildings. They made their way across the sidewalk and toward the street as I rushed past doing fifty miles per hour. Their bodies flashed past like gray and tattered scarecrows that had somehow come back to life.

I weaved in and out of vehicle pile ups and traffic jams. I sped up onto the sidewalk when necessary running down crowds of them. They moaned or screamed and got up when they could and continued their chase. All the while I was hoping not to run into a dead end. Somehow I was lucky enough to escape the crowds of them. Eventually they no longer appeared from inside the buildings. The streets and sidewalks were clear. I drove slower, trying to clear my head and desperately rolling my options over in my confused mind.

I could go back to the hotel and climb thirty some stories back to my penthouse. I would feel safe there but then what? I had to find a long term solution. I decided the first thing I needed was weapons. I remembered seeing the Beretta Gallery near my palace. I quickly drove in that direction trying to remember the winding route I took. I kept my eye on the doorways and alleys ready to flee if attacked by another group of zombies but I saw none. Again, I had to backtrack many times but eventually I made it to my destination.

I shined my flashlight into the front window of the gun shop and after a few minutes of observation I was satisfied that the store was unoccupied. The front door had an open sign hung on it along with a few security stickers and gun club memberships. I was confident I would not be hearing any alarms. I quietly pushed open the large wood door and was surprised by the weight of it. Despite its mass it swung quietly and smoothly. When the door was open as wide as possible I stepped inside. Next to the door I spotted an umbrella stand and pushed it up against the door to keep it propped open. Not only would this allow fresh air and light to enter, but it would also allow for a quick escape if needed.

I shined my flashlight across the glass cases. They were filled with numerous varieties of pistols and side arms. There were also other larger cases filled with shotguns and rifles. I went around to the proprietor side of the counter and tried breaking the locks with my foot. After spraining my ankle and injuring the sole of my foot I gave up. The locks securing the doors to the cases were heavy duty and would not budge.

I went in the back of the store in search of something heavy to break the cases open. I found a red axe with a wooden handle in a back room and brought it around to the front of the cases and started smashing glass. I took two of the newer looking rifles. One had a scope attached and the other looked like some form of assault rifle. I also grabbed two black Beretta pistols with holsters. Both holsters had ammunition compartments and were filled to capacity. I took one of the side arms, loaded it and rested it in the holster which I strapped around my waist. I felt much safer now that I was armed.

Fortunately the ammo type was written right on the description tag. Since I am not familiar with American weapons this was a great help. I took the tags and the axe to the back of the store and smashed the lock on the tall, gray ammunition cabinet. I then scanned the shelves for the matches to the caliber of bullets and shells needed for each weapon. I filled an empty box with my armory of firearms and ammunition and took it out to the Corvette.

I shoved everything on the front seat and floor boards on the passenger side of the vehicle. I looked up and down the street searching for any type of movement and saw none. The streets appeared to be deserted.

The next task I needed to accomplish would have to be finding shelter. I decided it would be much easier to do this in the daytime without those things coming after me. I drove back to the hotel and parked in front. I went inside the lobby and cautiously explored the area to make sure there weren't any of those creatures hiding anywhere. I didn't want to climb thirty stories again so when I was sure I was alone, I brought in only what I needed for the night and slept in the manager's office. It was the only room I could find which had a lock on the door. In the morning I would begin my search for a fortress in which I could live.

Stan Howard Las Vegas, NV

Stan woke with a start. It was pitch black and Stan could see by the lack of light coming in from the split in the shades that it was still the middle of the night. He lay on his back breathing as quietly as possible and listening to the deafening silence. It was hot in the room and Stan wore only his underwear. The dirty white bed sheet was soaked with sweat and was beginning to smell like a wet dog.

He could have sworn he heard a noise that sounded like a door being slammed but he couldn't be sure. After a few minutes of shallow breathing and intense listening Stan finally calmed down. It must have been a dream, Stan thought.

He rolled over onto his side and tried his best to fall back into sleep. The noise came again only this time louder. Stan shot up into the sitting position. If he had been a dog his ears would have been standing straight up in the alert position. He was staring so intensely at the darkness that colored spots were starting to surface in his peripheral vision. Stan waited but heard nothing else. He crept out of bed and slowly stepped up to the door which led to the hallway. Stan put his eye to the peep hole but the absence of light hindered him from seeing anything.

He stood there for an eternity listening. Then very faintly Stan could hear footsteps. As they drew closer to his room, Stan realized it was more than one pair of feet making the noise. It sounded like half a dozen people shuffling and staggering down the hallway. Occasionally it sounded as if one of them fell against the wall and thudded to the floor. He could then hear the scrapes and bumps of hands clawing at the walls. Then the shuffling would start again.

Stan could only compare this experience with the time he took a business trip to Albuquerque. He had stayed in a cheap and filthy hotel near the airport. There had been a convention in town for a large tire manufacturing company. That evening there had been dozens of drunken tire salesmen staggering the hotel hallways bumping into the walls and falling down. The noises he heard now were similar to that night, only then there had been a lot more yelling and drunken babble. There were no voices tonight. Only grunts and moans. They hardly seemed human, but what else could they be?

Stan slowly collapsed to the floor with his back to the door and sat. He shivered with fear and tried to make sense out of what was happening to him. His mind was a whirlwind of questions with no answers. He thought he was going insane.

Amir Baghira New York, NY

At first daylight I set out to find myself a stronghold to make my new home. I had put a lot of thought into this matter and even dreamed about it in my sleep last night.

In my dream I was floating in an orange raft on a dark and black ocean. I was cold, wet and hungry and I had no idea how I had gotten into the vessel. I could see the glimmer of the city lights a few hundred yards away but I was adrift with no motor or paddles to get to the shore. In my dream I had an overpowering feeling of helplessness and vulnerability. I started to paddle with my hands frantically trying to get to shore. As I grew closer to the mainland I could see hundreds of bodies milling around the buildings that were on fire. Others just stood staring into the flames. I stopped rowing and sat there gawking at the bodies not sure what to do next. Suddenly I heard a splashing noise and one of those things came out of the murky water and grabbed at the collar of my shirt pulling me onto my back. I squirmed and flailed my arms at the creature trying to beat it off me and shove it back into the gloomy ocean. It released its grip on my shirt and fell backward into the black and murky water disappearing from my view. I sat there trembling while I peeked over the side to see if the thing was really gone.

