

Whiskey Tango Foxtrot



W. J. Lundy

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By W. J. Lundy

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The gravel crunched under the heavy wheels of the MRAP. Staff Sergeant Brad Thompson looked out his passenger window tirelessly searching and scanning for threats. A short four hour patrol to recon a village is how they were briefed but they had already been on the trail for over five. First a suspected roadside bomb had slowed their approach to the village, and then their radios had failed shortly after arriving. To make matters worse, confusion and lack of communications caused an argument and further delayed their return to forward operating base Bremmel.

Nobody wanted to be alone on the roads after dark, especially in an area where the Taliban owned the night. His men were hungry and tired but still remained vigilant. His driver Henry was gripping the wheel tight and he reminded him to stay focused, Cole the gunner was on the .50 caliber machine gun up in the turret. Thompson could hear the squeaking of gears when Cole would rotate it to get a better angle on blind spots as they drove down the dusty trail.

Suddenly the vehicles ahead all began to slow then came to a stop, Brads headset squelched and he heard Lieutenant Rogers call his leaders forward to the command vehicle. Brad undid his harness while telling Cole to keep scanning his sector for targets, "Henry I'm going forward to see LT" Brad said in a tired voice.

He opened the door and took the long step down bracing himself for the drop. Gripping his M4 with his dominate hand while swinging down, landing hard he began the walk forward.

Passing the dusty vehicles he looked inside and saw the tired and drawn faces of the passengers. He found the Lieutenant leaning over the hood of an older armored style Humvee. LT was talking to their Platoon Sergeant SFC Turner and a couple of the other squad leaders about the return trip to Bremmel. They all had disgusted looks on their faces and Brad worried the argument from earlier would kick back in. "Staff Sergeant Thompson glad

you could join us” complained Turner. “I was just trying to explain to the LT that this communication outage makes no sense, all of our internal radios are working, and we should have been able to pick up the FOB once we cleared that last ridge, but we still aren’t picking up shit, and we ain’t even seen any aircraft in the last 3 hours”.

Brad scratched at the 5 O’clock Stubble on his chin, it didn’t make sense, and he had never experienced anything like this, military radios even though the butt of many jokes had almost always been reliable. “What about the Blue Force Tracker?” Brad asked. “It’s still not working, I mean we can navigate but nobody is sending messages or replying to mine” LT answered. “This isn’t right! It’s all wrong” He mumbled. “I want suggestions, and I want them now, I don’t want to continue down this road with no comms and no air support.”

“Let’s halt here, we can hold back the main body and setup a defensive perimeter, we can send my gun truck and two of the lighter HUMVEES back up the road to Bremmel.” “Without the main body we can move faster and avoid threats, when we reach Bremmel we can figure out what’s up with the comms and send a couple birds back to escort the rest of you home” Brad suggested. Turner grimaced “I don’t like the idea of splitting our force when I don’t know what’s lurking out there, but it may be the best course for what we got going.” “Okay let’s stop wasting time then, Sergeant Thompson, pull your truck ahead and get ready to move out with two trucks from 2nd squad, I want you guys rolling in 5 mikes.” LT barked.

Brad walked back to his truck and jumped into the passenger seat, “alright fellas lets mount up, were going to break out of the formation and move to the front”. “What’s up Sergeant? What’s going on” asked Cole. “We are going to route recon ahead and link back up with Raider back at Bremmel, if we move fast we can make it back in time for dinner” answered Brad. “Hell yeah I hear

that Sarge” answered Henry as he pulled the MRAP out of the column and slowly moved to the front of the convoy.

As the MRAP passed the front vehicle two more trucks dropped in behind them and they picked up speed. Brad got on the Radio and announced “Charlie six, Charlie four, radio check”, *Charlie 4 this is six, I read you loud and clear*, came the response. “Roger that six, Charlie four on mission” Brad answered. “Hey Henry how bout you put that pedal down and get us home, Cole keep your eyes open on the horizon, I don’t want any surprises” Brad ordered. The MRAP roared as it picked up speed and they quickly moved east along the road throwing dust behind them.

Things really were strange, even though the road to FOB Bremmel was typically quite in the daytime, especially in the late afternoon; they were used to at least seeing a Sheppard or a stray jingle truck. Today they hadn’t seen anything moving west away from Bremmel. Brad started to get a bad feeling and consciously noticed his heart rate begin to quicken, they were now less than 5 miles from the base.

Brad keyed the mike on his radio handset and tried to call the Bremmel. “Task Force Raider, this is Charlie Four over”; Brad heard nothing but static and tried again, “Task Force Raider, this is Charlie Four over” again nothing. “Charlie Six, This is Charlie Four over”. *Go for Six* squelched back on the radio, “This is Charlie four, still no response from Raider”, *roger understood, stay on mission, six out*, came the answer from the radio.

Brad looked to the left and could see the worry on Henry's face, things defiantly were not right. Brad checked in with the two scout vehicles behind him and asked them to tighten up the formation as they got closer to Bremmel. They moved down into a saddle and up the other side as they made their final approach towards the road to the FOB's front gate. They reached the top and made a hard turn onto the paved road, Henry slammed on the brakes and everything in the truck crashed forward. Brad heard the trucks behind skidding to a stop. "What the fuck Henry" Brad shouted as he looked up and saw FOB Bremmel.

The FOB was burning, there were people running everywhere pouring over the walls, there was no gunfire, but the base was being mobbed. "Permission to open fire" Cole shouted. "No! Hold your fire, they are out of range anyhow and we don't know what's happening" Brad shouted back. "Jesus Sergeant what is happening down there, why is there no gunfire? Did we lose the base, what's going on" Henry yelled. "Everyone lock it down, Cole stay on your gun. There was a knock on his side window; it was Corporal Méndez from the Humvee that had been behind them.

"This is bad Sarge, what is this, what the fuck is going on down there, how could all of them civilians take out the base. What are we going to do?" Said Méndez. "Méndez, get back to your truck, get your guns up and keep an eye out, it looks like nobody has noticed us up here, I want to keep it that way, I'll be with you in a minute" Brad answered. "Charlie six, this is four" he calmly said into the radio. *Go for six*, "Six this is four, we are 1 click from Bremmel, Bremmel is overrun". *Repeat your last Charlie four*, "I said we are 1 click from Bremmel and the base has been over run and is burning!" He yelled into the handset. *Calm down sergeant, I need you to give me a clear answer on what you are seeing*, He responded. "I told you the base is overrun with civilians, the gate is open and it's burning". *Wait one sergeant*,

we have a group of civilians approaching the back of our perimeter, came the reply from the radio. “Ughhh Sergeant you might want to look at this” Cole uttered. Brad looked up and saw that a small ant trail of people were moving out of the base and headed in their direction.

They were moving fast, not quite a run, but defiantly at a quick pace. “Charlie six, we are being approached by the mob from the base, please advise” he said into the radio. *Charlie four break contact, return to the convoy, crack crack crack we are under assault, we are engaging with less than lethal. Return to the convoy.* “Roger, Charlie Six we are enroute” He answered. *LTL not working they are swamping the crack crack crack trucks they are dragging off the crews open fire!!.* “Charlie Six this is Four what’s going on?” Brad yelled into the handset. Uhhh Sergeant they are getting closer” Yelled Cole in a panic.

Brad looked up and saw they were now within a thousand meters and moving very quickly. Brad lifted his M4 to use the advanced optics to get a better look. He could see a large group now that had separated itself from the main ant trail winding away from the base. He looked at the man in front, he was wearing a traditional man dress but his head was bare and so were his feet. The man was at a fast jog, his face looked filled with rage, and those behind him looked the same. Then he noticed with alarm, the man’s chest was covered in blood, he scanned the crowd they also were covered in dark stains.

“Cole give them a burst, far off I don’t want you hitting them by accident” Brad ordered. “On the way” came the answer from Cole. The large weapon thumped in a quick report as it poured a 6 round burst out towards the approaching mob. Rounds skipped off the ground in front of them kicking up sparks and dust, they didn’t even flinch, and they kept running at the same pace without missing a beat. “This isn’t good Sarge, we should leave” said Henry. Brad didn’t look away to answer he was fixed on the mob, they were seconds away and building speed, they hit the vehicles

like a tidal wave, the armored MRAP shuddered but took the impact. "Cole Button up" Brad screamed. Cole dropped into the vehicle, slamming and locking the hatch shut behind him. Bodies tried to climb up the truck, having trouble because of the vehicles towering height. But the two Humvee's didn't have the same luck.

Brad heard the gun from Méndez's truck fire, and looked back, he could see the mob hoarding over the vehicle, Méndez's gunner was being grabbed at from the turret, he was firing madly, and the Humvee was taking off wildly out of control. The third truck was backing up into a stone wall and also trying to escape the Mob. Brad saw the empty turret but couldn't see if the gunner had been able to escape and close his hatch. The humvee was being pressed against the stone wall. Suddenly he saw to the right that the gunner hadn't reached safety, he was being ripped apart by the mob, he could see white and red movement inside the Humvee also.

"Henry Drive get us out of here" Brad yelled. Henry hit the accelerator hard, and the huge MRAP lurched forward, making a sickening crunch as it plowed over and thru the mob. They were still climbing and holding on to the sides of the vehicle. Henry was pulling away from the crowd, Méndez's vehicle was moving along side, He could see that Méndez's truck had finally closed its hatch, but still had about eight of the crazies holding onto the top. "Cole can you see truck three" Brad yelled. "It's lost Sarge, the doors are open and those guys are dragging them, what the fuck they are ripping them apart." He shouted back. "Get it together guys, Henry calm down and drive right, those fucks aren't getting in this truck we will deal with them when we get away from that mob".

They drove for what seemed like an eternity, the crazies were still banging and pounding on the sides of the armored vehicle, every now and then one would tumble onto the hood of the truck or fall off the side. No one said anything; they just stayed focused and drove. Finally the internal radio broke the silence and Brad's

headset woke up. *Sergeant what just happened?* “I don’t know we need to get back to the convoy” Brad answered. *Sergeant we can’t see Jones and truck three, we have to go back.* “Truck three is gone, there is no going back there, what’s your status corporal.” *We’re okay but my gunner is fucked up, and those guys are still on the roof, looks like you have a bunch on you also.* “Okay Corporal, take care of your gunner, follow us, I’ll be back with you in a minute.” Brad reached for his radio handset and tried to call the convoy, after three tries and no response he gave up.

“Méndez I think we are alone here, we have to lose these shit heads on our vehicles, do you understand” Brad said into his internal mic. *I understand Sarge, what you want to do.* “We’re going to stop, you stop about 20 feet away and I’m going to shoot the bastards off of your truck.” Brad answered. Brad asked Henry to slow the vehicle and turn it so his firing portal faced Méndez’s truck. When the vehicle stopped, the things on top got frenzied and he could hear them clawing and pounding at the armor above. Brad knew in that moment that the enemy outside wasn’t human, he didn’t know what they were, but they weren’t people.

