

## **Those Left Behind: Lieutenant Dan Killmeyer**

"Dan?"

"Dan?"

"Dan! Get up."

"Hmm? What is it?"

"There's someone at the door. Get it before they wake the baby."

"You're already up."

"I'm sick, though. I don't even know if I can get out of bed."

"You're sick? When did you get sick?"

"I don't know. It was just starting when I went to bed. I was hoping I'd be able to fight it off while I was asleep, but I don't think I'm going to be able to go to work tomorrow...today."

"It's that bad? Will you go see the doctor?"

"It's probably just a virus. Will you get the door already?"

Dan Killmeyer slipped out of bed and grabbed the pair of pants that was resting on the chair. They were dress pants. He'd had to meet with some pretty high ranking officers the day before and it had run late. His wife had already been asleep when he'd finally crawled into bed. The baby, now eight months old, was mercifully sleeping through the night.

In his dress pants and t-shirt, he went down the narrow staircase and opened the front door. A sweaty private was standing there. She was wearing combat fatigues and carrying a sidearm. She was alone.

"Lieutenant, sir," she stammered. "Colonel Samm sent for you."

"It's midnight."

She began to look uncomfortable.

"Fine," he huffed. "Go back and tell the colonel I'll be there in a few minutes."

She shifted on the balls of her feet.

"What?" Dan asked, exasperated. "He wants you to wait for me?"

"He insisted, sir."

Sighing, Dan ushered the young Private into the house. It was a small and narrow house. Most of the officers lived off base, but Dan liked the environment inside the gates. Surprisingly, his wife liked it, too, even though she wasn't military. She said it made her feel safe. Heading back upstairs, he first checked on the baby. She was sleeping soundly, the slow rhythm of her breath filling the room. He wanted to give her a kiss, but was afraid to wake her. Instead, he went back to his bedroom and pulled out a clean shirt.

"What is it?" his wife asked.

Dan shrugged. "Summons from the Colonel."

"Now?"

He shrugged again. "Hopefully I won't be too long."

She didn't answer. She had already gone back to sleep.

After a quick trip to the toilet and a swipe of his teeth with a tooth brush, Dan was ready to go. He joined the nervous private in his living room and, together, they drove across the base in a military SUV to the Colonel's office.

Dan had met the Colonel many times since being stationed there. Colonel Howard Samm had been running the base since even before he'd officially been made a colonel. He was popular with his superiors, but the rank and file didn't think much of him. They didn't hate him, but they weren't in love with him either. Dan surmised that it had to do with Samm's demeanor. He wasn't exactly pretentious, but it was easy to tell that he didn't think of his underlings as equals, or human. It didn't do a lot for morale. Dan's primary contact with the colonel was at staff meetings. Usually, his tasks were given to him by Captain Reynolds.

The office building was quiet. The private parked the car out front and they both went inside. Dan noticed immediately that there was no guard posted at the desk in the narrow lobby.

"Who's supposed to be on duty here?" he asked.

"I am, sir."

Dan felt a stabbing fear in his gut. What could be so urgent that the colonel would order someone to abandon her post?

"I'd better get right upstairs, then."

Hurrying past the elevators, Dan hit the stairwell at a run. The colonel's office was on the third floor, not nearly enough to wind the thirty one year old lieutenant. He came out into the dark corridor, approached the office, and knocked on the door.

"Come in," called the colonel in his dry voice.

The first thing Dan noticed as he entered the office was that the lights were turned down. The next thing he noticed was the waste basket full of tissues. Some of them had blood on them. Colonel Samm was sitting in the chair behind his desk and staring intensely at his computer monitor while clicking away on the mouse.

"Sit down, Lieutenant. I'm not contagious. Not anymore."

Dan took a seat. He waited patiently while the colonel finished up whatever it was that he was doing. His balding head was covered with sweat. He was wearing the shirt from his dress uniform, but the tie had been discarded and the top three buttons were open revealing a ribbed t-shirt over a chest that sported grey hairs. Casting dignity aside, he had shed his jacket and wrapped a woolen blanket around his shoulders to ward off some internal chill.