Out of nowhere came a strong gust of wind which pushed my craft away from shore and toward the open ocean. I was relieved that I was getting farther away from the bodies but anxious to know where this phantom current was carrying me. I drifted farther from shore on the cold and dark water. Eventually I could see the burning torch in the arm of the statue woman. She stood there proud and tall in the chilly night air. The raft eventually came to a stop with a bump against the island.

I stepped off of the boat onto the island. The breeze turned again and was blowing inland now. It was warm and crisp and smelled of the desert. It was a scent from my childhood. I felt a calm come over me and for the first time in years, I felt at peace. I felt at home.

When I awoke the tranquility I felt in my dream was still with me. My decision was made. I would make my new home on Liberty Island. I hoped those things could not swim and I needed to be somewhere I felt safe when I slept.

The sun shone brightly on this morning mostly because there was no smog or clouds in the sky. I drove to the harbor looking for some way to reach the island. I scanned the docks and located the ferry which used to haul tourist to and from the island. I made my way down to where it was docked and loaded the weapons, ammo, food and water I had collected the night before. I then decided to make another supply run. I drove around until I found another grocery store and loaded up again with more of the same supplies. Once I was loaded I returned to the ferry and put everything on board.

It took me awhile to figure out how to start the craft. Once I had the engine running I ran down and untied it from the dock. Then I ran back up to the controls and slowly accelerated the boat out into the open water towards the island. The trip took about twenty minutes, most likely because I was going at such a slow pace. I had to circle the island a few times until I found a spot I was comfortable bringing the vessel in to dock. It took me a few tries but eventually I brought her in close enough and cut the engine. I then ran down and tied the ferry to the dock so it wouldn't float off when I wasn't looking.

I walked around the island looking for the best location to reside in. The first location I inspected turned out to be a maintenance building. It was a one story red brick building with a front entrance and garage doors in the back. There were a few small offices in the front area and the rest of the building was used to house and maintain lawn and building maintenance equipment. In the garage I found a four wheeler with a three by three box on the rear to haul items in. I opened the closest garage door then sat behind the handle bars of the vehicle. The key was in the ignition so I turned it and it fired up immediately. I used it to transport me around as I scouted the remainder of the island.

The rest of the island contained only another red brick building used as a gift shop and of course the statue itself. I chose the gift shop as my base because it faced the shore and it had many windows to let light in. It was not the most secure of the buildings I had to choose from but it was the one I was most comfortable with.

I used the four-wheeler to haul my supplies from the ferry to the gift shop. After that I decided to get a better look at the area. I drove over to the statue and climbed the many stairs to the top. The view was amazing as I looked back over the city. The sun glinted off of the mirrored sky scraper windows and smoke still rose from several neighborhoods throughout the city. Other than that there was no movement whatsoever.

I went back to the gift shop and arranged the place to my liking. I found a couch in one of the back rooms and pulled it out to the front of the store so I could look out the windows while I went to sleep. I was hungry after all of the exploring so I ate some cold beef stew from a can and a couple pieces of beef jerky.

“What now?” I thought. Is this how I live the rest of my life? What is my purpose? I sat there looking out across the water at the city. This city used to be the home of my enemy. Now my enemy was dead. I thought about that for a moment. My original enemy is dead but something has seized their bodies and become my new adversary. I do not have the same hatred and disgust for this new enemy, but they appear to want me dead more than my previous foe did.

In my mind I accept this new challenge and begin to scheme my subsequent actions. I am energized by my newfound purpose and excitement simmers deep in my belly. I must study my enemy. Find out its strengths and weaknesses. Then design a strategy to destroy them. Tonight I will get a good night sleep and strategize. Tomorrow the hunt begins.

Stan Howard Las Vegas, NV

The candy bars and chips were almost gone. Stan needed to get more food from somewhere. He was going to be sick if he had to eat anymore Snickers.

He heard more of those things wandering the halls again last night. It seemed there was only activity after the sun had gone down. It sounded as though someone was moving furniture and at one point last night, he thought he heard someone screaming from outside. It was impossible to tell where exactly the noise came from. What he did know was that it sounded like the person was being murdered.

The shock of what had happened was wearing off and Stan was coming to the realization that if he wanted to live, he was going to have to leave his hotel room. Not only would he have to leave his room, he would have to leave this floor. And more than likely, he would have to leave the hotel. Stan didn't have any close family back home in Phoenix. Both his parents were deceased and he wasn't married. He also hadn't talked to his brother in over a year. He could go just about anywhere he pleased. The question was where should he go?

Start with finding the stairs, Stan's brain told him. The elevators would not be working. The stairs most likely would be at both ends of the hall. Stan quietly unhooked the security latch and unlocked the deadbolt. He stopped to listen to see if he could hear any movement in the hallway. When he was sure

there was no one waiting to ambush him outside his door, he slowly turned the handle and opened the door.

Stan slowly stepped out into the hallway. The security lights were dimming so it was very hard to see. He was pretty sure the closest stairs would be to the left so he started walking in that direction. Stan traveled with his hand on the wall to keep his balance. Eventually he bumped face first into what he thought was a wall. Upon further inspection, Stan realized it was a door he had run into. He could feel the security release bar that spanned the middle of the door. He pushed on it and the door opened onto an even darker blackness than what he experienced in the hallway.

Stan slowly inched his way forward with his hands out in front of him. He found the hand rail of the stairs and kept his lead foot tapping on the floor on front of him looking for the first step down. He found it and slowly started his decent.

Stan counted the number of flights down so as not to end up in the basement. When he was fairly sure he was at ground level, he let go of his safety line which was the stair railing and groped in the darkness for the security door. After what seemed like a couple minutes of disoriented searching, Stan finally found the door handle. He turned it and pushed outward. It didn't budge. "Oh my God" Stan thought. "It's fucking locked." Panic started to rise in him. He thought he was going to be stuck in the staircase for the rest of his miserable existence doomed to starve in the dark. In his terror and out of sheer luck, Stan's arm jerked inward. The door moved an inch in his direction and Stan realized the door opened toward him.

Stan exhaled and the panic flew out of him with his breath as he pulled the door open the rest of the way. He peeked around the door to get a look at where the portal led. The security lighting was not much better here than on the upper floors. He could make out a coffee stand and some shops but nothing else from his vantage point.