He eased open his firing port just enough so that he could fit the barrel of his M4 out. He had a small internal conversation in his head, if it was okay to shoot one of these unarmed civilians. But then the answer came back to him, in the vision of truck three’s gunner being torn apart. He looked thru his optics and took aim at one of the crazies on Méndez’s truck. He put the cross hair center mass on a large male that had his fingers wedged into the door jam. He pulled the trigger and felt the recoil in his shoulder. Nothing, dam he missed? He took aim and fired again, this time that man’s left arm went limp but he still howled and pried at the door. Brad looked thru the site and fired four more times, finally the man loosened his grip and fell to a knee then tumbled off the truck.

“Holy Shit, how in the fuck did that just happen, that freak just took six shots, this shit ain’t right Sarge”. Cole shouted. Brad ignored him, taking aim on the next one, an overweight man sitting on the hood, this time he aimed at the head, and blew the man’s brains out and onto part of the windshield. He finished off one more the same way. “Your turn Méndez,” he said into his headset. *Roger I’m on it* came the reply. He watched as Méndez slowly opened his armored window and fired off close to thirty rounds before he announced that his vehicle was clear. They sat quietly for a minute, before Brad decided to get out.

Brad undid the combat lock and slowly opened the door. He looked over and saw that Méndez was also exiting his vehicle. Brad stepped to the ground and saw one of the bodies lying in a slump near a tire. The man looked like it had been clawed and bitten, maybe as a result of the rough ride on the MRAP? He saw a leg hanging from the top of the truck and he grabbed for it and pulled the body free of the vehicle, it hit the ground with a thud. It was a female wearing a light shirt, he could see she had taken several shots from Méndez’s rifle and her wounds were covered in fresh blood, but she also had several deep cuts and at least one older bullet wound in her abdomen.

“What is this?” Méndez said. Brad turned and saw Méndez standing behind him. “I don’t know man, but I know we killed them, maybe it’s a bio weapon, you know terrorist are always into some crazy shit”. “You heard from the convoy?” asked Méndez. “No man, I’m kind of hoping the radio is out, our antenna looks like it was ripped off, last I heard they were engaging a mob, I hope it’s not the same shit, we just saw”. “How is your gunner?” asked Brad. “He is bad sergeant, those things tried to pull him out of the hatch, he had his harness on, but they still dislocated his shoulder, and one of them took a bite out of his forearm.”

Brad walked over to Méndez’s truck, they had his gunner PFC Ryan laid out in the back, and he had sweat dripping off of him and a tourniquet on his arm. Méndez’s medic and driver SPC

Eric was treating him. "I don't get it Sarge, he is burning up with fever and he hasn't woken up since he passed out after the attack. I started an IV, but I don't think it's helping" Eric said. "Okay good job soldier, just do the best you can, we're going to mount up and try and get back to the convoy, we will get him help soon" said Brad.

Beep Beep Beep, Brad turned his attention to his MRAP, Henry was beating the horn and he leaned his head out of the window and frantically yelled "Sergeant their back about 5000 meters and on the run". "Cole get that gun up, suppress, take them out" Brad yelled. "On the way Sergeant" Cole answered as he racked the M2 Machine gun chambering a round and pointed into the direction of the closing mob. "Méndez button up and get ready to move" Brad ordered. Thump, thump, thump, thump, Cole had started firing his big gun. Brad climbed into his seat and secured his door, he watched Méndez's truck pull around and angle behind him.

"Let's go! Back to the convoy Henry, Cole keep pouring it on them!" shouted Brad. Brad looked back thru the window and could see the Mob cresting the hill just meters from where they just left, Cole was knocking them down with the big gun, he paused to reload, and Brad saw some of them moving on the ground and get back up. What the hell he thought; nobody takes a fifty caliber round and gets back up. He looked thru his scope and saw a man limping down the road with a softball size hole near his hip, and he was jogging after them. After about 5 yards the man fell over flat on his face. They lost the pack and Brad ordered Cole to cease fire.

Henry started talking “Sergeant how is that possible, we are almost ten miles from the FOB and those things caught up with us, they aren’t Kenyans Sarge, nobody is that fast, they didn’t even look tired”. “I don’t know Henry, I shot that guy six times before he went down, and Cole was tearing that crowd apart, and I swear I saw some of them get back up; let’s just keep it together and we will figure this out” Brad answered. “Méndez, take point and recon ahead, I don’t want any surprises up front” Brad said into his headset.

The more maneuverable Humvee passed the MRAP and Pulled away. Méndez’s truck was far ahead now and running as a scout, he was staying just within sight of Brad. They had driven for close to an hour now without seeing anything or hearing a word on the radio. It was getting late and the sun was beginning to crest the mountains, Brad knew they would only have another hour or so of daylight.

Sergeant, I can see the convoy, I’m stopping, squelched the radio. “Roger that, Méndez, we will hang back, what can you see” Asked Brad. *Not good Sarge, I can see the vehicles, looks like maybe one or two are missing. There are no people; nothing appears to be alive down there.* “Stay in position Méndez, I’m moving to your location” Brad responded. The MRAP moved forward and pulled up alongside the Humvee, Brad used his scout binos to look at the scene ahead of him. Looks like the LT circled the wagons; the Convoy was still in its defensive perimeter. Brad didn’t see anyone in the turrets, and the razor wire barrier looked like it had been dragged inside of their safe zone.

Brad continued to scan but he didn’t see a single living person, most of the vehicles had the doors open and the turrets still had mounted weapons on top. Brad knew his people wouldn’t leave their vehicles and weapons like that. He did a vehicle count and compared it with the convoy order he had received early that morning. Two MRAPS were missing from the convoy. Brad had

an idea of what may have happened by the way things were strewn about. The Perimeter was over run and the lighter vehicles easily over taken in the same way they had lost truck three. The Heavier MRAPS were able to take the initial blow and get secured. Brad was guessing that the MRAPS fled the mob, and were pursued by the attackers in the same way the Bremmel mob had chased them.

With the two vehicles on line, they started to approach the perimeter. As they got closer he could tell that it wasn't going to be pretty, the soldiers hadn't abandoned their positions. Parts of them were scattered everywhere, as well as several bodies of the crazies that must have attacked the convoy. They pulled to within 100 meters of the perimeter, he had Cole and Eric mount the guns and provide cover while he and Méndez went in on foot. Not only did he want to protect his men from any physical danger, he wanted to save them the experience he was sure he would find.

Walking among the wreckage you could see the soldiers put up a fight, there was blood everywhere. Pieces of body armor and protective equipment were ripped apart and tossed to the ground. Brad saw a fighting position where there was a pile of brass and dead bodies, many were cut apart, next to them was a dead soldier he recognized, still with his fighting knife in his hands.

They found the lieutenants Humvee with the doors open and bent; the inside of his truck had smeared blood and looked like it had been destroyed. Things were tossed everywhere. One MRAPs had bodies all over it in different twisted poses; whoever had manned that gun must have gone down hard. The MRAP was surrounded by corpses that had been shredded by the MRAPS big gun. "Over here" Méndez called. Off to the side of the perimeter, they could see where sets of big tire tracks had pulled away from the perimeter, dragging razor wire with it. There was a bread trail of bodies as the vehicle tracks peeled away into

the distance. From the tracks and drag marks, it was obvious that the mob and followed them into the desert.

They found nothing else, so they took a trailer off one of the MRAPS and loaded it with anything they could find in the convoy that they may need later. Cases of MRE's, bottled water, 5 gallon cans of fuel, batteries and as many ammo cans as they could carry. They grabbed a spare gun for each truck and called for Henry to bring down their vehicles so they could connect the trailer and top them off with fuel. Méndez found a sniper rifle and a couple light 240B Machine guns, to put in the trailer also.

After they were sure everything useful loaded, they mounted back up. Brad decided it was best to stay the night near the convoy in hopes the two MRAPS would circle back, so he directed the vehicles off road and towards a small ridge ridgeline that overlooked the convoys resting place. They pulled into a nice hide where the vehicles could be hidden by some large rock formations, but still able to see the road and the approach to the ambush site.

The Men were exhausted, Brad told them he would take the first watch and instructed the others to get some rest. He walked over to check on PFC Ryan, he was still hot with fever and still unconscious. The wounds around his forearm had grown a deep purple and had streaking going up his arm. It didn't look good. He was still laid out in the back of the Humvee; quietly Brad closed the door and walked past Eric and Méndez who were sleeping off to the front of his truck.

He climbed on top of his MRAP and slowly scanned the horizon with his Night Vision Scope looking for any danger. Later in the darkness he heard the moans and noise coming from the road, thru his scope he could see the mob from Bremmel moving towards the convoy site. The group paused when they reached the vehicles and the hairs stood on the back of his neck while he waited to see what they would do, he looked around and could see that the rest of his men were also up and looking at the road. The Mob suddenly started moving again and continued to follow the road to the village they had patrolled earlier that day. Brad was relieved that the Crazyies didn't appear to be good trackers. Once again it became quiet, which was strange for this part of Afghanistan, where you could always here jet aircraft or a distant explosion all through the night.

Brad watched an hour more, and then woke Henry to relieve him.

He climbed into the back of the MRAP and drifted to sleep listening to Henry shuffle around on top of the MRAP. Brad woke to the sounds of screaming, but it wasn't his men it was a loud howling moan, almost un-human. He jumped out of his MRAP and saw his men gathered around the Humvee, they were stone silent in disbelief. Inside PFC Ryan was clawing at the doors tugging on the handles trying to get out; his face wore a mask of rage. "I don't know what happened Sergeant; I heard the noise in the Humvee and when I got close Ryan saw me and just started screaming, he is going crazy in there, but I don't dare open the

door” Mumble Cole. “It’s okay Cole, you were right not to open it or let him out, I’m not sure what’s going on, but looks like he may be infected with whatever turned those people on the road.” Brad answered.

“What do we do with him” asked Cole. “We can’t kill him like the others, He’s one of us” said Eric. “He’s making too much noise, he will attract the crazies, and we have to shut him up” Said Cole. “What the fuck do you mean shut him up?” yelled Eric. “I mean if he doesn’t stop screaming he is going to get us all killed” Cole shouted back. Brad just looked on, “He’s right” brad said raising his hand, “and we got to silence him”. “Okay, you guys open the door, I’ll tackle him and we can zip tie him and cover his mouth, we don’t know what this is, maybe it will wear off, maybe there is a cure” Eric said. “Fine let’s do it then, let’s get this done quickly” replied Brad.

