

PsychoNoble Presents

Stranger in a Strange Place

A Choose Your Own Zombie Adventure

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Begin

GASP!

Your eyes bolt open. Darkness. You painfully take in a breath of dusty air. It stings your lungs as the air flows into your chest. It hurts just as much on the way out. Your breathing is shallow and forced. You are pinned down on your back. Trying to move only causes more pain. Your eyes dart back and forth in an attempt to see what is holding you down, but blackness covers everything. You blink in hopes that your eyes are just closed, but the scratch of your crusty eyelids seem to prove otherwise. You are able to turn your head, but the rest of your body is another matter. What is happening? you ask yourself. What's going on?

As you lay there, your eyes begin to adjust to the darkness. Still only able to see a few feet around yourself, you manage to make out what is holding you down. Large wooden beams cross over your body, along with what appears to be crumbled sheetrock and insulation. Nails protrude freely from the beams and you fear they are also inside of you. As you lay your head back you see a metal pipe only a few feet above. If you could just manage to get an arm free, you could maybe pull yourself out.

Testing each arm to see which is the most likely candidate to be freed, you decide to go with your right. Using your shoulder to pull, you begin to dislodge your arm from the rubble. All around your arm you feel a piercing pain as you begin to remove it. Nails, digging deep and holding on for the ride, puncture your skin. You bite down hard and tears escape your eyes as you clench them shut. Slowly but surely, you are able to free your arm.

Looking up again at the pipe, you wonder if you can even reach it. You raise your arm toward it and estimate you have at least another six inches to go. Your arm falls weakly back onto your chest. Knowing this is probably your only chance to pull yourself out, you try again. This time you stretch your arm as far as it can go. Your body lifts up as far as it can as you reach for the pipe. The skin on your arm feels like it's tearing itself apart from the nail slices. You give out a little grunt as you close in on the pipe. Your fingertips graze it. With one final push, you work your fingers around the pipe and grab on with all you have left. You exhale.

With your hand securely around the pipe, you begin to pull with all your might. At first you don't even budge, but after a few strong tugs your body begins to shift. You feel scraping all over your body as you shift out from under the wooden beams, and it hurts like hell, but at least

nothing pierced you enough to hold you in place. Eventually your other arm is free and you use it for some extra leverage as you finally get out from under the rubble that pinned you down.

You are now in a hunched position, unable to stand, still surrounded by debris and darkness. About ten feet in front of you there are a few cracks of light. Slowly, you fumble your way toward it. You feel around with your hands as you crawl over the pile of wreckage. The light is growing stronger now as you near it and you need to squint just to keep going. Finally, you reach the cracking wall and push your hands against it. It feels weak and with one small push, you think you can bust through it. You turn to put your shoulder against the wall and give the wall a little thump. You hear it crumble on the other side. Leaning back, you give one final heave with your shoulder toward the wall. It shatters and your momentum carries you out into the blazing light of day, crashing down through more debris. After a few tumbles you come to a rest on your back staring straight into the sky. Your body aches all over but you somehow manage to struggle to your feet. Using your hand to shield your eyes, you look around and are dismayed at what you find.

Directly ahead, barely standing, looks like a two story house. Half is caved in, the half where you just came from. Turning around, there is an entire neighborhood of houses in the same shape or worse. Some look as if they should no longer be standing while others are simply burnt to the ground. One house has a car coming out of the living room, or is it going in? Another house looks as if a cross section has been taken out of it. What happened here?

Looking back at the house you came from, you try to think of the last thing you remember doing. Thinking intensely, you come to a horrifying realization. You can't remember what you last did. In fact, you can't remember anything. How you got here, where this is, or even who you are. Nothing. As these thoughts race through your head, you begin to get dizzy. You put a hand on the ground as you stumble over in shock. Where am I? you ask yourself. Who am I?

Slowly you come to your senses and reach into your pockets. In them, you find a only a wallet. You scavenge through the wallet and find what you were looking for: a driver's license. A face you don't recognize stares back at you. "Holcomb, William John," reads the name. Will. As you sit and stare at the license, hopelessness comes over you. Thousands of questions that need answering envelop your mind with no idea where to start--

CRUNCH CRUNCH

The sound from behind makes you jump and swing your body around to look. You see someone off in the distance, walking across the street, gravel crunching under their feet. You breathe a sigh of relief and hope some of your questions can be answered.

Slowly, you make it to your feet and begin to hobble over to the person. You have a slight limp, you notice, from your recent tumble. The person is obviously unaware of your presence so you wave your hands in the air and shout, "Hey! Over here!"

As the stranger turns your way, you feel fear shoot through your body. His clothes are tattered, torn, and barely hanging onto his bony skeleton. His limbs are white and decayed. And his face (if you could even call it a "him") is covered in open boils. Pus flows freely from open sores. On one side of his head you can clearly see his jaw where skin used to be. He looks at you, his eyes devoid of color, and merely moans out a gurgle of a noise.

You stare in shock. You slow your approach to a cautious pace. He begins to limp toward you, only a few yards away now. Completely flabbergasted you blurt out, "Are... are you alright?"

The man lets out a quick hiss and lunges at you. You quickly try to avoid him, but he lands right on top of you, throwing you both to the ground. His mouth hovers a few inches away from your face as you fight to get free from underneath him. spurts and spits of horrible noises escape his mouth as he claws and bites at you. Powered by adrenaline, you manage to summon up one last effort and shove him off of you. He rolls a couple times, hissing as he goes. He stops a few feet away and slowly begins to lumber back to his feet.