"Shouldn't you be in bed, sir?" Dan offered.

Colonel Samm looked up at him without humor. "I'm going to be dead in a few hours."

Dan's instinct was to dismiss the statement as dark humor, but his experience was that the colonel never made an insincere comment, even in jest.

The colonel finished up whatever he was doing on the computer and gave the lieutenant his full attention. "Two months ago, the government discovered the existence of a mostly dormant parasite making its way through the human population. It didn't take long to discover that this thing was worldwide. It's bio engineered, but the source was never found. Now it's awake and we're out of time."

"What's the infection rate?" Dan asked, swallowing his fear and trying to immerse himself in the difficult task ahead.

"Based on the data collected, we're looking at eighty nine percent of the population with one hundred percent fatality."

Dan suddenly felt his mind empty of thought. It felt as if his head was being inflated with helium. The catastrophic numbers he had just been quoted were too much for even his controlled psyche.

"Snap out of it, Lieutenant," Colonel Samm said.

Dan looked up at him. "My wife is sick, sir."

"I'm sorry to hear that. It's going to make this next part even harder."

"Next part?"

The colonel nodded. "While in its dormant state, the parasite still reproduced and spread like a virus. You're not sick because your immune system was too strong for it to take hold inside of you. Now that it's awake, though, you're vulnerable. It takes direct fluid contact to pass it on at this stage."

That, to Dan seemed like a silver lining. If all of the victims, his wife included, were going to be dead in a few hours, then the parasite would die with them.

Colonel Samm shook his head. "In the last few weeks, some drastic steps were taken in trying to fight this thing. In several subjects, they accelerated the development of the parasite to get a handle on the next stage. They call it the zombie stage."

Again, the colonel was not trying to be humorous, no matter how ridiculous his statement.

"Once the parasite is large enough to kill, it takes control of the motor functions of the body. It can also use sight, sound, smell, and taste, but seems impervious to pain."

"Wait, stop," Dan shouted. The colonel stopped, waiting patiently. "Are you trying to tell me that all of the sick people, all of the people who die, are going to get up and start wandering around afterwards?"

The colonel's head bobbed up and down. Then he quickly grabbed a tissue from a box on his desk and sneezed into it. It came away bloody.

"It's worse," he said, tossing the tissue into the basket.

Dan dipped his face into his hands, unable to get the thought of his dead wife walking around the house out of his mind. What would he do with her? Would he keep her in the basement or perhaps have her cremated, put out of her misery.

"How much worse can it get?" he complained.

"Dan, everything I'm going to tell you in the next few minutes will be worse than the thing I tell you before it. Believe me when I tell you that I don't envy your immunity."

Dan straightened up. "Let's have it all, then."

Colonel Samm nodded. "The zombies are aggressive. The active parasite can feed off of the host for a long while, but it would rather have fresh meat. We've found that the zombies are slow, awkward, and clumsy, but still dangerous. If one bites you, you'll be infected. If it has its chance, it will tear you apart.

"In about three hours the sick people will become comatose and then start dying off. That means that eighty nine percent of the population will then become these aggressive zombies and start attacking the survivors. If you assume a casualty rate of about twenty five percent of what

remains, you'll begin to realize that humanity will very quickly lose its ability to maintain order anywhere in the world.

"The president, who is also sick by the way, has been working on a draft of final orders for about three weeks. That draft includes all of the information I've just given you. I only received it yesterday morning."

"What are the orders?" Dan whispered.

"Evacuate. Survive."

Dan looked up at him with accusing eyes. "Evacuate? You want me to leave all of these sick people here on their own? And where are we going to go?"

But Colonel Samm was shaking his head. "You're misunderstanding me, Lieutenant. You're evacuating us. You, and everyone else who isn't sick, are going to load up every truck and bus with those of us who are."

Dan was speechless. All he could do was stare at the colonel, aware that his mouth was slightly ajar.