Stan stepped out of the black stairwell and into the murky hall. He walked as quietly as he could across the white or gray marble floor toward the abandoned shops hoping he could find some food and water. Out of pure luck Stan walked into one of the many gift shops scattered throughout the hotel. He worked his way through the racks of t-shirts and souvenirs until he reached the back of the store. Here Stan found the snack aisle. He grabbed a pack of crackers, ripped them open and stuffed them greedily into his mouth. When the crackers were no more, he did the same with a bag of cashews. Mr. Peanut was disgusted by Stan's horrible manners.

Now thirstier than ever Stan turned to the cooler which housed soft drinks, beer and water. Stan opened the cooler door and grabbed a bottle of water. It was warm but was more refreshing than any drink Stan could ever remember consuming. He leaned over the checkout counter to rest while the food and drink he inhaled settled into his stomach. His belly rested on the glass top of the counter as his eyes fell upon a brochure rack. There was an advertisement for the Whore Shoe, a local strip club that was not fortunate enough to be located on the Strip. Stan saw that there were twenty dollar private dances in the personal VIP rooms. What a deal. He also saw that you could get a free massage with the purchase of a regular priced massage at Rosey's Hands of Ecstasy. Stan thought he would have to try to get out to Rosey's to feel some ecstasy.

Stan stood up straight and looked around. He walked back the way he came to a rack of t-shirts. He pulled one off the rack and held it up. "Vegas Baby!" read the front of the shirt. Stan took off his stained and smelly undershirt and put on the fresh one. He then looked around and found a rack of what looked

like beach bags. Stan took one off the rack then stuffed it with as many bottles of water, chips, crackers and candy bars as he could. He then walked out of the gift shop and stood in the hallway. What now?

Stan stood there looking up and down the hallway. To his right the hallway curved off and out of sight. He knew that it led to more shops, bars and restaurants. He didn't think he would find anything of use that way. To his left the gloomy hallway led past a few more vacant shops and eventually ended up at the main casino. Stan didn't know where he was going yet, but he knew he wanted out of this desolate hotel. He started walking as quietly as possible in the direction of the casino. Stan hoped this was the quickest way outside.

The batteries in the security lights were almost dead. Stan had very little light but there was just enough to see his way down the hallway. He could see a few feet into the shops that he passed but no further. As he walked he passed a coffee shop, a jewelry store and some sort of women's clothing store. He also passed some kind of trinket shop, what looked like another gift shop and a restaurant. He peered into each as far as he could but could barely see a few feet past the dim entrance. Stan had a nagging feeling that something was wrong. It was just out of his mind's reach, but still just visible enough to tug at his consciousness. It was like the sensation you get when you see movement from the corner of your eye, only to have whatever it was disappear when you try to look directly at it. He could not put his finger on what was troubling him.

Stan reached the shadowy junction which separated the shops from the casino. The light was no better here than in the hallway that serviced the shops. Stan knew the casino stretched out for at least another hundred yards in every direction but could not see much farther than a few rows of quiet blackjack and craps tables. Stan studied the bleak looking floor. From memory he knew the carpet was an ugly orange and dark green combination of shapes and objects that had no discernable pattern. Now it looked like a solid brown. He could make out a few overturned chairs and some casino chips but nothing else. That was when Stan's blood ran cold. The tugging sensation at the back of Stan's mind became a cold wave of realization rushing over him. There was not one fallen body in sight. They were all gone.

Chad Grable Wichita, KS

It's amazing how many bags of Dorito's you can eat in a few days. I don't think I will ever look at a Twinkie again without throwing up. I was foolish to think I could live off of junk food. I need to get some real food. Too bad Taco Bell isn't open anymore. What I wouldn't give for one of their delicious Gordita's. Or maybe some hot and salty fries from McDonalds. I don't want to go out again but I have to. I need to be smarter this time. The junk food and flashlights didn't last very long. I need to get some canned meals and candles. Maybe I'll get a small gas grill to cook on. It's getting much colder every night and without heat I may need to find somewhere else to stay. Somewhere I can build a fire. The house gets very cold at night and I have a hard time sleeping when I am shivering so much.

I will make a trip to get supplies tomorrow and then worry about where I will live. I can't think straight when I feel like this. Sick and scared.

The last couple of nights I could hear creepy noises outside after dark. They woke me up last night. I got up and looked out my window. I could see shadowy, shuffling shapes moving around in the street but it was so dark I couldn't tell what they were. My breath was fogging up the window and I had to keep wiping it away with my sleeve to see. It looked like people walking in the street but they didn't sound

human. Maybe I was dreaming. Maybe all the junk food is making me have nightmares. I watched for at least a couple hours then tried to go back to sleep but it's hard when you are scared shitless.

Tonight after it gets dark I am going out to see what those things are. I have my gun so I'm not too worried. Then tomorrow I will gather more supplies and scout a place to live. Right now I need to sleep. Those things kept me up all night.

I slept for a few hours and when I woke up it was dark outside. I guessed I had slept for about three or four hours. I wasn't sure and to be honest I didn't really care. I went to the kitchen and opened one of my last bags of potato chips. I lit a candle and sat alone at my kitchen table and ate them while deciding if I really wanted to go out and investigate the noises. I washed the chips down with a soda and belched loudly in the flickering candle light. What the fuck was I going to do? Stay inside forever? I have a gun. What is going to happen?

I went upstairs and changed into my darkest pair of jeans and a long sleeved black t-shirt. I then found a dark blue baseball cap and put it on. I wanted to be as invisible as I could out there in the cold and miserable dark.

I went downstairs and made my way to kitchen. I grabbed the gun off of the microwave where I had left it. It had a full clip and no spare ammo. I had no idea how many bullets that meant I had. I am not a gun enthusiast.

I had yet to hear any noises coming from outside. I went to the window next to the back door and moved the shades slightly so I could peek out into the dark back yard. I could see nothing moving. It was a cloudless night so the moon lit up most of my yard. The grass looked silver in the moonlight and the trees cast eerie shadows across the lawn. I could tell it was a little breezy by the way the branches swayed in the wind. The shadows on the lawn moved and made it appear that the lawn was a silver pool of water.

As quietly as possible, I opened my back door and stepped out onto the small porch. It was chilly but I was not shivering yet. At this time of year it could be sixty degrees or we could have four inches of snow on the ground. I could not see my breath so I figured I wouldn't freeze to death while I was out investigating.

The yard is surrounded by a wooden six foot fence so I felt fairly safe for the time being. I quietly moved to the back gate that opens onto the alley. I stepped into the alley and quietly closed the gate behind me. The moon was very bright and it allowed me to see a fair distance. The wind howled loudly and was masking any sound I would have heard if someone was moving nearby.