The men gathered around the Humvee door on the far side, the plan was for Cole to open the door and when Ryan ran out at Brad and Méndez, Henry and Cole would drop a canvas tarp over him and wrestle him to the ground while Eric put the restraints on his wrists. But as soon as they opened the door Brad knew their plan wasn’t going to work. And he could see by the fear in the other men’s eyes they knew it also. Ryan wasn’t a big man, and he wasn’t strong, but this version of Ryan did not tire out, he kept fighting and clawing at the canvas. He bit at Brad’s leg thru the tarp and the pain was unreal, lucky for Brad, Ryan’s teeth couldn’t get thru the heavy material.

They struggled with Ryan and were all near exhaustion, Eric only had one wrist in a zip cuff and it was taking everything Méndez and Brad had to keep Ryan’s head pinned to the ground. All the time Ryan was letting out that scream of rage. Brads arms began to get numb and he lost grip, Ryan gained leverage and was able to get a foot planted and he began to stand, he tossed Henry from his back grabbed at Eric’s pants and started to lunge. Ryan’s body suddenly went limp and he slumped to the ground on top of

Eric, his single zip tied hand gripping Eric's throat. There was a knife planted square in the back of Ryan's head.

"I'm sorry, it was too much, I didn't have a choice" Cried Méndez. "wha wha you murdered him, you killed Ryan" Eric squealed. With no thought, Brad slapped Eric and yelled "Shut the fuck up, that wasn't Ryan! He would have killed all of us, I don't know what's happening but if we're going to make it you better harden the fuck up." Brad yelled. "Méndez grab your shovel and help me burry this soldier. The rest of you get packed up, we are rolling out of here as soon as it gets light." Méndez and Brad lifted Ryan's limp body and carried him away from the trucks. They took one of his dog tags and his wallet. They put his military ID card and another tag in Ryan's breast pocket and buried him in the sand. They didn't say a word. When they were finished they quietly walked back to their vehicles.

Brad walked to the MRAP and saw Cole helping Eric load his gear into the back of the Truck. "What's going on Cole?" Brad said. "Well, Eric doesn't want to ride in that Humvee after what happened, and I tend to agree with him. Besides, this way we can ride together and we can save on fuel, who knows how far we will have to drive." Cole answered. Brad nodded his agreement and helped them cross load the rest of their gear from the Humvee.

They pulled out of the hide at first light, not really knowing where to go; they had decided the best bet was to follow the two MRAPS that had fled the mob ambush on the road. The MRAP now had two more passengers, bringing the crew to five. It was a bit more crowded, but they did feel more secure being locked tight in one vehicle, and Méndez and Eric were glad to be out of the Humvee after what had happened there. They drove past the quiet ambush site of the convoy, and fell into the tire tracks of the two missing vehicles.

After a good hour of driving they saw a makeshift campsite surrounded by a pile of bodies. "They must have discovered what

we did yesterday, the bastards like to follow” said Brad. “From the looks of it, the guards spotted them early, and took off before they got close, were still a good hundred feet from the stop site” said Cole. “Good for them, maybe we will have some good news today” Answered Méndez. They mounted back up in the MRAP and continued to follow the trail; they drove all day and never saw anything else. When it got dark they decided to continue on, in hopes of meeting up with the missing vehicles.

Early morning with a bright moon Henry woke Brad up with a shake. “Sergeant, where now?” Cole asked. They had come to a paved road and the tracks ended there, it was hard to tell which way the trucks had gone. Brad exited his MRAP and took a knee on the pavement searching for clues. He could see where the mob of crazies had entered the road, but it didn’t look like they knew which direction to go either. Some of the pack appeared to have just crossed the road and kept going; the rest traveled both left and right as if they couldn’t make a decision. Brad was surprised that they didn’t stick together; maybe they didn’t have the pack mentality he expected.

Brad stood and walked back towards the truck, stopping when he heard a distant buzzing; he knew the sound and looked up. There was a small predator drone circling high above. Brad waved at the drone and turned on his IR strobe hoping to let the drone know that he saw it. The drone reversed the direction of its orbit and reversed it again. Brad took this as a sign they had been seen, but he still didn’t know what to do. Then the Drone went to a lower altitude and followed the road to the north before going higher and back out of sight.

Brad entered the vehicle and said “Well I guess that settles that, follow the drone”. “But Sergeant, that’s away from the main base, nothing is that way but Uzbekistan” Argued Méndez. “Corporal it’s almost 400 kilometers to the Main air base, we aren’t going to make it there on our fuel.” “The border crossing at Hairatan is our best bet, there is a railroad and a lot of truck traffic there and

somebody should see us". "The drone sees us, so they know where we are at, and hopefully we can join up with the other trucks and they will send someone for us." The men reluctantly nodded in agreement, and Henry pulled the truck onto the road and headed north.

The going was slow, the MRAP rolled along at close to forty miles an hour on the black top surface, but this wasn't a well maintained road and they had to stay aware of obstacles and potholes this was no time for a broken axel. Brad had traveled the Hairatan road early in his tour and knew that it ended at a bridge and border crossing. Last time he was there, he visited the small Afghan Army post and had lunch with some of the US soldiers who were stationed there as trainers and advisors. He hoped they would still be there.

Henry stopped the truck again; Brad looked up and saw a silent MRAP sitting in the center of the road. Nothing moved around the lonely vehicle, the sun had just come up and they could see that the doors were all closed. "Bring it in slow Henry" Brad said. Henry eased the truck forward and when they were about fifty feet away Brad asked him to stop. Cole was already in the turret and said he saw no movement; Brad, Méndez and Eric dismounted the MRAP and slowly approached the abandoned vehicle.

"Cover me while I move up" Brad ordered to the two soldiers behind him. He slowly crept forward and hugged the back corner of the large vehicle. He looked for signs of people but found nothing, he put a foot on the back step and raised himself up to peek into the truck. It appeared empty, and unlike the vehicles at the ambush site, this one had the gun removed from the turret. Brad walked around to the driver's door and slowly opened it while trying to keep his M4 aimed with his free hand. The door squeaked open to reveal an empty cab. Brad stepped up into the vehicle to find a handwritten note.

*Anyone
this.*

who

finds

We are the six survivors of Echo Company, 2nd Brigade. We were attacked on route A62 by a large population that approached us in the late afternoon yesterday. They ignored warnings from our roadblock to stop, and kept running for our perimeter. We used the limited bean bag shotgun rounds to try and turn them, but they had no effect. We opened up with our rifles, but we were quickly overrun, and they were in so close it was hard to fire effectively without hitting each other.

Most of our men were on the perimeter and were not able to flee to the safety of armored vehicles, several of us were able to board two MRAPS, but because of the mass of people we could provide little to no covering fire, instead we fled like cowards. As we left we could see our brothers fighting hand to hand, but they had little chance when up against 100 to 1 odds. We pushed our way out of the perimeter and into the desert with at least twenty of the things holding onto our trucks. We took turns shooting at each other's vehicles thru the firing ports until we lost the clingers.

We drove for several hours before stopping and resting for the night. Within a couple hours our guards heard the mob approaching, but this time we were ready and we opened up with our 50 caliber machine gun and the light machine gun on the other truck. The Mob went down but they didn't stop, soon they had closed to within one hundred meters and we were forced again to run. It appears that this enemy can take several hits, and are immune to pain or exhaustion. They do bleed out and die, but they are hardened and don't quit until dead, head shots work best.

We drove thru the night until we hit the Hairatan Road; we decided our best chance was to get to the Afghan army base at the border so we traveled north. This truck is out of fuel and instead of splitting the precious fuel we have left we have decided to abandon this vehicle and use what we have to get to the border. We have almost no water left, and only a little food. We

haven't seen anyone or heard anyone on the radio for at least 24 hours.

If you find this note please give it to the nearest NATO ISAF military units for a reward.

Signed

SFC Turner

Brad read the note and walked back to Méndez and Eric, he handed the note to Méndez and watched him read it silently. "Oh shit, this is bad man" Méndez mumbled. "Let's get back in the truck so I can think" Brad said. They mounted the MRAP and sat quietly while Brad stared at the note, when Cole said "Sergeant there is a haboob coming from up the road". Brad looked up and saw a large gathering sandstorm, and ordered Cole to close the hatch.

As the sandstorm got close Brad looked at it thru his binos and saw that it wasn't a storm at all, but a mob of at least a thousand coming down the Hairatan road. "Shut off the engine Henry, everyone lock the doors and get down" Brad yelled. "What are we doing sergeant, why don't we run" asked Henry. "We don't have time, I think if we are quiet they will go past us, they didn't touch the abandoned MRAP, if we are lucky and keep our mouths shut they will go right by."

The mob hit them, but not with the violence of their first encounter, they didn't seem to move as fast when they weren't chasing prey. They walked quickly but not at the speed they saw earlier. They were clumsy and Brad could hear them bumping against the heavy armored vehicle, a couple even climbed up and over the truck, but none looked inside the darkened interior. It took 15 minutes for the herd to pass and another 20 minutes for the stragglers to go by.

Brad slowly lifted himself from the vehicle floor, the inside of the truck had gotten extremely hot with the windows closed and the AC turned off. He raised his head up and looked as best he could in a 360 to make sure they were alone. When he was certain he gave the all clear and told Henry to fire up the engine as he opened his window. He looked outside and saw that the mob had made a wide path in the sand and littered it with pieces of clothing and shoes. They seemed to march with purpose and didn't quit, Brad wondered how they decided where to go.

He got out of the MRAP and walked among some of the things dropped by the mob, he leaned down to pick up a shoe when he heard the shuffling sounds of something approaching. He looked back at his truck and saw his crew signaling for him to get to cover. But it was too late; the thing had already spotted him and started moving directly at him. Lucky for Brad this thing had a gimped leg, it looked like it had a blown out knee by the way it dragged its foot behind him. "Sergeant shoot it" Cole yelled from the turret. "No, hold your fire, if we shoot with the mob still that close they might come back for us" Brad answered. Brad pulled out his Karambit knife and dropped into a fighter's stance and waited for the crazy to get within range. When it got close enough the crazy lunged at Brad head first, which was a mistake, as Brad was an experienced wrestler. He grabbed it by the hair on the top of its head and buried the karambit deep into the side of its neck.

Brad thought that would be the end of it, but the thing continued its lunge, and grabbed at Brad's legs. Brad had to make a deep

sprawl so he could land on top of it, and keep his legs out of range. He yanked out the knife and plunged it deep into the base of the things skull. This time the creature went limp and settled onto the ground. Brad got back to his feet and wiped his blade off on the things pants. He noticed his hands were shaking, and he was shocked at the strength of the creature, and that it didn't quit, even with five inches of steel in its jugular.