Reaching across his desk, Colonel Samm put his hand on a thick binder and pushed it toward the lieutenant. "This is a complete list of the personnel and their families living on base. Every name that's highlighted in yellow is the name of someone who is not sick."

That explained the random blood tests they'd been given the week before. Even the baby had been tested. At the thought of his baby, Dan quickly opened the book and paged over to the Ks. The name Rosemarie Killmeyer, just two names beneath his own, was highlighted in yellow. Her mother's was not.

Dan Killmeyer was about to become a single parent.

"Who will be taking over command?" Dan asked, resolving himself to the task at hand.

The colonel made a show of looking around the empty room. "Lieutenant, now is not the time for you to be sinking into denial."

Dan also looked around the room. "You're telling me that I'm the highest ranking officer who isn't sick?"

Colonel Samm shook his head. "You're the *only* officer who isn't sick. When I'm dead, feel free to hand out promotions to all of the corporals and privates you like, but for the time being, you're the king."

Dan looked down at the binder and began flipping through the pages. He tried to ignore the names of the people that weren't highlighted, but saw too many that he knew. All of those people, his friends, would be dead in a few hours.

Reaching across the desk, he pulled the phone to him and picked it up. He dialed a number and waited for an answer.

"Jim?" he said.

"Who's this?"

"It's Dan. I need you to come to the Colonel's office right away." As he spoke, Dan continued to scan through the book.

"What? You mean Judith, right? She's sick, Dan."

"I know. I need you because you're not sick."

There was silence on the line, the implications of that statement sinking in.

"I can't leave Judith."

"I don't know how to tell you this, Jim, but...she's not going to make it. My wife's sick, too."

"What the hell's going on, Dan?"

"Get here as quick as you can."

Dan hung up the phone without waiting for a response. He looked up to see the colonel staring at him.

"This kind of a crisis and the first person you call is a civilian?"

"You told me to start handing out the promotions," Dan said. "That's my first one."

After a few breaths, Dan found himself facing the situation with a much more rational demeanor. He put out of his mind the fact that people he knew and loved would be dead in a couple of hours and dealt with the necessities. The Colonel provided him with everything he needed, including access to what would normally be classified digital files. The binder he had been handed was also available as a spreadsheet.

The use of the digital spreadsheet helped facilitate his job. He first sorted the file by infected and uninfected. There were a lot of infected people. In fact, he didn't even know if there'd be enough time to evacuate them all. He separated the two groups and went first to the healthy. He identified three sharp shooters and two incendiary experts. He called all three. Then he began sorting through the households. He would need to alert the entire base.

After making a dozen more calls, Dan went downstairs to find Jim and two others waiting for him with the nervous private. They asked questions but the lieutenant chose to wait for the others he had summoned so that he could explain everything just once and get started on the evacuation. There were two other civilians on his call list. One was a friend of his wife's and the other was an electrician who had been given residence on base. They, like all of the others, stared open mouthed, much the way he had, as he explained the situation. His candor was undeniable. They did not doubt what he said.

"We don't have enough vehicles to get everyone to a reliable facility in time so we'll have to set up a makeshift quarantine area." The actual facilities would probably be overrun with sick people so getting his sick to a proper place didn't really matter.

Taking over the front desk's computer, Dan called up a map of the area. There were towns dotting the region, the nearest one six miles from the base. There was some woodland close by, but the surrounding region had a lot of open area. There was an old unused airfield just a mile away.

"The hangars are all empty. Jim, Kyle, and Fran will go ahead and set up cots there."

Cots.

For the dying.

"You've got approximately forty minutes before the first bus rolls in so don't wait around."

They left.

After that he began doling out orders, surprised at the ease with which he was taking command. Even more surprising was how quickly he was accepted as commander. Perhaps the young soldiers were latching on to him in a time of fear. His wife always said that he had an innate ability to put people at ease. He didn't recognize that in himself, but people seldom see their own strengths.