I made my way to the end of the alley and stopped short of the empty street. There was a large, yellow two car garage to my right with a row of four gray steel trash cans lined up along the concrete drive way. I hid behind the cans and looked up and down the street. The wind continued to blow leaves and trash across the ground but I could see no other movement. I sat there for what seemed like an hour. Most likely it was about ten minutes. I told myself I was being cautious. Just making sure no one was around. In reality it was my fear that kept me from moving.

I gathered all the courage I could and quickly ran across the street and entered the alley adjacent to my alley. The slapping of my tennis shoes sounded like gunshots to my ears. I didn't know why but I did not want to be caught out in the open. I felt safer hidden in the shadows and being able to spot someone before they could see me. As I approached the next street I could see slow and deliberate movement

ahead. I hid behind a car that was parked outside a garage and watched. I could not make out any shapes, just a flow of movement. I needed to get closer.

I couldn't get any nearer to the street from the alley without being seen. There was nothing to hide behind. To my left was a house that looked yellow in the moonlight. I crouch walked into the back yard and towards the house. I stopped next to the back door and listened. I could hear nothing but the wind. I moved along the walkway on the side of the house and made my way towards a hedge that separated the properties. I could still see the movement up the street.

I spotted a black Ford Thunderbird parked in a driveway about two houses up. I decided I could get a better look and still be concealed from that position. I crouched again and ran to the side of the next house. I caught my breath then ran quickly and quietly to the car and crouched down next to the rear bumper. I caught my breath a peered over the top of the trunk.

There were people walking in the street up ahead. Hundreds of them. They were all walking in the same direction which happened to be towards the center of town. None of them were talking. They were all staring straight ahead and shuffling along the street to some unknown destination. Some of their clothes were ripped and tattered. Others looked as though they had been burned. How could they be moving? They had all been dead as doornails two days ago.

I stared in disbelief while my mind raced. I decided I didn't want to know where they were going. All I wanted to do was go home and hide under my bed. I sat down behind the car with my back against the steel rim of the wheel. My body and hands were trembling with fear.

When I had just about summoned enough courage to flee my hiding spot and head for home I heard someone yelling from across the street.

"Help!" the voice called. I looked around and in the darkness could not discern where the voice was coming from.

"Over here!" the voice called again. It was an old lady yelling from a blue house across the street and to my left. She appeared to be wearing a white nightgown underneath a pink robe and was most likely in her late sixties. She was leaning out of her second floor window and waving her arms. At first I thought she was hollering to me, but soon realized she had seen the shuffling masses from her window and was calling out to them.

A few of the bodies turned to look in the direction of the noise. That was when I could see their eyes. They were glowing red like hot coals. A shock of fear shot from my toes to my scalp when I saw their burning eyes. It reminded me of The Terminator movie when the robot is without his human skin and you can see the red eyes glowing in its skull.

The elderly woman kept calling out in a voice that sounded eerily like the "Cookie Monster" from Sesame Street. "Help, please. Someone help me!"

She must have assumed the bodies moving on the street were survivors. More of them looked in her direction. Then they started moving to her location. Now I could hear the noises I had heard last night much more clearly. They were animalistic sounds of hunger and want. When they reached her house they walked stiffly up the stairs and crowded onto her front porch. The ones closest to the house pounded weakly at the front door and windows. I could hear the sounds of metal on glass as one of the bodies at the front window clinked its wedding ring on the window pane. The crowd was starting to

whip itself into a frenzy. The bodies that could not get near the house were beating and tearing at the backs of those in front of them trying desperately to get closer.

I could no longer see the woman in the window. She must have realized what those things were and decided to keep quiet and hide in the house until they went away. I decided I would try to come back later when the bodies were gone. Maybe the lady knew what happened. If nothing else, she would at least be someone I could talk to.

Just then I heard the sound of a dead bolt being unlocked and the door of the old woman's house opened. "Oh my God" I thought. She's going to let them in. I thought about screaming at her to shut the door but that would have alerted them to my position. All I could do was sit and watch the bodies as more of them awkwardly made their way into her yard. There must have been thirty of them on her porch and another fifty fighting in the yard trying to get closer to the house.

"Thank God you're here. I thought I was..." was all she managed to speak before the bodies were on her.

The screams were horrible. They lasted less than a minute although it seemed like a lot longer. I don't know what they did to her. They must have torn her apart. I sat trembling behind the car for what seemed like hours. I finally gathered enough courage to sneak a look at the old woman's house. The front door stood open and was smeared with what looked like blood but there was no sign of her or the bodies. I focused my attention on the street where the bodies had been streaming toward the center of town. There was no sign of them. The street was completely empty.

I had to get home. My heart was thumping in my chest like jack hammer. I got to my feet and ran as fast as I could back between the houses and down the alley. When I reached the cross street, I stopped in a dark shadow along the side of a green paneled garage only long enough to ensure there was no movement. I then sprinted across the moon lit street and down the endless alley until I reached the gate to my back yard. I latched the gate behind me and ran into the house breathing heavily.

Once inside the house I locked the door and quickly climbed the stairs to my room. As I sat down on my bed I realized my left hand was aching from holding the pistol so tightly. I had forgotten that I had it. I set the pistol down on my nightstand. I then curled up on my bed and stared at the moonlight that shone through my bedroom curtains until I fell asleep.

Stan Howard Las Vegas, NV

After the shock of what he had seen had worn off, Stan made his way to the main entrance of the casino. He pushed through the heavy glass doors with the casino logo emblazoned on them. He was greeted by a warm breeze that smelled of smoke although it was fresh compared to the musty and heavy air inside the dark casino. Stan walked out from under the high ceilinged canopy which would normally shelter the taxis and limousines. It was dark now but Stan could see millions of bright stars lighting up the sky. Las Vegas had not been this dark in almost one hundred years. He looked around at the other hotels and casinos he could see from his vantage point. Some had dimming security lights on that were visible from the street. He counted two that were ablaze with uncontrolled flames. They looked like two huge orange torches set in the middle of a black universe by some unknown god. Nothing was visible beyond the blazing infernos.

Stan walked to the main street which was Las Vegas Boulevard and headed north. As he walked he passed a few of the smaller casinos and restaurants. Eventually he came to a lake which stood proudly on display at the forefront of what was once a beautiful casino and hotel. The body of water used to house a huge water show but now the lake was calm. In the darkness of night the water looked black but Stan knew it was a brilliant blue. The moonlight sparkled and reflected off of the smooth surface. It appeared that there was a huge, white circular raft floating on the water.