Brad dropped to the ground and sat there for a second before dry heaving into the sand next to him, when he looked up, his men were standing around him and looking down at what he had just killed. Brad rolled the man over and saw that he looked like a middle aged Asian man. Not like the typical Afghan they ran into around this area. He reached into its jacket pocket and found a tattered wallet the identification card wasn't in English but he recognize the papers from his time earlier working at the border.

Brad folded the papers and put them in his pocket. "What is it sergeant, what did you find" asked Cole. "Nothing guys, do a quick check on the truck and make sure nothing was damaged, Méndez help me look this thing over some more" Brad answered. When the others moved away, Brad told Méndez that he was sure the papers were Uzbekistan identification documents. "What do you think that means Sergeant?" Méndez asked. "Well I hope it doesn't mean that this has spread into Uzbekistan, I hope it doesn't mean that the border post has been lost, I hope it doesn't mean we are screwed". "Méndez I need you to help me keep this from the men until we get to Hairatan, I need these guys to stay focused." Brad said. "I think you have a point Sergeant, I won't say shit till we know for sure what we are looking at."

Brad and Méndez walked back to the truck and got on board. "Let's move out Henry" Brad said in a low voice. Henry pulled the vehicle forward and around the abandoned MRAP in the middle of the road. They passed a sign that said Hairatan 15km. We will be there soon guys, just stay sharp" Brad asked. "If there is anything left, I mean you saw that pack of them, they came from

where we are headed, what do we expect to find there?" Eric said. "Just keep your head on straight and worry about that when we get there" ordered Brad.

The road to Hairatan passed through the arid desert before it moved near the Amu Darya River. Brad could see things slowly begin to lose the tan beige of the desert and turn green. As they got closer to the river they would pass an occasional mud hut, they continued on as the road turned to the east and skirted the river, they could see it below them on the left; but still saw no sign of life. As they got closer to Hairatan they started to see more and more abandoned vehicles, some looked as if they had been trampled, others were rolled over with shattered windshields.

Henry carefully navigated around the broken and battered vehicles but the congested road soon got to where it was almost impassable. Henry eased the vehicle to the shoulder and prepared to go off road to skirt a large bus that was broken down blocking the left lane. Henry pushed the accelerator and the MRAP began to climb the embankment. "No Stop!" Cole yelled from the gunners hatch. Henry hit the brakes and the vehicle slammed forward then stopped. "What is it" Brad asked. Cole pointed forward, and Brad opened his door and stood in its frame to get a better vantage point. Ahead and off to the side, he saw the missing MRAP.

It looked like they had attempted the same maneuver to get around the bus. They must have climbed the embankment and tried to skirt around the bus, when it lost traction and slid into the deep ditch at the other side of the bus. The MRAP and ditch was out of view of Henry and he never would have seen until it was too late. Brad asked Henry to back up, and then they all got out and wearily approached the disabled MRAP.

Just like the abandoned truck on the road, this truck also had its mounted gun removed; Brad took that as a good sign. When they got closer they could see that the crew spent a considerable amount of time trying to recover the vehicle. They saw spare tires and cables tied and propped under the MRAP in every position imaginable to try and right it. There was no sign of the crew, and

this time there was no note. The vehicle was empty and they took everything removable with them. It looked like they must have lost the fight with it and were forced to abandon the truck. Brad was hoping he wouldn't have to make the same decision.

The bus was wedged in tight and didn't seem to be anyway around it, the other side of the road had a sharp drop off. Brad approached a car near that side and looked inside, the keys were missing and the windshield was smashed out. It looked like the last owner of the car was dragged through it. Brad reached thru the window and put the car in neutral and started to push it. Méndez picked up on what Brad was doing and leaned into the back of the car. They pushed hard and Brad steered the car out over the edge of the cliff.

Brad instructed Henry to follow them down the now cleared up lane, Cole stayed in the turret to provide cover while Eric and Méndez helped him push vehicles over the side. It was hard work but eventually they had made it thru the pileup and the MRAP had room to maneuver again. Eric got back inside the truck while Brad and Méndez elected to ride on the hood. They were starting to approach the outer edge of the city of Hairatan. The road forked and Brad instructed Henry to stick to the north fork which would take them along the river and to the Afghan army post. As they approached Brad could start to make out the Steele girded Friendship Bridge which connected Afghanistan to Uzbekistan, an important trade route and path for military shipments. He wasn't happy that he could already tell the bridge looked heavily damaged, and some vehicles even appeared to be burning.

The head of the bridge on the afghan side is barricaded and you can't just drive up to it. Brad instructed Henry to move the MRAP up onto the railway bed that ran parallel to the road, and around the barriers. The MRAP slowly climbed the rail road tracks and eased into the customs station. Strangely there were no train cars, and the inspection station was eerily quiet. Brad and

Méndez dismounted with Eric while Cole stood watch. Brad asked Henry to kill the engine while they listened.

They heard them before they saw them, four males and a female running towards them from down on the far side of the barricade; they were running along the fence trying to make their way to the gate so they could get around and at the soldiers. Brad watched them as they crashed thru the gate and began coming up the embankment, He looked thru his red dot site and took aim at a large man in a yellow leading far out in front. He pulled the trigger and hit him in the chest with a 3 round burst. The man fell and the others ran over him, Brad told the men with him to open fire.

They took carefully aimed shots that hit the crazies several times, but they kept coming. "Aim for the head" Brad yelled. And he again aimed for the lead runner, putting the red dot just below his chin and pulling the trigger. He saw his rounds pop thru the neck and face of the runner. When he lowered his rifle all of them were down, they changed out magazines in their M4s and looked around. He saw off in the distance, the man in yellow he initially shot three times in the chest was getting back to his feet and making his way back towards them.

They just stared at the man in awe, Brad raised his rifle and placed the dot over the man's heart and pulled the trigger. Yellow shirt spun around and fell, but rolled back to his belly and got back to his feet and started walking again towards the soldiers. Brad aimed at the man's leg and took a shot, yellow shirts knee buckled, and he went into the dirt, but began crawling towards them. They just stood and watched the man crawl until he was less than 10 feet away when brad placed a shot in yellow shirts head stopping him.

"What the fuck was that?" Méndez muttered. Eric walked to the down man and rolled him over to his back. There were four holes going across the man's chest, two in the abdomen, one in the heart and one in the lungs. "How is this possible, you shot him three too many times to kill him and he kept going" Eric said. As

they stared at yellow shirt Cole shouted “contact right.” Brad spun to see two more figures running towards them. The two crazies were wearing border guard uniforms, at first Brad thought maybe help had arrived, but he could hear the high pitched whine.

Without instruction they raised their rifles and dropped the former guards with well-aimed shots to the grapes. They walked over to the downed men and one of them had a gaping wound on his shoulder, the other was missing a good portion of his neck. “It looks like whatever this is, it keeps them alive, look at these wounds, and these guys should have been immobile” Eric said. “It’s defiantly not good Eric, I don’t know what to say right now” Brad answered. Méndez rolled one of the guards over and found a Makarov pistol in the Man’s holster. “No sense in leaving this” Méndez said as he tucked the pistol into his body armor. “Back to the truck guys, I’m sure this shooting attracted a lot of attention” Said Brad.

Henry drove the truck deeper into the border post compound; eventually he found a spot back in some shipping containers. He found a horseshoe stack of containers and backed the MRAP and trailer in nicely to where they couldn't be snuck up on from behind, but they still had a nice view in the front. It wasn't a perfect place to defend against an armed enemy, but it made good tactics against the crazies they were facing.

Once the engine was shut down they listened intently for sounds that they had been discovered, but it was quiet. Now that they were in the city they did hear the occasional scream and some sporadic gunfire in the distance, but for the most part the compound appeared to be secured. Brad setup a watch schedule and he told his guys to try and get some rest. It was mid-day and the sun was high in the sky.

The inside of the MRAP heated up quickly with the engine and cooling systems shut down, Brad knew the conditions were not ideal. He allowed the men to dismount from the truck and try to cool off in the shade under the vehicle, but still the heat rolled off the pavement, and radiated from the vehicle and shipping containers. Brad climbed to the top of the truck and used his binoculars to try and scout the area. He had a good open view of the compound, and could see the warehouse buildings off in the distance. Most of the fence still looked to be in place, and the warehouse doors were all closed and secure.

Brad decided that he needed to take a small foot patrol to find a better hide; they couldn't sit here in the hundred degree heat and cook. He told Cole and Eric to suit up and be ready to move in 15 minutes, leaving Méndez in charge of the vehicle. They packed their gear and put on their knee and elbow pads. Because they were no longer facing a traditional enemy it was decided to drop the heavy bullet stopping ceramic plates from their vests, and to also close up the neck and shoulder protectors on their body armor. Designed to protect soldiers from shrapnel and road side

bombs, they hoped the Kevlar fabric would now prove useful against the rabid mobs they had been faced with.

Cole crept out around the container and led the way on point; he walked slowly and stuck close to the edge of the containers. He stopped often to listen and to look at far off objects thru his rifles advanced optics. The enemy didn't appear to be particularly cunning but they had managed to sneak up on them more than once, and they didn't want that to happen without the safety of the MRAP. Quickly yet silently the patrol moved until they were within a football field's distance from the first warehouse. Cole put his fist in the air and waved them down to the ground; Brad crawled forward and used his binos to look at the building.

It was made entirely of cinderblock, and appeared to be new, probably part of the ISAF reconstruction efforts. The building had a large overhead door in its center and a smaller door to its right, a row of windows lined the very top of the building probably for venting and to let in daylight. They watched and waited for a good twenty minutes to make sure they were alone, then got to their feet and one at a time they bounded across the distance and stacked up on the warehouse door. Brad reached across and tried the handle, it turned easily in his hand and he was relieved to find the door unlocked. He held up three fingers and dropped them one at a time then swiftly entered the room professionally and cleared everything within their view.

A large empty bay, with rows of shelving filled the back wall; to the right were a block of offices and a set of stairs that led to a loft of more office space above them. They took their time in clearing the row of offices one by one, and then went up the flight of stairs to confirm the building was empty. At the top of the stairs Brad signaled for them to stop and put a finger over his lips, he pointed to a desk where he could see a foot sticking from behind a half wall of a cubicle. Brad silently un-holstered his M9 pistol and slowly cut the corner allowing him to slowly see what was on the other side without making himself a target.

He peeked into the cubicle and saw a man sitting face down on his desk the back of his head had a large exit hole and his brains were still running down the back wall of his cube. "Well looks like someone decided to check out early" Brad whispered. The man still clutched an S&W sigma pistol, Brad grabbed it and put it in his pack. Now that the building was clear he called the MRAP on his headset and informed Méndez that the warehouse was safe, and they would be returning. He told them to be ready to move when they got there. Cole and Eric tried the large overhead door and found it operational, even though the power was out; the manual chain system still seemed to work fine.