He sent most of his small group to the streets. Their jobs would be to rally the healthy. It wouldn't be easy. Those with sick families would want to stay and tend to them. But his small crew was authorized to be completely truthful with the recruits. People needed to know that they couldn't save the sick. They could only save themselves. It was a bitter pill to swallow. His own instinct was to return to his house and his wife. Instead, though, he gave his key to the nervous private and dismissed her. She was charged with seeing his wife onto a bus for her final ride and taking care of his daughter, who he would protect with every ounce of strength he was granted.

When he was alone, he gave himself a minute to grieve. He was never going to see his wife again.

Colonel Samm appeared at the end of the corridor. "Is everything in order?"

Dan nodded, but everything wasn't really in order. Aside from the collapse of civilization as they knew it, he wasn't going to be able to evacuate the base on time. Going door to door was going to take too long. The Colonel suggested using the air raid siren. The horn was tested twice a year but otherwise went unused. Its sound reached every corner of the base and all personnel, sick or otherwise, would respond if they could. The lieutenant wondered why he hadn't thought of it himself. With the colonel's help, he blew the horn.

With everyone awake, Dan began rounding up the healthy. He made calls to cell phones and sent a blast email to every military account. The messages gave people a quick briefing delegating the responsibilities. One of the major points was that there was no time for questioning. If they did not act quickly, they would all die. The word spread fast.

He was just finishing up when his sharpshooters and explosives experts arrived. Pulling the explosives people to the side, he issued a series of quick orders with met with a most unusual response. The sharpshooters watched the exchange, glancing over at the colonel from time to time to gauge his reaction. His health, though, was rapidly declining and he looked as if he'd dozed off.

When the incendiary experts had left, Dan turned to the sharpshooters. "Which one of you is Dwayne Martinson?"

Martinson, a tall man with a thick and well groomed mustache, raised his hand. Dan thought he looked too old to be a corporal.

"You're in charge of these two men," Dan said. "I want you three manning the towers at gates two, four, and seven."

"Sir," Martinson said. "What are we looking for? I thought we were quarantining sick people."

Dan nodded solemnly. "Sometimes sick people don't want to be quarantined. Assume your posts and then read your briefing."

It was clear that the lieutenant didn't want to use up any valuable time explaining things that didn't need to be explained.

Just as the three men were leaving, Dan called to them. "Aim for the head, gentlemen. Nothing else will count."

On the street, Martinson looked at the other two sharpshooters. One was Cubby Langston. Cubby was a young heavysset guy from Chicago. Martinson had known him for about a year. He was a terrible soldier, but great with the rifle. The other one, Xavier, he had never met. He sent Cubby to gate two and Xavier to gate seven. He would man gate four himself. It would give him the best view of the main entrance. Already, buses were starting to roll through as Lieutenant Killmeyer organized the evacuation. Through the dark windows, he could see the ashen faces of the sick. Most of them looked as if they were fighting death itself.



After giving Cubby and Xavier their assignments, Martinson went to the tower at gate four. Each tower had a weapons locker. Normally, Martinson had to check in with a guard and check out a weapon. This morning, though, there didn't seem to be anyone on duty. Martinson paused a moment to pull out his phone. He had glanced at the briefing when it had arrived, but now he scanned it in more detail. After all, why *did* the lieutenant need sharp shooters for an evacuation? More to the point, why did he need an incendiary team? As he scanned the document, he couldn't believe what he was reading. It explained the missing guard, though. Whoever had been on duty had probably been too sick to stay. Whoever had been scheduled to relieve him had probably been too sick to report. If at least some of the protocol had been followed, Martinson would find the keys to the weapons locker in the back office. The keys were there. So was the guard.

The young man was lying on the floor. An empty bottle of pills was on the desk next to a printed sheet. The first thing Martinson did was check for a pulse. There was none. He already had an inkling of what was going on, but couldn't understand how this man could have found out and had enough time to kill himself with a bottle of pills.