“Do they dye the water?” Stan wondered to himself. He shrugged his shoulders and realized he really didn’t care.

Stan dropped his bag of supplies, took off his shirt and shoes then jumped over the railing that separated pedestrians from the water. He landed in the water with a huge splash. The water was cold but refreshing. Stan swam laps in the lake for at least an hour. When he could swim no more, an exhausted Stan climbed back over the railing, grabbed his clothes and bag and walked to a nearby bench. He sat there for a few minutes catching his breath.

Once his heart rate was at a normal pace, Stan opened a bottle of water and chugged half of it. He then opened a bag of chips and a candy bar and ate them while admiring the view of the burning casinos. Stan focused his attention on the closest blaze. The flames danced around the base of the building and flickered with black and orange spots. Near the top they shot up toward the sky in skeletal fingerlike spikes of flame. The longer Stan watched, the more it looked as though a large group of people were gathered around the burning casino. As a matter of fact, Stan was sure there was a large crowd standing around the casino facing the blaze.

Stan quickly packed up his meal and threw it into his bag. He then started walking toward the casino. As he drew near, he became more convinced that the shapes he was seeing in fact were people. Stan could not tell what the crowd was doing. It appeared that most of them were just standing there, gazing into the roaring flames. Why in God’s name would they be doing that?

Stan was within a block of the casino now and he started to become aware of a horrible smell. He was downwind of the crowd and he had to assume the stink was coming from them. It was the most rotten and putrid smell Stan ever had pass through his nostrils.

Stan quietly crept closer and hid behind a red double-decker bus. He edged up to the corner and peeked around the side. Some of the people were milling around aimlessly but the rest just stared at the fire. Just then a huge explosion shook the otherwise quiet Nevada night. The people quickly looked in that direction and started walking toward the source of the noise. Stan could tell now that these things were no longer human. As they turned in unison, he could see their eyes. They burned a deep velvety red that you only see on the most beautiful and vibrant roses. The horrible smell also hammered home the fact that these things were not what they once were.

Stan watched as the bodies made their way toward the noise. Some walked briskly while others limped along at a slow pace. As the crowd thinned, Stan also saw others that could no longer walk but pulled themselves along the ground by their hands. Their tattered and ripped clothes trailed behind them from being dragged across concrete and asphalt.

Stan shivered even though it was still warm outside. What the hell happened to those people? Why are they coming back to life? Stan was more frightened than he had been on the night that all of this started.

He turned and retreated, slowly jogging along side of the double-decker bus trying to be as silent as possible. When he neared the front end of the bus, he inadvertently kicked an empty beer can out into the open. It made a loud clanking noise that could be heard above the crackle of the flames. It bounced against the curb and rolled along the concrete of the street. Stan could see the red Coors logo roll away from him on the silver can. It came to rest against a pink flip flop which must have been misplaced by some unfortunate corpse.

“What I wouldn’t give for an ice cold Miller Lite.” Stan thought. He could almost see a frosty bottle fresh out of the cooler and cradled in his hand.

Then Stan froze. He realized that those horrible things were attracted to noise after what he had witnessed just a minute before during the explosion. He listened very intently and was sure he could hear some of the bodies veering off course from their march toward the explosion and shuffling closer to where he hid. Stan quickly dropped down onto his stomach and slid underneath the bus. The ground was hot but not unbearable. He could smell the oil and dirt caked to the undercarriage of the bus from years of service hauling hookers and drunks up and down the street swarming with casinos.

He could see the legs and feet of fifteen to twenty of the deceased moving along the opposite side of the bus and milling around the front end where the can had come to rest. From his vantage point he could only view them from their knees down to their feet. Some were barefoot and you could see parts of their skeletons where the skin had worn away from their exposed feet. Others still had their shoes on and appeared to have all of their skin intact.

The bodies loitered for a few minutes appearing to have no purpose after the clanking noise of the beer can faded. They soon returned to the flow of the core group of bodies still moving toward the flames and smoke created by the previous blast.

Stan quietly crawled out from under the bus and ran back the way he had come. He hid behind a huge stone fountain that previously served as a center piece for a casino drive up entrance. The fairies or nymphs or whatever the hell they were used to spray water from their mouths or pour from pitchers that they held. Now they stood forever silent in the arid scorching climate, never to see moisture again.

Stan crouched behind the fountain for several minutes trying to figure out what to do. He was quickly learning that the people he saw were no longer people. They had turned into some kind of mindless mob who were stimulated by sound and light. Stan had an extremely difficult time believing what he was seeing, but it had to be true. He knew he was not dreaming. If he was, it was the most genuine and stimulating dream he had ever experienced.

The bleakness of his situation hit him like lightning bolt. Stan felt like he wanted to curl up in a cave and stay there until he died. While his mind raced through countless courses of actions he could or should take, he felt a tug on his hair. The tug turned into an excruciatingly painful yank as he was pulled backwards onto the imported marble of the drive way. A spear of shock and terror raced its way from his toes to his chest. Stan looked up and saw the upside down face of a cadaver staring back at him through blazing red eyes. Its face was gray from the lack of circulation and its lips were wrenched back from its teeth in a furious rage. The thing had a fist full of Stan’s hair and was pulling him backward. It then reached a bony arm out and wrapped a hand around his neck. Stan reached up and covered his face just as the body leaned down and tried sink its teeth into his face.

Stan could hear the sound of the thing's teeth chomping together but coming away unfulfilled. The smell emanating from it made him want to gag. The hand that clutched his neck was cold and leathery like the winter driving gloves his mother used to wear. A fury started to rise up in Stanley Eugene Howard.

Hadn't he been through enough? Wasn't his mother hanging herself in their own garage enough to make anyone's life miserable? Wasn't it enough to be thirty three and single with no prospect of marriage on the horizon? Wasn't it enough that Stanley desperately wanted children but it appeared he would die lonely and isolated? Wasn't it enough that for the last twelve years he endured an unbearable boss who degraded and demeaned him on a weekly basis, only to have Stanley work twice as hard to please him? After all Stanley had endured, now this lifeless reeking human bag of bones was going to fuck with him?