Quietly they guided the truck back to the warehouse and pulled it and the trailer thru the large overhead door. Once the vehicle was parked and the engine killed they started setting up a defensive perimeter. The warehouse only had the 2 entrances, the small entry door and the large overhead. Brad placed a metal clip on the chain and pulley system of the door to prevent anyone from being able to raise it. The bolt lock on the entry door didn't appear to work, so they pulled it tight and secured it with some rope and zip ties fastening it as tightly as they could. It wouldn't keep a determined individual out, but it would give them warning if anyone tried to get in.

Brad asked the men to unload and get a good inventory of everything in the trailer and onboard the vehicle, Brad and Méndez went into the office spaces and tried to search for anything to give them the means of working communication. The phones were dead, and the power was out so all of the computers were also offline. Méndez came back around the corner holding a cell phone he had pulled from the man's pocket in the upstairs cubicle. The phone had full bars, but every number he dialed gave a busy signal. They had tried the radios in the MRAP several times and had no response, so it appeared they were alone and without any comms.

Méndez spotted a ladder well that went up to the roof, after climbing it they saw they had an immense view of the entire compound and some of the city. They could see a mass of the crazies moving down a city street far to the east, most of the city was burning. There wasn't much to see across the river, the bridge was congested and blocked, it looked like the Uzbeks may have attempted to destroy the bridge. There was a large hole in the concrete on the Uzbek side. There wasn't much to look at on the far side of the river and no movement could be detected. They searched the horizon and no aircraft could be seen, and no streaking of smoke that usually crisscrossed the sky.

It was decided that the roof would make the best watch station so they moved one of the machine guns and a sniper rifle up to the top. The roof was lined by a three foot wall that made staying in cover easy, they chose a spot in a corner facing the gate to place the machine gun and sniper rifle. Brad put Henry and Eric on the first watch and instructed Méndez and Cole to start doing maintenance on the MRAP and the rest of the equipment. He didn't know how long they would have to hide in their new home, and he wanted to make sure everything worked when they left.

They moved the body of the man in the cubicle downstairs and laid him under a tarp in a far corner of the warehouse. The men laid out their gear and bed rolls in the loft, there was a small bathroom in the downstairs offices and the water was still running, so they filled every container that could find. They took advantage of the running water to take much needed sponge baths. It was hard to remember how long they had been on the move, the two nights of running and hiding in the desert had taken a toll on them. Brad thought it would be best to just let the men rest for the remainder of the day; they locked up tight and settled in.

As night came the quiet of the city ceased, whatever was roaming the streets seemed to get more animated after sunset. Brad wondered if the things worked better in the cooler night air, whatever it was they were defiantly moving and making a racket. Brad was sitting on the roof in the small snipers position they had put together. Thru the Night Vision scope he could see far into the city, he was watching small engagements between local residents and the crazed mobs. He saw a small car speeding thru the streets; it would stop and pick people up then drive off again. Occasionally the car would skid to a stop and men with AK47s would jump out and spray sporadic fire at the mobs before they would jump back into the car and speed off again.

At least someone is fighting them Brad thought to himself. He scanned the perimeter of the compound and saw the pedestrian gate that the crazies they had engaged earlier had come through. And the Railroad entrance that they drove the MRAP thru. He cursed himself for not securing those gates; it would have to be a priority tomorrow. There were hundreds of shipping containers stacked around the customs yard. Hopefully they were filled with food and water, but not likely he chuckled to himself. Tomorrow they would find out.

A flare to the north of the city got his attention, and apparently the attention of the crazies as well, he could see them all over the city lift their heads to the sky and run towards the light. "Note to self, don't use flares" Brad said under his breath. He strained his eyes thru the scope to try and see who launched the flare, but he couldn't make out the distant figures. Suddenly he heard the report of heavy weapons, M240B, and M249 Light Machine guns, and the telltale sound of M4s and the crack of M67 Frag grenades.

Eric looked up from the machine gun he had been manning on the corner of the building "Hey it's a rescue; those are our guys out there". Brad put down the rifle and picked up the more

powerful binoculars, even though they didn't have the night vision of the scope, he didn't need it with the illumination of the battle.

Brad could see what was happening and it wasn't rescue forces. "I think I found SFC Turner" he said. The missing men from the ambush were putting up a fight in a walled villa on the south edge of the city. They were putting out an impressive wall of fire, but unfortunately every crazy in the city within earshot was stopping in its tracks and heading towards the commotion. "Shit, they need to get out of there, they can't hold off that many" He said. "Let's take the MRAP, we can get them out" yelled Eric. "There is no way, we would never break thru that mob, and even if we did we wouldn't be able to open the doors, or be able to man our turret. This is fucked" Brad answered.

The mob crashed against the large gate of the walled villa, the men fired down at them from elevated positions, tossing grenades into the crowd. The mobs would break then rebound with more force than before. The wall began to give and Brad watched the soldiers fall back to the house, then reappear on the roof, he saw the flash of a claymore explode in the courtyard. When he looked back only two soldiers remained on the roof, he observed the rest sneak out of the back corner of the building and over a wall. The men on the roof dropped smoke and frag grenades into the crowd. Brad lost sight of them in the smoke and the gunfire ceased; all he heard was the distant frenzy of the mob. "Man I hope they got out" Eric muttered. Brad scanned all around the building but he could find no evidence of the soldiers, the mob had taken the villa and they were now on the roof in a frenzy, they were attacking each other and screaming. It was hours before they calmed down and faded back into the city streets.

The screaming and occasional gunfire continued thru the night and went silent just before dawn. Brad didn't sleep at all and he was sure his men didn't get much rest either.

At first light he sent Eric and Cole out to secure the gates while Henry and Méndez provided cover from the small nest on the

roof. Brad went down to the offices and started to rummage thru the desks, most of the paperwork wasn't in English and he couldn't make shit out of the gibberish on the page, but finally he found a clip board with what he was looking for. It was manifest from the rail companies; he could make sense of some of the brand names and the lot numbers. He hoped it would help them in breaking down some of the shipping containers. He wrote down a few numbers on his notepad that looked like they belonged to produce or beverage companies.

Armed with a pair of bolt cutters and two duffel bags he headed out of the safety of the warehouse with Cole providing rear security. They moved to the stack of shipping containers trying to decipher the numbering system from his notes to what they were seeing on the ground. "Well it doesn't look like they made this easy for us, nothing is in order" Brad whispered to Cole. They decided to give up on the scavenger hunt and just start opening containers, Brad provided security while Cole cut the locks and seals on one of the large doors, and he helped him swing it open. The inside was filled with boxes of nails and bolts, all types of construction fasteners. "Fuck, strike one I guess" Cole mumbled. They moved on, and tried another four containers before they opened one filled completely with cases of energy drinks. "Shit, looks like we won't be dying tired" Brad joked and they both laughed, they dumped two cases of the drinks into their duffel bag and marked the location on a map Brad was drawing. The last container in the row, they found filled with canned goods, they couldn't read the labels to know what it was, but at least it was food, they marked the location and filled both bags, and headed back to the ware house.

Back at their hideout Méndez used his utility knife to cut open one of the cans of food. They found a small metal pot in one of the back offices and built a small fire made with pieces of broken furniture. He poured the contents of the can out and it plopped into the pot. "fuck bro, that stinks, man you sure this ain't dog food" Méndez said. "I don't think so bro; it has some goofy ass

kid's face on the can, if it was dog food it would show a dog" Answered Cole. "Well dam man this shit is awful; no wonder Afghans are always pissed off if they be eating on this slop, what ever happened to chunky soup. How do you fuck up soup?" "Sarge you sure we can't just eat the MRE's" Eric griped. "No we need to save them, and I want to keep the light stuff loaded in the packs and on the truck in case we need to bug out, this is what we got so dump in a couple more cans and bon appetite!" answered Brad.

They ate in silence, and after a minute Méndez reached down to open another can, everyone looked up at him. "You know once you get over the shit taste, it really ain't so bad" Méndez chuckled. All the men laughed together. "I bet that stuff is going to give you the shits too" Eric blurted out. "So what's the plan anyhow Sergeant?" Henry asked suddenly killing the jovial mood. "Well for now I'm thinking rest, fortify and build up our resources, after that I am pretty wide open for suggestions" Brad answered back. "I mean we are far away from our area of operations, our command is gone, and our home base is destroyed. The only semblance that anyone may know were even here is that UAV we saw two days ago, and they might not even know who we are." "Do you think SFC Turner got out last night" Eric asked. "I don't know buddy but if anyone could it was him, remember they escaped the ambush and they made it this far, plus they chose to go to the city and not lockup tight in this warehouse" said Brad. "They have the confidence and training to make it, so I'm not giving up on them yet." "I have patrolled this way before and there really isn't shit passed Hairatan." "Beyond the city the road fizzles out, there are some villages and farms going out along the river but there is no bridge. Eventually we will have to make a choice, if we want to try and cross the bridge into Uzbekistan on foot or head back into Afghanistan." "We could try for Mazari Sharif, it's about a half days patrol to the south, but after seeing this place, I got a bad feeling about that also" Brad finished. "My vote is stay put for a few days and see if communications come back up" Méndez said. They all came to an agreement to wait things out

for a while, Cole and Eric moved back up the ladder to the roof to start the evening watch.

Brad had settled into his bedroll up on the loft of the warehouse, dam he thought, if I knew we weren't going back to base that night I would have brought my pillow. He smiled to himself and placed the S&W pistol he found earlier by his side, once he stopped moving exhaustion took over and he drifted into a dreamless sleep. He felt the hand grab and shake his foot, Brad jumped up grabbing the pistol and pointed it into the shocked face of Cole. "Oh shit, my bad Sergeant" uttered Cole, "I shouldn't have been so quiet". Brad lowered the pistol and relaxed, "What is it Cole". Sergeant you need to get up top, something you need to see" Cole answered.

Brad sent Cole ahead and he stopped to put on his boots and his vest, he looked at his watch, dam it's only been two hours he thought. He climbed the ladder and settled into the nest with Eric and Cole, "what do we got fellas" he whispered. "Over there sergeant, just past the fence in that little building" Cole said pointing with his finger. Brad picked up the binos and looked down towards the building. "I don't see anything guys" He said. "Just wait sergeant, there it is" Eric said pointing. Three flickers of a red light followed by three long flashes and three more flickers. "Oh shit guys, that is Morse code, someone is signaling, but who are they talking too" Brad whispered. "It's got to be us Sergeant we are the only ones up here" Eric replied. "Go wake up Henry, he is good with this nerdy shit, and grab the red lens flashlight off my bag." Brad answered back to Eric.