The printed sheet had the answer. It was a copy of the memo sent to Colonel Samm. What was in it mostly matched what was in the briefing Lieutenant Killmeyer had sent out, but it spelled things out in much more detail. How the guard had gotten his hands on it was a mystery never to be solved. The simple truth was that he had discovered the future and decided to not to live in it.

Picking up the phone, Martinson called Lieutenant to report. The lieutenant had all of the same questions. Where did he get the memo? When had he killed himself? Had he been sick?

Martinson didn't have any of the answers.

Sighing, the lieutenant told him to continue as ordered. Martinson was about to hang up the phone when the guard moved.

"Sir, wait," he said into the phone. "I think he's still alive."

"Are you armed?" Killmeyer asked.

That seemed an odd question. "Not yet, sir. Can you spare a paramedic? I'm going to check him out."

"Corporal, wait..."

Martinson put the phone down on the desk and knelt beside the guard. There was a tiny spot of vomit on the floor. He must have thrown up the pills, saving his life. It didn't seem like enough though.

Martinson had read the briefing. He had skimmed the memo. There were no secrets. He would almost immediately chide himself once he discovered the truth. But the truth is hard to swallow

without experiencing it firsthand. Though he'd read about the zombie phase of the disease, the rational part of his brain had dismissed it when the guard moved. Movement meant life.

Turning the young man, Martinson almost tumbled backward when he saw the eyes. As a soldier, he had understood that there was a crisis and been ready and able to respond to that crisis. He was a well trained soldier. The eyes of the guard, though, forced a crack into that training that Martinson simply couldn't plug. The man was dead. There was no doubt about it. He was sitting up. He was gripping Martinson's wrist. He was dragging the corporal's arm towards his open mouth. But he was still so very dead.

Martinson pulled his arm free and pushed the man away. Then he scrambled to his feet and grabbed the phone. The line had gone dead. Hitting the reset button, he got the dial tone and called the office again. This time, it was the weak voice of the colonel that answered.

"He's dead, sir. He's a walking corpse."

"Kill it," the colonel rasped. "Go for the head."

Martinson dodged away from the desk as the dead guard made a lunge at him. Moving back out through the door, he ran to the armory only to discover that he hadn't yet gotten the keys. All of the guns were inside of a steel cage.

Laughing a bit at the irony of the situation, Martinson turned to find the guard at the entrance to the room. This seemed to be the part of the movie where Martinson met his rather unsatisfying end. Granted, he'd been one of the better victims. He'd put up a fight, moved on to another room. He'd given the audience some all important action.

But this was no movie and Dwayne Martinson wasn't some silly teenage kid. Setting his legs, he waited for the guard to get close. Then he moved in and delivered two strong blows to his midsection. Nothing doing. The guard wasn't even fazed. He just kept coming. Experienced and adaptable, Martinson took two steps back. It was clear that the dead man's ultimate goal was to take a bite out of him. The corporal was thoroughly disgusted by that notion and resolved himself to preventing that at all costs.

When the guard came clumsily in once again, Martinson changed tactics. Instead of trying to hurt or even stop the guard, he spun him and grabbed him from behind. The guard was armed with a handgun. Martinson pushed him face first against the wall and grabbed the weapon out of its holster. Armed now, he put some distance between the two of them, raised the gun, and fired. Heeding the colonel's advice, he aimed for the head and Martinson didn't miss. With the brain function disrupted, the dead guard crumpled to the ground.

Much to his chagrin, Martinson found himself breathing a bit too heavily. He wasn't sure whether that was due to the fear or the fact that he had spent too many years looking through the scope of a rifle. Either way, he imagined that the future, which he chose not to consider in too much detail, would offer him plenty of opportunity for getting into shape.

Going to the body, he helped himself to the keys for the cage and went inside. Grabbing up his favorite rifle, he headed out of the room.

Dan Killmeyer was just coming into the building. He, too, was brandishing a handgun.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

Martinson shook his head.

"Is it...did you kill it?"

Martinson nodded.

"So it's all true, then," the lieutenant mumbled, more to himself than to the corporal. Looking up, he asked, "Do you know understand now?"

Martinson nodded again.