Deep in the creases and folds of Stan's brain something clicked. The rage Stan suppressed for the last thirty years was now unleashed on this unfortunate cadaver. Stan reached up and grabbed the head of the thing that gripped his hair and neck. He turned and twisted its head around to the point of snapping while getting to his feet. He then reared back and smashed the zombie's head on a nearby pillar that held up the roof of the casino entrance. The thing instantly let go of his neck and hair and fell to the ground. Stan picked up his foot and stamped on its head until it was a pile of bloody mush the whole time cursing quietly. Tears streamed down his rage contorted face.

Out of breath and on the verge of collapse Stan turned away from the thing that died for the second time tonight. He reached down and picked up his bag of supplies. Slowly he trudged up the casino steps and pushed through the glass doors that led to the dark hotel lobby. Stan staggered past the empty check in counter and made his way to the dark recesses of the main casino floor. Once there, he found a crap table, crawled underneath and slept in the darkness.

Amir Baghira New York, NY

It was good to sleep with no fear. I feel refreshed and alert for the first time in a week. I spent the day preparing my weapons and my mind for what the night will bring. I have customized the holsters to hold two guns on either side of the belt "cowboy" style. I have also prepared the ammo belts and rifles to be carried easily on straps which criss-cross my chest so I can have my hands free at any moment. In addition to the two pistols, I will carry the sniper rifle and assault rifle as well.

I have also put much thought into the behavior and characteristics of my enemy. When I was attacked the other night, the things seemed to move very slowly compared to a normal human. The one that banged on my window snuck up on me and the ones that came from behind took a very long time to get to my vehicle. Also, the ones that came out of the buildings seemed to limp and stagger their way toward the street. Normal humans would have jumped and sprinted toward me but these creatures did not seem to be capable of this.

I also realized that the bodies were not very strong. The one that tried to break the window of the car could hardly make the pane shudder when it struck the glass. The ones that reached the rear of the car could not dent the back end or even shatter the taillights.

If you take into account the lack of agility or speed, the lack of strength in addition to the way those things look, you might come to the conclusion that they were dead. How could this be? I do not know. I will need to study them further before I come to any type of conclusion.

The last observation I have made about the creatures would be that it appears they only come out after sundown. Over the last few days I have been out during the day quite a bit. The only time I saw them was after the sun had set. Today, I used the sniper scope to observe the mainland. I have seen no movement. I am not implying these things are vampires. The one I saw up close had a full mouth of teeth. None of them were pointed like you would see on a vampire in the movies. Although they did appear dead like a vampire, I have no proof this is true.

My plan for tonight is simple. Make my way to shore before sundown and secure the ferry. Find a suitable vantage point to observe the bodies without being detected. I need to collect more information on my foe in order to defeat them.

The sun is low on the horizon so I must begin my excursion. I load the ferry with my weapons and supplies, untie the ropes from the dock and fire up the engine. I make my way to shore while the sun sets behind the soaring sky scrapers. It peeks in and out from behind the buildings like a playful child wanting to play hide and seek.

When I reach the shore side dock, I quickly cut the engine and tie off the craft. Then I gather my gear and dash toward the lofty structures. The shadows from the buildings collapse onto the concrete. They grow long and skeletal as I make my way farther into the city. The air grows cooler by the minute and I can feel the chill through my clothes.

I spot a large shopping center that once housed many types of department stores. It is ablaze like a massive campfire and most likely has been for days. I spot a structure that appears to offer a good view of the shopping center. I decide to perch myself on one of the upper floors of this building. It will make my observation of the creatures much simpler with the light it produces.

I enter through the front doors of the building and turn on my flashlight. I shine its light on the directory posted on the wall. The building used to be home to an insurance company, an advertising agency, a lawyer's office and various Internet companies. I realize and am slightly amused by the fact that all of these professions and companies are now obsolete.

I make my way to the stairwell and start to climb the many flights. As I do I am struck by many strange thoughts. Who needs insurance now? Life insurance would come in very handy with all of those things running around at night. But who would offer it? It's like the cattle that live on the flood plains and cannot get flood insurance. I smile to myself as I think about Zombie Life Insurance policies.

Does anyone need to advertise anything anymore? I can advertise that I am still alive, but it would only bring those creatures who would try to kill me.

I can think of no one who would need a lawyer except for those hit and run victims I created the other night.

Computers and networks are useless without electricity. The Internet is dead.

I reach the top floor where an insurance company once resided. I must be eighteen or twenty stories up but I lost count about ten floors ago. There are many desks with worthless computers and printers sitting on them. "Expensive paperweights" I think to myself.

I roll an office chair over to the window which faces the burning shopping center. The sun has almost completely disappeared and I can see smoke and fires dotted throughout the city. I eat a candy bar and drink some water while I wait.

When the sky is purple and soft in the west, I see the first bodies appear. They stumble from the open doors of buildings and appear to come from out of nowhere. Most of them look like normal humans from this distance but others are obviously dead. Some have arms or legs missing. Others are mangled or burned so badly there is no way they can still be alive. They must be hiding in the basements or where there is no light I think to myself.

They do not appear to have any purpose or direction. Some immediately walk to the burning shopping center while others walk around aimlessly. I wonder what the purpose of their existence is. If they are dead, what reason can they possibly have to exist?

I sit and observe them carefully. They seem to be uncoordinated and weak. They stumble and walk slowly and are very clumsy. Many of them fall and trip over objects, then struggle to stand upright again.

They also appear to be attracted to light like insects. A large group of them has gathered around the blaze and stand there staring into it while others mill around the perimeter with no obvious purpose.

What is also interesting is how they hide from the sun, yet are attracted to flames. This makes no sense and I do not try to reason this out in my mind. None of what has happened in the last few days makes sense and I doubt it ever will.

I am now faced with the question of how to destroy these creatures. Some have been mutilated and burned so badly that it doesn't appear they can be killed. The rotting and decomposing of their bodies tells me that they are still bound to some of the laws of nature. There must be a way to destroy them. They cannot exist indefinitely.

As I watch them, I notice when they turn their heads just right or when they enter a dark space, I can see the glowing eyes I saw up close the other night. The red is like no red I have seen before. It is the color of some dark deep hatred that can only exist in the depths of hell. It has somehow escaped and been reincarnated in the skulls of these things.

Seeing this brings my disgust to the surface and I feel a queasiness rising in my stomach. I must destroy them all. I remove one of my pistols from its holster and fire at the glass that separates me from a twenty story plunge. The glass cracks and shatters in a few places but does not break completely. I then fire at the four corners of the window shattering the glass further. I pick up a chair from nearby. With all my strength I heave it through the fractured pane. Glass falls and twinkles to the floor. The chair plummets with amazing speed and I can hear it clatter as it bounces off the street below.