Moments later Henry was crouched in the snipers nest with the flash light and a pen and paper after checking his work he finally spoke. "They said we are two US, and they want to come into the compound". "Well ask them who they are" snapped Brad. After another set of exchanges Henry spoke again, "they just say, we are Two US, request permission to enter your perimeter". "What do you think guys" Brad asked. The men looked puzzled that Brad was asking for advice, it wasn't typically his way. "Come on

guys cut me a break, this isn't exactly a military op any more, I'm open to suggestions." "I say let them in Sergeant, why would they tell us they are coming if they were up to no good." Cole said. Brad smile "you make a good point Cole, tell them to come in but stay in our line of site Henry"

They watched as the two men broke cover of the building and walked in a slow crouch to the fence, Brad thought they would circle around to the perimeter gate, but without making a noise they quickly cut thru to the inside turned around, repaired the fence and disappeared into the shadows. Before they could wonder where the pair went they heard a tapping at the downstairs door.

Brad looked over the roof wall and saw the two dark figures huddled at the door, he turned and he and Cole rushed down the ladder waking up Méndez. With his pistol in his hand he undid the bindings on the door and let it slowly open outward. The two men hurried inside and closed the door behind them. The man in front dropped a dark hood he had been wearing and gave a toothy bearded grin and extended his hand to Brad. "US Navy SEALS, we're here to get you out" He laughed. Brad didn't return the handshake and instead just stared at the man. "Why so smug sergeant, just fucking with you, we have been watching you guys the better part of two days, it's good to be inside with you, it's not a lot of fun out there in the city" The man said. "So who are you guys, where did you come from?" Brad asked.

"Dam kid where are your manners?, getting all personal and not even offering a guest a beverage" The Man replied. "Shit my fault" said Cole laughing and holding up a couple cans of energy drink. They all chuckled and moved towards the interior of the warehouse. Méndez secured the door and followed them inside. Brad looked the men over, they were solid but not large, both had overgrown beards and they wore an arrangement of camouflage, instead of issue boots, they were wearing civilian style hiking shoes. Both men carried huge packs and an assortment of

weapons. The chatty man carried a large scoped rifle and he had a suppressed MP5 strapped to the top of his pack. His partner carried a scoped M14 and also a silenced MP5 and they both had large hand guns on their hips. They wore dark patterned cargo pants, and large dark and tan splattered hooded jackets, they defiantly blended into the terrain here in northern Afghanistan.

The man saw the pot and asked if they had anymore, "Taste like shit" answered Brad "But suit yourself." Méndez smiled and reached over to stir the coals on the fire and started to open a couple cans of the afghan slop.

"So you care to make a proper introduction now?" Brad asked. "Yeah sorry about that" he laughed. "I'm Chief Sean Rogers, this is my partner Petty Officer Brooks, we really are SEALs" he smiled "But we sure is hell ain't in any condition to get you all out".

"How did you get here, what are you doing all the way up here?" Eric asked. "Well, we been up here for a week now, we started about a hundred miles from here, been in the city for three days now. You guys were smart to hold up here, there ain't shit but bad news out on those streets. We saw your army brothers last night making all that noise, it was real John Wayne of them picking that fight, but also really fucking stupid. We have been watching you guys, trying to make sure you weren't fucking stupid too. We don't like to make camp with stupid people." Sean paused to open the can of energy drink and he gulped it down spilling some on his beard. "That shit done yet?", he asked digging a canteen cup out of his pack and handing it to Méndez. Brooks dug out a similar cup and handed it over, Méndez poured the contents of the pot between the two cups and handed them back.

"Dam you weren't lying this does taste like shit" Brooks said, and all the men laughed. "So Chief, you were saying how you got here" Brad said. "Oh yeah, well we were a ways north of here in Teremez doing a little recon and trying to close out some leads, when we were told our pick up was going to be delayed. Then later we were told it was canceled and we should try and make

our way to the base at Hairatan. And yeah that's pretty much when the world went to shit." Sean answered.

"Wait a minute" Brad asked. "Teremez, you were operating in Uzbekistan? And what do you mean the world went to shit? This thing is everywhere". "Well Sergeant I guess I can't say for certain, but we know for a fact things are bad out there". "Fuck yeah they are" Brad yelled, "I lost my entire company yesterday, so will you stop fucking around and tell us what's going on!" "Stand down sergeant, you think you are the only one that has lost people this week, I went to Teremez with six men, Brooks is all that I have left." "If you'll sit back down I'll try and explain". Sean scooped a mouthful of the slop, swallowed then continued.

"About 2 months ago we lost an embassy in Yemen, you may have heard about it" Sean said. "Oh yeah that was fucked up, they got rushed by protestors, the ambassador was killed, Al Qaeda right" Eric added. "Well something like that", Sean answered. "What the people don't know is we had four former SEALS assigned to protect that ambassador, and a contingent of Marine guards. Now what sort of protestors can take down that kind of muscle?" "What are you getting at Chief" Brad asked. "Well sergeant, we now believe that was a test shot, we think the crowd in Yemen was infected, they tore thru the embassy residence, walking through a wall of gunfire and took everything out. The reason CNN showed the smoking rubble the next day and blamed it on Mortars and rockets is because the Marine commander onsite ordered a C130 gunship to rain fire on his own position. He knew the ambassador was already dead and he had watched one of his men turn in the 3 hour battle." "That Marine Captain stopped the spread" Sean said. He paused to take another huge gulp of his energy drink. And he explained what they found. We aren't sure where it comes from but we know that Al Qaeda found a way to make a weapon out of it. The nerds at the CDC call it primalis rabia or primal rage, It effects the brain, somehow protects it, you can stop the heart, you can shoot them through the lungs and the brain will still function for hours. It spreads thru blood, a spit in the eye won't do it, but get infected

fluids into your blood and you're screwed. Once a victim is infected he slips into a coma, and then gets a fever. The heat of the fever seems to cause irreversible brain damage, then for reasons they can't figure out yet, the brain reboots. When the victim wakes up they are feral.

The longer the person is infected the harder they are to bring down, recently infected ones can still be killed with a shot to the heart. Those infected for over 48 hours, good luck, only extreme trauma to the body seems to bother them. After 96 hours the brain is fully protected and nothing will kill them but a critical brain hit. They move in packs like wolves, and they will attack on sight.

The attack in Yemen put them on our radar, but we still didn't know how to react until twelve days ago. A man code named Asim walked into a field office in Pakistan. He said that there was a major global attack planned by the Sons of Bin Laden. Asim carried a special ink pen, but instead of ink it contained the virus. It was a brutal method of transmission, but all you do is stab yourself with the pen and click the button, and bam you are infected. In the lab it took anywhere from 2-6 hours for the victims to reboot. Asim said there were over one hundred pens made and distributed globally, he only knew the locations of those in his cell and he gave them up. He was supposed to walk into a crowded mosque in Karachi and infect himself, then wait for it to take hold. Asim came to us instead.

"What happened next" Brad asked. Sean continued, Well my team was sent into Teremez, Asim had fingered two members of his cell who had orders to infect themselves simultaneously on different edges of the city; one at the airport and another at a popular park. We setup and staked out both locations, but things got difficult, things went wrong. I went with Brooks to the park, we watched for tango one all afternoon. We had a good description of him but everyone that day seemed to look alike. Towards the end of the day we spotted a suspect and took him down in a men's room. We found the pen on him. Tango one didn't want to answer our questions, we needed to know how to find Tango two.

He didn't want to cooperate so we quickly eliminated him from the equation, and turned our attention towards the airport.

The rest of my guys were setup in the international terminal, they just had too many suspects, they tried to find people sleeping or in the coma phase, but no dice. It happened quickly and without warning. In the smaller terminal Tango Two went crazy; they heard it over their police scanners. The local police were responding and by the time my men got there, they had already put down Tango Two. But there lays the problem, Tango Two managed to scratch, bite and claw a number of people before he went down. We didn't even know how many because a number of them fled or went home after the incident. The Uzbek police thought they were dealing with just another insane person and didn't buy our story. Even when we notified Interpol they didn't care to listen. The Uzbeks were more concerned about us operating in their border than a possible epidemic about to explode on them.

So victims go home, they feel sick, they go to bed, they wake up, and they attack their families, neighbors. Simultaneously all over Teremez we were tracking at least 15 outbreaks, by morning we heard of ninety more, then it just snowballed from there. By the second day the city was in flames, we called for extraction, but they told us we needed to hang tight. See Teremez was just one attack, this was going on everywhere, and somehow it had even gotten into a few of our larger bases. Bagram and Kandahar were lost quickly, within twelve hours we had a complete loss of combat readiness in theater. All bases were locked down, NATO recalled all of its troops, the US followed suit. That was chaos in itself, there just weren't enough birds to move them, and with that they were battling the primal virus at the same time. Gentleman it's pretty safe to say it was a huge cluster fuck. We stayed in contact with Kabul thru that first night, but they were in bad shape and we eventually lost comms. The last message to us was to try and make it to the border.

"What about your men? Where is the rest of your team?" Eric asked. "Dead, getting out of that city was hell, it's not like here, this place is small, Teremez on day two! You're talking close to a

hundred thousand of those fucking things on the streets” Brooks said. “Chief and I got separated from the team, we were providing over watch while they moved on ahead, they were surrounded and quickly overran, it’s a fucked up world”. “They didn’t have a chance, in numbers it’s like fighting a tidal wave”.

“What about the States, Chief? What’s going on at home?” Brad asked. “We don’t know, honest answer is last update we got, there were no attacks in the US, but Mexico and Canada are nearly lost. Moscow, Paris and London all got hit hard. Germany was attacked but they were holding” Answered Sean. “Our sat phone died two days ago, and our radios haven’t worked in three, boys we are in the dark” Sean said.

Brad told the SEALs their story, how they lost communications during their patrol to the village, about the mobs, how they had barely escaped and made it Hairatan. “So what do we do Chief? What was your plan B” Asked Brad. Sean let out a sigh “Plan B? Shit son we are already on plan C, hell we are off the page”. They were interrupted by the sounds of gunfire and they all climbed the ladder to the roof. The small car was back, repeating the acts of last night. They watched it stop while two men jumped out and fired away at the mob until it was within fifty meters, then they jumped back in their car and sped away.

“Ha that just Junayd, don’t worry about him” Chuckled Brooks. “What’s so funny” Brad asked. “Oh Junayd, he’s a local Taliban boss, we bumped into him crossing the river, well we saved his ass actually. We gave him our car and those rifles he’s using” Said Brooks. “He is determined to take back his city.” “You armed the Taliban?” questioned Eric. “Hell yeah we did, if they are keeping the primal bastards busy then they stay the hell away from us, and the enemy of my enemy is my friend right?” answered Sean.