"They might be people you know, people you care about."

"I've got it," Martinson said simply.

Dan pulled a face, then headed out the door. The corporal had a good service record and a good reputation. If Dan was going to be in charge, he would need to learn to trust his subordinates. There would be no one higher up from which he could get advice. Even more importantly, he would need to trust himself. The attack on Martinson confirmed everything the colonel had told him. Though he had been following orders with one hundred percent commitment, some small doubt had remained. That doubt was gone now.

As he made his way to the SUV, abandoned in the middle of the street, he thought of his wife.

A line of buses was coming back through the main gate as he drove past it. They were empty except for the grim faced drivers.

Mounted on the dashboard, Dan's phone buzzed. It had been buzzing nonstop for the last hour. The radio was busier. The whole base was awake now. Everyone needed orders. There was some predictable dissension. There had been some altercations. Good soldiers were only good to a point. They were being asked to take on a heavy burden at the moment. Like Dan, they questioned the soundness of a plan that evacuated the majority of the persons on base. They had no idea what was to come.

Pressing the button on his phone, he activated the speaker. It was Doctor Hess. She was at the quarantine area.

"Go ahead, doctor."

"Lieutenant, many of these patients aren't going to last much longer."

It was getting close to three am. Where had the hours gone?

"We've got two more busloads of people coming out to you there. What's your estimation of time?"

Doctor Hess had been fully briefed on the situation. "The first ones will probably go within the hour."

"I want you to come back on the next bus."

"It's fine, lieutenant. I'd rather stay. "

"It's too dangerous. We've already had one incident. "

She was silent.

"We need you here, Hess."

"Yes, sir," she said.

He waited , but she didn't say anything else so he disconnected.

There were four soldiers manning the front gate. They were checking numbers off of a list on a tablet. Grabbing his phone and the radio on the passenger seat, Dan got out of the car and approached them.

"It's going to be another forty minutes, Lieutenant," said one of the soldiers, a young harried woman with her brown hair tied into a pony tail.

As they spoke, another line of buses moved through the gate on its way to the airfield.

"We don't have forty minutes."

"The sick are getting more difficult to move. Block seventeen is still mostly full."

The radio crackled.

"Go," Dan said into it.

"This is Franklin, sir. The explosives are in place. Over."

"Good. Go get Dr. Hess and get to a safe distance. Over and out."

The soldier was waiting patiently. As soon as Dan gave her his attention, she continued. "Like I was saying, sir..."

"Forget it. There's no time." He didn't like having to make his next decision. Taking the tablet from the young soldier, he began paging through the names. When he found the person he was looking for, he got back on the radio.

"Killmeyer to Pooka. Over."

The response was immediate. "Pooka here, sir. Over."

"Where's Private Boston? Over."

"Block seventeen, sir. I'm right around the corner. Over."

"What's the situation there? Over."

"Most everyone who's sick is unconscious, sir. It's making it hard to get them onto the trucks. Over."

"We're out of time," Dan grumbled.

"Sir?" Pooka asked after a minute.

"Pooka, do you know what happens when they start to die?" He had abandoned all radio protocol. "Do you?"

Pooka's discomfort was evident, even over the air. "I...it's in the briefing, sir. But I don't see..."

"We need to defend ourselves," Dan said, suddenly resolved.

"What..what should I do?"

"Get Boston and anyone else you can trust and cordon off the block. Anyone healthy *must* leave the block."

"And the sick, sir?"

"Leave them. Once they start dying, you'll know what to do."

"Sir?"

"One bullet to the head is all you'll need."

"Sir, I..."

"Why is that bus stopped?" Dan said to the four soldiers with him. "Did anyone else notice that?"

A couple of hundred yards down the road, one of the buses had stopped in its tracks. The four soldiers were staring at their shoes sheepishly.

"Lieutenant?" Pooka was still calling over the radio.

"You have your orders, Private," Dan barked at him. "Out!"

Hitching his radio to his belt, Dan walked up to the gate. He stared out at the road in the darkness. All he could really see was an outline and tail lights. He knew already that something terrible had happened.