I pick up the sniper rifle and position myself behind a desk, laying the rifle on the surface for support and stability. I put my eye to the scope and begin to locate a target. I notice that many of the zombies have turned and amble toward my location. The crimson gems smoldering in their eye sockets brings a jolt of fear that rises quickly in my spine and stomach. My eye is drawn to a body that wears a bright red dress. It has light golden hair that now looks greasy and dirty. I bring the crosshairs to bear on the forehead of a woman who was once quite beautiful.

One shot, one kill. Aim for the head. I squeeze the trigger. The jolt of the rifle is stronger than I expected. My shoulder throbs as I bring the scope back to my eye. The thing in the red dress lies lifeless in the street. Its head torn open and its brain lie splattered on the concrete. It does not get up.

I take aim at another. This one appears to have been a construction worker. It wears an orange vest, jeans and work boots. Again I place the sights on its forehead and pull the trigger. This time I am ready

for the recoil. My eye stays on the scope and I see the mist and spray of the zombie's brain exit the rear of its skull. Its body stands for a moment before collapsing to the earth.

For the next half hour I continue my killing spree. I have dreamed of this day but never thought it would become a reality. In my dreams there was much more screaming and chaos and it always ended with me taking my own life. Now it is not necessary. There are no authorities or law men to arrest me and make me a prisoner.

As I reload, I look down at the base of the building I am perched in. Hundreds of bodies crowd the doors and windows desperately looking for a way in. What have I done? I have lured them to me without planning my escape. I do not have enough ammunition to kill the crowd that has gathered. Also, the more shots I fire, the more bodies I will attract. It is an endless circle of death that will only end with my own.

I ran to the stairwell and listened closely before I opened the door. I could hear no noises coming from the other side. I slowly opened the door and stepped onto the landing again listening intently. I shone my flashlight down into the dark pit of the stairwell. My light only penetrated a floor or two and I could not see anything any below that. I stood there listening for a minute or two. Shattering glass and the weak banging of fists on metal were the next sounds I heard. Fear leapt up into my throat and I could feel my heart thumping in my chest.

The sound of more breaking glass jolted me out of my trance. I ran back through the office to the window that served as my sniper's nest. The cool air blew against my face and the darkness of the night was now complete. I could no longer see the street or the bodies below me although I could hear an occasional grunt or moan.

I cleared my mind and desperately tried to reflect on my situation. The sound of my rifle attracted them to me. The light of the blaze attracts them when there is no noise. Could I create a sound and light to attract them away from me? I had to try or die like one of the cattle in their prison tower.

I brought the scope of the rifle to my eye and scanned the many fires near my location. I could see empty and lightless buildings and some abandoned cars and trucks outlined by the backlight of the flames. Then it caught my eye. An orange city vehicle most likely used for road construction sat just a half block off the shopping center fire the bodies had massed around. I could barely make out the fuel tank just below the driver side door and to the rear of the cab.

I trained the sights of the rifle on the gas tank and tried to calm my nerves. I took a deep breath, held it then fired. The rear wheel of the truck exploded. The sound was fairly loud but not enough of a distraction to draw the bodies away.

Again I lowered the rifle and took aim at the fuel tank. I adjusted to the left about a foot to take the wind into account. I held my breath and began to squeeze the trigger. Fists pounded on the stairwell door. The noise frightened me and I jerked the barrel of the rifle up and to the left. The driver side window of the city vehicle shattered.

I looked back at the door with terror in my eyes. I could see the door shudder as more and more fists pounded weakly at the metal. My heart thumped wildly. It was just a matter of time before the brute force of hundreds of bodies pressing against it forced the door open. I trembled when I realized that the only thing between me and death was a two inch thick fire door. Reluctantly, I turned my back on the

door and focused my attention on the shot. I hoped the door would hold long enough to allow me one more attempt.

For the third time, I brought the sights of the rifle to bear on the gas tank. This time I did not wait. I just fired. The light was magnified in the scope and for a moment I thought I was blind in my right eye. Then the report came. It was like being inside a missile on impact with its target. The sound was literally deafening. I could no longer hear the things pounding on the stairwell door.

I turned the gaze of my only good eye to the doorway. It still shuddered but not as violently as it had been. I still could hear nothing. I looked toward the explosion I had created and noticed bodies beginning to gather around it. Again I looked at the stairwell door. It appeared to have stopped trembling altogether.

My hearing was slowly returning. I could hear the popping and crackle of the flames again. I could also barely make out the bodies below me moving en masse toward the latest and greatest attraction I like to call, "Exploding Truck."

I slowly crept toward the fire door and was relieved when I heard no sound or movement. The ones at the top of the staircase must have followed the others back down to see what the commotion was about. I let out a sigh of relief and walked back to windows.

I watched and waited while the bodies massed around the new bonfire for the next hour. I wanted to be sure even the slowest stragglers were out of the building before I made my escape back to the island. Once I was sure they were all gone I crept back down the staircase and made a mad but quiet dash for my boat. Once back on the island, I ate supper and planned for my next excursion to the mainland.

Chad Grable Wichita, KS

I woke up to bright sunlight shining in my bedroom window. I rubbed my eyes and rolled away from the sunshine. Jon Bon Jovi stared back at me from his place on the wall. "What the fuck are you looking at?" I asked Jon.

I didn't know how long I had slept but I guessed it was mid morning. The images and sounds of the previous night came rushing back. I quickly tried to push them out of my mind. I laid there for a few minutes staring at the white ceiling and sorting through my thoughts. If I was going to survive I needed a plan. Food and water were not the only things I had to worry about anymore. Safety from the bodies was now a strong front runner in the race for priority number one. Don't get me wrong. Food and drink are very important for survival. But so is the need to keep all of my limbs firmly attached to my body.

I got out of bed and went to my closet. I pushed aside some board games and tossed some old shoes into the corner. After rummaging through the junk for a few minutes I finally found my backpack. It still had books and folders in it from my senior year. Seeing it brought a flood a memories back. It seems like just last week I was wasting my days sitting through boring history lectures given by Mr. Everett. He could put me to sleep in minutes. Then there was the hot music teacher Mrs. Davis. She would wear these low cut dresses that would show off just enough cleavage to drive you insane. I can't count the number of times I left her class with a hard on.