“What about the other army unit, SFC Turner and his guys” Cole asked. “Yeah they are out there, we watched them escape, but for some reason they don’t like to lay low, not sure how long they will last without instruction” Said Sean. “They took up residence in a two story building on the edge of the city, I’m sure they aren’t as comfy as you all are in here.” “Well then we need to get to them,

we can't leave them hanging out there, Chief" Said Brad.
"Tomorrow son, tomorrow, but for now Chief needs his sleep,
besides them things are to active at night, we would never make
it, so how bout you guys show us were we can bed down" Said
Sean.

The next morning they did maintenance on their vehicle and equipment. Cole and Henry made a run to the shipping containers to resupply their stash of afghan slop and energy drinks. Brad showed Sean the supplies they had on hand. "You guys have done a good job here Sergeant, you probably have more ammo than anyone within a hundred miles" Sean said. "Well we took everything we could, we have a few extra weapons too, but the MRAP is our baby right now, I don't think we would have escaped the mob at Bremmel without it" Replied Brad. "Yeah she is nice, but she is loud and will attract attention, I'm surprised you didn't get a mob following you right into this fence, you guys got lucky." "So what's the plan to get SFC Turner and his guys?" Brad asked. "Well first put this on your M4", Sean said as he handed Brad a threaded suppressor for his rifle. "They are attracted to noise, this will help."

They waited until the sun was high in the sky, that's when the crazies were the least active. Brad left Méndez in charge of the men and the warehouse, he moved out with the SEALs thru the compound gate. They were fast, and quiet, Brad was in great shape but the SEALs made him feel like a bumbling idiot as he struggled to keep up with them. They hugged the walls of the buildings ducking behind abandoned vehicles and sometimes tucking into alleys to avoid a wandering primal. But the Chief was right, they were less active during the hot mid-day, then they were at night.

As they turned a corner Brooks put his fist in the air and put a finger to his lips. Both Sean and Brooks carried their silenced MP5s, Brad had his M4 with his new suppressor attached. Sean took a knee and leaned into a stone wall and tried to make himself invisible. A group of five crazies were staggering down the street towards them. They were moving slower than they had the past two days; Brad wondered if that was a symptom did they slow down as they aged? The primals stumbled at a curb and looked like a pack of drunks as they navigated themselves over it. Without warning Brad heard the clacking of metal on metal from the SEALs guns, and all five of the infected dropped to the ground. Brooks whispered clear, and they started moving again.

Brad was amazed at the efficiency that the SEALs could unleash violence.

They rounded a corner and tucked into a tiny store, Brooks made sure the room was clear, and then they huddled near the window. "It's that two story building right there" Sean pointed. "Well what are we waiting for, let's go" Brad said. "We will but we need you to go first, to make sure they aren't all hopped up and don't shoot us" Added Brooks. "Oh, good plan I guess" said Brad. "So you just want me to walk over there and say Hi". "Yeah but the tricky part is to do it quietly, so you're not seen or heard by the primals, and also be careful not to spook your army boys into whacking you" grinned Sean.

Brooks opened the storefront door and gave Brad a thumbs up, "good luck" he whispered. Brad just nodded and made his way to the street; he could see the two story building had all of its windows covered with heavy drapes. He looked to the left and right and saw no one. He walked into the center of the street and held his hands and rifle over his head and waved them up and down. But there was no response from the building. He watched the windows and saw no movement, the edges of the roof revealed nothing, so he moved to the front door.

He stood by the door listening and heard nothing. "Fuck it" He whispered to himself. He reached up a hand and knocked on the heavy wooden door. He heard nothing so he knocked again. Hearing nothing inside, He turned to signal the SEALs as the door crashed open and a large man with a knife dove at him. "No, No, No, No" Brad yelled, the man stopped his assault with the blade just inches from Brad's face. "What the fuck are you doing creeping up on us like that" shouted the soldier. Brad recognized him as one of the Privates from third squad. Before he could answer, the SEALs had rushed across the street and grabbed them, "Gentleman perhaps we should have this conversation inside, you boys have already made enough noise" Sean said. They all tumbled through the doorway and Sean closed the door behind them.

Brad found himself sitting in a long hallway with doors on both sides and a set of stairs leading up at the end. "Oh hey it's you

Sergeant Thompson, sorry about that man, I thought you was one of them things, I wanted to shut it up before he called his buddies” said the Private. “Where is everyone else” asked Brad. “Oh yeah they are all in the basement, we been sleeping during the day, we all stand watch at night when they go nuts out there. If one of you wants to watch the door I’ll take you down there” answered the Private. Brooks nodded to them and dropped his pack, Brad and Sean followed the private down the hall to a heavy steel door.

He knocked on the door and after a minute there was a noise inside and the door cracked open. “Hey Jones, what you need man” said the guard. “We got company, its Sergeant Thompson, he just showed up knocking on the door”. The guard swung the door open and shook Brads hand, “good to see you sergeant we thought you all were dead, come on down, Sergeant Turner is going to want to talk to you.” Said the guard and he led them down the stairs. The cellar was dark and damp, there was very little light, only what came in through the floor boards upstairs.

They made their way into a damp room, Brad saw soldiers sleeping on the floor, and a small area setup as a latrine. They wound thru the dark cellar to a smaller entry way. The soldier knocked on the door frame and he heard a grumble from inside. “What is it” called the voice. “Sergeant Turner, Sergeant Thompson and some men are here” answered the soldier. “Huh what the hell”, a flash light came on and illuminated the space and shined into Brads face. “Well I’ll be dammed, it is you, come on in man have a seat” Said Sergeant Turner.

Turner lit a small gas lantern and the Men mad their way into the small room. It was sparsely furnished, nothing but a small table with a map laid out on it, and a handful of chairs. Brad and Shawn made their way to the table and took a seat, as Turner hurriedly put on his boots and met them. “Dam Brad it’s good to see you brother, I thought you guys were dead.” Turner said as he slapped him on the back and took a seat next to him. “So who is your friend? Where is the rest of your crew”.

Brad explained the SEALs and that his men were back at the warehouse. He told him how they had followed them to Hairatan, and how they had watched their battle the previous night. “Shit,

yeah that was bad, one of the kids got scared and popped that dam flare, and then things went to shit.” “We lost Smith over it, but we got lucky, the rest of us made it.” explained Turner. “Hey guys, I don’t want to be a dick and spoil your reunion, but we only have so much mid-day left, we need to pack up and get moving” said Sean.

“Moving? Move where, we are pretty secure in here, I don’t know that they we will be moving” Quipped Turner. “Really Sergeant” snapped Sean, “low on ammo, your guys are shitting in buckets, I don’t see much in the way of food or water, and your hiding in a cellar.” “Your soldier has managed to secure a compound; he has a trailer full of guns and bullets to match; a shipping container of food, running water and flush toilets, but suit yourself, we will be moving in fifteen minutes”. “Whoa hold up Chief, I didn’t say we wouldn’t go, and besides you make a good point those buckets are starting to smell the place up, give me some time to get the men organized and we will meet you in the hallway upstairs” answered Turner.

Sean and Brad moved back up to the hallway and briefed Brooks on the move back to the warehouse. “I’m not a fan of your Sergeant Turner” Sean said to Brad. “Don’t be too hard on him Chief; he kept these guys alive for this long, that’s got to count for something.” The five soldiers came up the stairs in full packs, they looked beaten and tired, but they said they were ready to get out of the confined cellar. Sean briefed them on how they would move back, there were five of them, so they would move in three teams. Brooks would take point with one, Brad had middle with two more, and Sean would pick up the rear with the last of them. Sean told them he wanted no firing, if they had to take shots do it with the suppressed weapons.

“Shit we don’t have any silenced guns” said one of the soldiers. “Here” said Brooks handing the soldier a Ruger MKII with a suppressor from his pack. “It’s small but it’s easy to shoot and will knock them down if you get them in the Nugget, make sure you hit the head” said Brooks. Chief reached into his pack and handed his own MKII to Turner “I’ll be wanting that back Sergeant” he said with a smile. Once the men familiarized

themselves with the pistols they slowly stepped out the door and made their way into the hot street.

Brad followed them into the street and hugged the wall, he had two soldiers right behind him and they mimicked his movements. He waited for Brook's team to bound past the corner, then Brad bounded forward, looking back to watch Sean and his men fill his previous position. They moved quickly and quietly thru the city, until he saw Brooks fist shoot into the air. Brad and his men dropped to the ground and looked for cover. Brad listened intently for a sign of what was going on up ahead.

He heard the clack, clack of Brooks MP5, then the sound of the MKII. Brad took a knee and looked forward as he saw both men walking backwards to them and firing as fast as they could. Brad got to his feet and looked through his scope spotting a group of 15 to 20 coming at them from the alley way. Before he could pull the trigger Sean had already brought his group forward and he was taking quick aimed shots thinning the number of the pack headed at them. Turner faced a building on the street and pried its door open, then turned and provided covering fire while the men dropped inside.

Sean and Brooks were the last ones in, and they quickly barricaded the door. The pounding and screaming from the outside was deafening. "Find another exit" Sean yelled to Brad as they kept piling objects against the door. Luckily the door opened out, so the things were pressing it shut as they piled against it. Brad ran down the long hallway and kicked in an apartment door, as he stepped inside two crazies came at him from a bedroom. Brad fired at them from the hip with his M4, he hit the first high in the chest turning it sideways, the second came crashing into him. Brad was fighting to keeps its head and snapping jaws away from him, while the thing scratched and clawed at his body armor. One of the privates followed Brad into the room and quickly ended the crazy with a soccer kick to the head, knocking it loose from Brad, turning he terminated the other one with a burst to the skull from his unsuppressed M4. The noise of the soldier's rifle made Brad's ears ring, but he pushed through the small apartment and saw a window, he broke glass

with the butt of his rifle and peeked outside. The window opened into an alley on the side of the building, there didn't look to be a safe way out, but the building across from them had a fire escape with the ladder extended.

Brad huddled the men into the apartment, and told them to get out the window and up the ladder across the alley. He ran back into the hall to find Sean and Brooks finishing the barricading, and booby trapping the door with a claymore mine and trip wire. Brad led the SEALs to the apartment, and out the Window. The Alley as he suspected was a dead-end, the open end pointed back to the street where the mob had gathered, but it was also empty. They quickly made their way to the ladder and climbed as high as they could, then lifting the ladder up behind them. Following the rest of the soldiers up the ladder they pulled themselves over the top rung and onto the building's roof.