He grabbed the radio again. "Killmeyer to Franklin. Over."

"Franklin here, sir. Over."

"Are you clear? Over."

"Negative. Santos went in to get Dr. Hess. Over."

"Killmeyer to Hess. Over."

Crackle.

"Killmeyer to Hess. Over."

Crackle.

"Killmeyer to Franklin. Over."

"Franklin here, sir. Over."

"Blow it."

"Sir?"

"Santos and Hess are not coming out. Blow the building."

There was movement out by the bus.

"Sir, Santos just went in a few minutes ago."

Some figures seemed to be coming back toward the base.

"Detonate the explosives, damn it!"

The figures were moving awkwardly, as if they were drunk or just really, really tired.

"Killmeyer to Martinson. Over."

Martinson was perched in the tower, staring out at the approaching figures. His radio was sitting on the ledge and he grabbed it.

"Go for Martinson. Over."

"We've got hostiles approaching the main gate. Over."

Martinson buried his eye in the scope and tried to focus on the shambling forms coming up the road. In the current light, it was impossible to tell whether they were alive or dead.

"I cannot confirm hostiles, sir. Over."

There was an audible sigh as the lieutenant pressed the button on his end. "Martinson, put a bullet in the dirt at the feet of one of them and see what happens. Over."

Martinson took aim and fired. Through his scope, he saw the bullet impact only a few inches from where one of the people was walking. None of the handful of walkers in the area showed any reaction whatsoever. That settled it. Martinson readjusted his aim and fired.

A man in fatigues went down.

He fired again.

A woman in a blue nightgown and open coat fell to the dirt.

Another shot.

Another victim.

Suddenly, the sky was lit by an orange flame. Martinson paused in his slaughter to find the source of the light. About a mile away, an explosion had taken out the empty hangar at the airfield. At the same time, he heard shots from within the gates.

"Cubby, come in. Over," he said into the radio.

"Langton here. Over." Cubby was in the tower at gate seven.

"Can you confirm shots fired within the compound? Over."

"Affirmative. It looks like block seventeen. Over."

"Do you have a visual? Over."

"Affirmative. Over."

"Can you assist? Over."

"Will do. Over and out."

Martinson put his eye back to the scope. There were more people coming toward them from the bus. Martinson popped off another three. A tiny figure detached itself from the vehicle and started toward the base. He took aim and saw that it was a little girl. She was wearing a little dress and carrying something in her left hand. Even at this distance, Martinson could see that it was some sort of toy, perhaps a stuffed bear. Some strands of her hair stood out away from her round, china doll face.

He took aim but found his trigger finger locked up. The little zombie girl stood at the rear of the bus for a moment, seemed to look right at him through the scope. Then she turned away and began walking in the other direction.

Martinson lowered the rifle and found that he was shivering.

"Killmeyer to Martinson. Over."

The corporal looked over at the radio. Picking it up, he pressed the button and said, "Here, lieutenant."

Dan was holding a pair of binoculars up to his eyes. There were at least forty corpses left on that bus. "Can you hit the gas tank? Over."

"Sure."

Dan looked at the radio. "Corporal? Are you all right."

"Yeah. Yes, sir. A bit rattled is all."

Dan didn't say anything. When this was all over, he was very likely to collapse in on himself. "Take out the bus, please, Corporal. Over and out."

A moment later, there was a shot and the bus exploded.

Dan turned away. "Killmeyer to Franklin. Over."

"Here, sir," said Franklin.

"Do you have transport? Over."



"Negative, sir. I'm en route back to base on foot. Over."

"Copy that. Are you armed? Over."

"Affirmative. Over."

"Be alert for hostiles. Over and out."

"Killmeyer to Martinson. Over."

"Go. Over." He sounded better.

"Inform your people that Corporal Franklin is en route on foot and should be in sight within ten minutes. Do not fire on Corporal Franklin. Over."

"Affirmative. Over and out."