I quickly snapped back to reality when I heard what sounded like gunfire coming from the direction of downtown. I wondered who was shooting the guns. Was it other survivors or could the bodies be capable of this? If they were, who were they shooting at? Each other or survivors? The thought of a corpse training the sights of a rifle on me and pulling the trigger sent shivers down my spine. I dumped everything out of the backpack onto the floor, grabbed the gun off of the nightstand and went downstairs.

Once downstairs I started filling the backpack with useful items. I started with the little food and drink I had left. I then started looking around the house for other items I could take with me. I grabbed the lighter my mom kept in the junk drawer to light birthday candles. I also found a couple books of matches which I tossed in the backpack. I remembered my mom kept some candles in her bedroom. I ran upstairs to get them. While I was up there I remembered I had a sleeping bag I used when we would go camping. I retrieved it from my closet.

When I was ready to leave, I cautiously peeked out the front window. The street was deserted. I slowly exited the house and stood on the front porch listening for a few minutes. It was deathly quiet. I could see no movement in any direction. The sun was shining brightly but it was still chilly for this time of year. It was time to go.

I decided the first thing I should do was gather more supplies. I started walking towards the supermarket near where I work. I kept watch in every direction and paid special attention to places where someone could hide. As I walked past the deserted houses, I noticed some of the curtains in the windows were open just a crack. This would be just enough of an opening for someone to look out onto the street but not be seen. I kept telling myself that there was no one there. I wasn't buying the shit I was selling.

I came to the main road that marks the end of my neighborhood and turned right. When I reached the grocery store I was not surprised to see that all of the bodies were gone. Not a single one was left. There must have been fifty bodies here a couple of days ago but now they had disappeared. Well, not disappeared. I knew what happened to them. I didn't know how, why or where? Nor did I care. My first task was to get supplies.

I entered the store through the front like I did on my previous trip. This time I filled my backpack with bottles of water, beef jerky, cans of soup, vegetables and fruit. I also found the health food aisle and grabbed as many power bars and granola snacks as I could fit in my back pack. I looked around for some type of cooking device but had no luck. I would most likely have to get that at a mall or a hunting and camping shop. I also found some extra lighters and a first aid kit. I knew this was not going to be enough to last forever but it was a start.

I threw my back pack over my shoulders and walked outside. It weighed so much the straps were digging into my skin. I told myself to tough it out and headed Southeast to the edge of town. Black clouds could be seen on the horizon when I would check behind me. Storms were coming. Hopefully it would stay warm enough and just be rain. I was not ready for snow yet.

My next destination would be a more secure location where I could hole up for awhile. It also just happened to be the opposite direction that I saw the bodies traveling last night.

I stood and looked through the chain link fence. An occasional vehicle or fire could be seen but otherwise McConnell Air Force Base appeared to be deserted. In 1991 a tornado swept through and

destroyed many of the structures. They had replaced the damaged buildings with new and improved aircraft hangars and office buildings. I also knew that during the cold war, this had been one of the Strategic Air Command bases. Therefore, there would be a reinforced bunker that could withstand a nuclear blast.

I walked along the fence until I came to the entrance gate. The gate itself was pushed back and the only thing standing in my way was a red and white striped arm that would be lifted to let vehicles enter. Normally there would be a pair of armed guards watching over the entrance. Today the guard house was empty. A sign out front informed me that McConnell Air Force Base was the 1998 winner of the Kansas award for excellence. Excellence in what I did not know.

I went inside and found an M-16 lying on the floor next to a pool of dried blood. I picked up the rifle and slung it over my shoulder. There were documents and papers littered about the floor and desk areas. It looked like it had been deserted for months but I knew better. A half full cup of coffee sat on the window sill and a partially eaten sandwich sat next to it on a white paper plate.

I exited the guard house and scanned the horizon while trying to plan my next move. I decided the first order of business would be to find somewhere safe to make camp for the evening. I could see some buildings up ahead and knew that the dual airfield runways would be just on the other side.

I walked along the two lane road towards the buildings. As I drew closer I could tell I was in the administration area of the base. Four like sized office buildings faced me. I walked past them and kept to the road. Eventually the road led me to the back of the administration buildings and I now had a clear view of the air strip. Just beyond I could see what appeared to be the maintenance areas for the airplanes.

Again, I kept to the road and walked with the runways stretching out to my right. On a normal day it would have been filled with noise and activity. Now the runway sat silent. I neared the maintenance buildings and could see into some of the dirty windows. Some held massive aircraft that would never see the skies again while others were deserted.

I followed the road through the maintenance plaza and came out on the far side of the warehouses. I had finally found what I was looking for. The living community for the airmen and base personnel. The streets were lined with maple and honey locust trees. Their branches filtered out most of the sunlight which gave the street a shadowy and creepy feel to it. I'm sure that being the only living person I knew of had something to do with it as well.

Other than the houses being almost identical, this looked like any other neighborhood you would see in the Midwest. I kept walking until I found a house that looked suitable for an overnight stay and walked up onto the front porch.

The house was a light shade of green, (Imagine that. Green in the military) and stood two stories high. The porch was big and would be perfect for spending summer evenings watching the sun set.

Believe it or not, I almost knocked when I reached the door. Instead I turned the knob and found it locked. Not wanting to make a racket or break the lock, I walked around the side of the house and into the back yard. The screen door was closed but the main door beyond that stood wide open. I opened the door and peeked inside. Inside and to my left was a small kitchen that smelled old and musty. Near the window stood a small table with four chairs. At the far end was a doorway that I assumed led into the living room. To my right was a dark staircase that could only lead to the basement.

I stepped inside and locked the dead bolt behind me. I stood there for a moment listening. Even after all that had happened, I still felt like a trespasser on someone else's property. I decided the house was empty. I quietly walked through the kitchen and into the room beyond and found that I was right about it being a living room. Dirty yellow light filtered in through the drapes and it made the room look as if I were looking at it through a beer bottle.

There was a green and brown couch and two tan colored arm chairs facing what looked like a twenty six inch television. I could see myself silhouetted against the window as reflected in the dark television screen. A movie I had seen once came to mind but was gone before I could envision it.

I shook off my backpack and leaned the rifle on the brown, wooden end table, then plopped down on the ugly couch. I was exhausted and starving. I ate a stick of beef jerky and one of the cans of fruit as I sat there listening to the silence. Before I knew it I was asleep.