As Sergeant Turner was making his way to them he announced that the roof was clear, and the access door was secure. With a thundering clap they heard the improvised claymore explode in the building below them. The explosion blasted and partially collapsed the building and blew a cloud of dust into the street out front. "Well I think they know we are here now" Sean said with a smile. "No worries though, I don't think anything saw us climb this ladder, if we lay low, they should go back to their nests, in a day or two" Brooks said. Brad frowned at the statement, especially with the sun still high in the sky and his camelback only half full.

Just as Brad was beginning to think it was going to be a long night they heard the report of AK47s coming from down the street. Brad looked up and over the edge of the roof and saw the small white car, two men in Arab garb jumped out and were shooting at the mob in front of the destroyed apartment building. When the mob would get too close they would jump back in the car and drive further down the street and do it again, effectively leading them away from Brads position.

"Son of a bitch it's Junayd" Brooks said. "Look at that shit; he is clearing the way for us". As everyone was running to the edge of the roof to look out below a large open bed truck pulled in front of the building, a man jumped from the cab and waved frantically at

them. "Well what do we do chief" asked Brad. "Looks like he is offering us a ride, rude to turn them down" Sean answered. Quickly they all made their way back down the ladder. They ran around the corner and jumped into the back of the truck. A small Arab man closed the tailgate behind them and they sped off. The truck drove quickly down streets changing directions every block or two, occasionally bouncing a primal off of its large steel bumper. Junayd's men drove for some time until they were sure they had lost any followers. They pulled into a darkened side street far from anyplace Brad recognized with high walls on both sides. Lifting their heads to look over the high tailgate, they saw the small car pull in behind them. Sean and Brooks got to their feet and leapt to the ground. A large Arab man approached and shook Sean's hand then embraced Brooks in a bear hug. "My friends we are even now, you saved me, now I save you" said Junayd.

"You got that right Junayd" said Brooks smiling at the man, "but We also gave you weapons and a car, it would be really nice of you if you could get us back home, and not just leave us on this street." "Yes friend, that is a very real possibility, but I need you to also allow my people into your home" Said Junayd. "We have seen that you have taken the customs compound, you must take in our people. This city is not safe for them. Take in my people, and we will safely bring you home." "Well it's not my place to negotiate over, I'm only a guest there Junayd" answered Sean. "I see" said Junayd frowning, "It appears you men will have a long walk home, you should hurry it will be dark soon".

"Hold up, I think we have room, just get us back to the warehouse and we can work this out" said Brad. "Wait Brad, we can't trust these people, maybe we should just get out here, I think we are better off on our own" snapped Turner. Junayd glared at the insult and turned to walk towards the cars. Brad quickly jumped from the bed of the truck and walked over to Junayd. "Junayd, if you get us safely back to the customs compound, I will open my doors to your people, we are all in this fight together now." Brad said extending his hand. "Agreed", said Junayd briefly touching

his hand to his heart before grasping Brads in a tight handshake that quickly turned into a hug.

The ride back to the compound was quiet and uneventful. The vehicles pulled into a narrow ravine and that twisted around and behind the customs compound. The large truck lurched to a stop and the small man dropped the tailgate of the Truck. The men jumped out and stretched looking around. "Go through that hole in the fence" Said Junayd pointing. "If you go through and follow the fence till it ends you will see the railroad track that will lead you back." "How do you know that" asked Brad. "My cousin and I have been raiding and smuggling things from this customs yard for years." "We only asked your permission to stay here to be polite". Junayd said, giving Turner a cold stare. "We have plenty of work fighting those things in the city; we really do not need to be bothered with fighting Americans also."

"Get back to your warehouse and prepare your men, we will be at your gates shortly after the sun sets." Junayd said. "Why not wait till tomorrow, you know they are more dangerous at night" asked Brad. "More dangerous Yes, but also more predictable; we will use distractions to move the packs where we want them, while we deliver the people to you, be ready for them" Junayd said as he turned and walked back to his car. Shutting the doors, the engines started and the vehicles drove back down the ravine leaving the Soldiers. Sean walked by and Patted Brad on the shoulder, a gesture that didn't go unnoticed by Turner. "You did good Brad, now let's get back to the hooch" said Sean as he lifted the hole in the fence while the men went through.

They made their way back to the warehouse, and received a warm welcome from the waiting men. Brad briefed them on what had happened and that they were about to receive guests. Sean and a couple of the soldiers cleared the warehouse next door so that it could be set up as lodging for the incoming civilians. Brad took Sergeant Turner on a tour of the compound and helped his men settle into the building. They were happy to see the flush toilets and running water. Brad got Cole started on preparing the evening meal and he told them all to get some rest. As he was leaving Turner called Brad over.

“You have done well here Brad, and you did good getting these men here safely, I just want you to know that I won’t step on your feet” Said Turner. “It seems the world has gone to shit quickly, I don’t know where that leaves the military, but I am a Platoon Sergeant and Its going to stay that way, but I think you have proven yourself, and you should be the acting Lieutenant until we come up with something different.” Brad grinned, “I appreciate the gesture Sergeant, but I don’t think you have the authority to give battle field commissions” he laughed. “Yeah you’re probably right, but this is the best I got Brad, it allows me to save face, and will keep the men from getting caught up in a power struggle” responded Turner. “Well then sounds good to me, I have work to do sergeant, we can talk again later” said Brad. “Okay buddy, and how bout you drop the sergeant shit, we can catch up after I grab some shut eye”

Brad walked outside the warehouse door; he bumped into the Sean heading back in the other direction. He explained what had just happened with Turner. “Well dam, I didn’t think the guy had it in him, but I think it was the right decision. I was afraid we wouldn’t be able to work together, maybe I was wrong” Said Sean. “Sergeant Turner isn’t a bad guy, and he has a lot of combat experience, I trust him”. They were beginning to lose the daylight so they retreated inside, and climbed to the roof. Just as the last bits of sunlight faded, they heard an explosion distant in

the city. A fire began to burn, and they heard reports of the AK47 rifles.

“Well there is Junayd, right on time” said Brooks. They could see the primal crazies shifting in the streets and heading towards the racket on the far side of town. Sean grinned when the two flares popped and went high into the sky. “They must have learned that trick from your sergeant” he chuckled. “Where ever they learned it, it’s working look at them all, they go to it like mosquitoes on a bug zapper” Laughed Cole. Eric pointed down toward the railroad gate at the front of the compound “They are here.” Brad stood to look and saw four large flatbed trucks overloaded with people, a few more then he had expected.

Brad watched his men open the gates and guide the over loaded trucks in; they lead them all the way down to the empty warehouse. Brad left the roof and made his way down the ladder. When he reached the small convoy of vehicles he was greeted by Junayd with another stiff handshake. “Thank you my friend” Junayd said. “These people had it very badly out there; I don’t think you realize how much safety and security these fences will give them.” Brad watched as his men helped women and children exit the vehicles and enter the warehouse. He moved into the building, it was dark, but they were afraid to turn on any lights while the overhead doors were still open, Sean and his men had laid out cardboard into make shift mats on the ground for the people to sit on. Brad saw that the warehouse was laid out very similarly to the one they were using.

As he walked he saw that Eric had converted one of the offices into a medical clinic and he was treating a small child, and others had already started to get in line. The loft area was already occupied by several men and they were carrying their limited supplies up the stairs for safe keeping. Brad looked around and tried to get a count in his head. “Junayd, you have nearly fifty people here, this will be a lot to feed”. Brad said. “Seventy two to be exact, and yes but the city holds resources, and unlike Americans we know how to live off of this land. We will be fine my friends, shortly my men will return from their mini Jihad

against the monsters in the city, lets walk so that we may greet them” said Junayd.

As if on cue, they could hear the vehicles approach the gate. While they walked Brad saw his men working with some of Junayd’s, men to open the gates and escort in the small car. The car pulled in and killed its engine and the small man from before stepped out with four other Arab fighters. Junayd exchanged words with the man, and then patted him hard on the shoulder while facing Brad. “This is Hasan, he is my best soldier” Brad extended his hand and smiled. “I think we almost met earlier today, thank you for your help Hasan, and good work getting the people here safely.” Hasan smiled and returned the handshake.

The next several days were spent improving the small camp. The soldiers decided to give up the warehouse space to the civilians and they all moved into a small guard house near the gate. Although the guard house was smaller, it gave the soldiers privacy, and relieved them of the guilt of thinking about the families crammed into the single space. They continued to stand watch nightly on the roof of the ware house in the sniper hide they had setup. With the help of Junayd’s men providing distractions so that the noise wouldn’t attract the primals, they were able to utilize some of the heavy equipment to move the rail road shipping containers into a large wall. After a few days’ work the compound was now ringed in by the large forty foot long and ten foot high containers.

The men slowly made improvements to the camps perimeter. After the wall was constructed they started to lose some of the fear of making noise. Any Stray Primals that moved to close to the compound were quickly terminated with the use of Sean’s suppressed sniper rifle. After a week the camp was fortified. Containers stacked end to end, completely enclosed the camp, they had a sliding gate and they had cut access doors into the containers that held food or other valuable supplies. Brad was extremely happy with the progress made.

Late on the thirtieth night since the outbreak Brad made his way to the communal fire pit inside his former residence. The warehouse now was divided into small shacks constructed of

cardboard and crates salvaged from inside the containers. He saw Junayd with Sean and Brooks off to the side of the fire so he sat next to them. Once he was settled a smiling young woman handed him a bowl of rice and dried meat. A child handed him an energy drink which made Brad laugh. "You have done well by these people Brad, they would welcome you into their tribe" Said Junayd. This gave all of the military men a laugh. "I am honored Junayd, really, but this isn't my home, I think there is more for me than this."

Sean gave Brad a serious look. "That's exactly what we have been discussing lately, Brooks and I have decided that it is time to move on, we have to see where things are at". "What are you getting at Sean, you want to leave? Where will you go?" answered Brad. "Brad I fear we have been forgotten out here, we were thinking we could make our way to Bremmel, things should have died down by now. We should be able to gather supplies from there; then we will do our best to make it to Bagram down route 76. It won't be easy, but I am confident we can make it. Bagram fell fast in the early days of the outbreak; maybe there is something left, maybe we can find an aircraft and get out of here." "Oh yeah and we want you to go with us."

IR STROBE: Small LED type light, invisible to the naked eyes, used to signal aircraft or friendly forces.

FOB: Forward Operation Base, a military outpost.

MRAP: A large bomb resistant military vehicle often found in Iraq and Afghanistan, the primary replacement for the HUMVEE.

BLUE FORCE TRACKER: A computer found in military vehicles similar to a GPS that allows navigation by way points and communications to other vehicles or headquarters elements that also had the equipment.

LTL: Less than lethal rounds, rubber bullets and bean bags, used for crowd control.

MRE: Meal Ready to Eat.

ISAF: International Security Force, responsible for the safety and stabilization of Afghanistan.