"Pooka to Killmeyer. Over."

"Go. Over."

"Block seventeen is contained, sir. Several of the hostiles are still in the houses. Over."

"I'm on my way. Over."

Dan got into the SUV and drove three minutes to block seventeen. There were a number of vehicles barricading the area on both ends. Soldiers patrolled the borders. The street was filled with bodies. Dan looked around and noticed that there were other people huddled in the area. Some were military but most were civilians. They were crying.

"We need to go house to house if we want to be sure," someone was saying to Pooka as Dan walked up. It was Boston.

Pooka looked at the lieutenant. "Sir, I don't recommend it. We've been doing dirty work all night. I'm not sure we can take much more."

There was a van parked just outside the barricade. Dan went to it and pulled open the back door. Finding a set of fatigues and a helmet, he dressed himself right there on the street.

"Boston, Pooka...you and you." The soldiers fell in behind him. "Shoot to kill."

Dan led them through the line of cars and up to the first house. It was the first of many. It took two hours to clear the block. The things they saw inside the homes were frightening. The sick who had died first had eaten those who'd hung on longer. There were civilians in the houses as well as military people. They shot people they knew. They shot children. Dan felt like he was on some terrorist police force going door to door and eliminating the dissidents. When it was

over, when they marched down the street through the litter of corpses toward the rattled soldiers and sobbing survivors, he understood that the world had changed in a way he could never have comprehended before. They were at war now. They were on the front line against the dead and for every casualty on their side, there could well be a new soldier on the other side.

"Main gate to Lieutenant Killmeyer. Over."

Killmeyer grabbed his radio. "Go," was all he said.

"Franklin's back, sir."

Dan looked at the radio. "What? It's been two hours."

"He's at the gate, sir. He...well, he didn't make it."

Dan closed his eyes. "Are you armed?"

The private didn't answer, but he heard the report of the weapon in the silence of the early morning.

Stripping off his body armor, Dan shook out all of the tension of the operation. He turned to Pooka. "Burn these bodies."

"Yes, sir."

Getting into the car, he drove back to the office. He had to work through all of the surviving personnel and figure out how they were going to live for the foreseeable future.

As he entered the building, he was surprised to find Colonel Samm still sitting in the chair behind the desk. He looked up, but was very clearly dead. A strange rasping sound issued from his throat as he got out of the chair and started around the side.

Shaking his head sadly, Dan pulled out his sidearm and laid the old officer to rest.

He spent the next several hours working on duty rosters and trying to figure out what they needed to do. He used the computer to check the state of the world. The newest of the updates was several minutes old. The web sites reported terrible things. This base was his world now. Provisions would not be an immediate problem. They had plenty of food for the remainder of the base's population. When the power went out, they'd be able to switch to the generators. He instantly began formulating a rationing plan for the gas. Ultimately, he would need help.

When he had organized as much as he could, he spent the next four hours on the phone and the radio. He issued duty rosters and delegated responsibilities. Then, as the morning began its final stages, he left the office and drank in the warm air and sunlight. Getting into the car, he drove back along the route that had taken him into this nightmare until he had arrived at his home.

Inside, he found the young private asleep on the sofa with the baby in her arms. Rosemarie was awake and cooing. She liked the young private.

Leaning in, Dan took the child and hugged her close. The young private fluttered her eyes open.

"Sir," she said with mild surprise. "I'm sorry. I..."

"Thank you, private," he said to her. "Thank you for taking care of my baby. My wife?"

"They took her, sir. It was..."

He shook his head. "I don't want to know. There's a work schedule in your email. Check it out."

"Okay, sir. Thank you, sir."

When she lingered, he dismissed her.

After she was gone, he started to walk toward the stairs, but couldn't bear to face his bedroom. So he sat himself down on the couch just where the private had been sitting. He looked at Rosemarie for a long time. Then he began to sing. He never sang to the baby, but his wife did. He sang a song he had heard in her voice and butchered it. It didn't matter. Before too long, he was asleep, the baby cooing softly in his arms.