Try to find a weapon to defend yourself pg.21

Run to a house for cover pg.16

SCREECH

The tires burn a little rubber as the car swerves again.

"Yeah... I think I'll try my luck with the axe."

You reach under your seat and fumble around for the axe. Behind you the zombie clunks along the side, edging ever closer to your door. You hear demonic sounds spew from its mouth as you manage to reach the axe.

You spin around in your seat so your back is to the dashboard. Placing your left hand on the door handle, you breathe in a big breathe and pull. The door swings open and you are instantly pelted by wind and rain. Along the side of the truck the zombie is still holding on. Grotesquely, you notice the legs of the monster have been nearly ground away by the friction with the road.

With the axe into your left hand, you grab onto the seat and lean out of the truck. The zombie is close. It gurgles out a horrible hissing sound and scratches at you with it's deformed hand. You bring the axe up and swing it down towards the zombie's arm. It makes a horrible thudding sound as it connects with the arm, but bounces off the bone. Abbey screams. spurts of blood shoot out of the wound, but the zombie remains unaffected. It merely hisses at you.

Again you raise the axe for another blow, but the car swerves right, this time sending you back into the truck.

"Hold it steady!"

"Would yah rather I run into another one of those things?" he yells back sharply.

As you are about to lean out again, the zombie latches his hand around the open door and starts to pull itself in. You smash it's hand with your heel multiple times before it falls back, moaning. You again lean out and raise the axe to make the final blow. As you swing, the truck lurches slightly and you miss, slamming the axe straight into the truck. It's stuck.

You desperately try to pull it free, but before you can the zombie seizes your arm and begins to pull. Letting go of the axe handle, you try to shake the zombie off, but it secures its grip with its free arm and climbs up your body, using you as leverage. First, it grabs the top of the door and then the inside of the cabin. You struggle under it's weight to do something, anything, but your effort is focused on trying not to fall out of the speeding truck.

From inside you hear Abbey scream again as the zombie tries to

enter the vehicle. Your right arm is barely holding onto the seat as your body flails around outside. The truck shakes violently and your grip slips. As you tumble out of the truck, you fall face first at high speed onto the concrete below. You feel your body bounce and roll along the highway until it eventually slides to a stop. Pain rages through your body. Staring straight up into the sky, rain falls onto your face. Your vision is blurred and the world is spinning. So sleepy...

In the distance you hear a little girl scream and you shake yourself out of it. Somehow you manage to sit up and look ahead to see the truck spinning out of control as a zombie crawls inside the open door. The truck turns nearly horizontal before it begins to roll over. It flips and flops down the road and then, without warning, explodes into a giant fireball. It engulfs the sky and lights up the world, revealing a terrible amount of walking dead all around. A wave of heat hits your face and for a split second stops the rain. The sky darkens and the rain again begins to fall on you.

"No..." you choke, looking at the blazing crash. A lump grows in the back of your throat as tears well in your eyes.

As you sit alone on the pavement, zombies lumber toward you from all directions. You've lost everything. Your food, your supplies, and horribly, the only people you knew. All gone in a fiery second. In your short memory, this is the most hopeless you have ever felt. Your body is in terrible pain. You're surrounded. You have nothing left. You feel like dying. What's the point? Why even continue?

Give up pg.54
Continue pg.29

"No! I don't care what I promised, I'm not letting those things get you!" you respond stubbornly.

The horde of zombies move in closer and closer. They aren't far off now. Their horrible moaning and hissing makes the hair on your neck stand straight up. There is no time for arguing.

"Alright Abbey," you say to her, putting her down, "You're going to have to help me with Grandpa."

You bend down and sling one of Jackson's arms over your neck while Abbey futilely tries to help. Jackson struggles against you, but he is too weak to fight you off. His grunts of protest are interrupted by an agonizing scream as Jackson puts weight on his leg.

"Dammit John," Jackson mumbles, "My leg... it's no good..."

"Just keep it off the ground and we'll do the rest," you order.

With Abbey clinging to Jackson on one side and you supporting him on the other, the three of you begin to struggle toward the edge of the park. You are moving at a snails pace. The noise of undead grows louder.

"Come on!" you shout, "We've got to move fas--"

In an attempt to go faster, the three of you tumble over as one collective body. Jackson screams out in agony as his leg twists unnaturally.

The zombies will be on you in seconds.

"Abbey," you grab her. She is obviously in shock. "You have to run," you say calmly but commanding, "Run ahead. You'll be faster." She shakes her head, refusing, but you insist it will be fine. "We'll be right behind you."

Abbey reluctantly darts off into the trees. You're not even sure where she went.

"Come on Jackson, we can do this," you say to him, but more to reassure yourself.

Jackson is crying. You try to lift him, but he has gone entirely limp.

"Why...", he attempts to say through his sobs, "Why didn't you just leave me behind... Now we're all dead!"

"Jackson, I couldn't ju--"

A wave of zombies pour through the trees and pile on top of you and Jackson. The impact sends your shotgun flying. You fight to break free of them, but the numbers are overwhelming. Hundreds, maybe thousands. They scratch and bite at your flesh. Wounds, new and old,

start to bleed. You feel pieces of skin and muscle being torn off your body. You don't realize it, but you are screaming for your life. For what seems like an eternity, your body slowly grows cold and weak. The pain dissolves away as what little light fades to darkness.

You have died

You shrug.

"Left, I suppose." You point down James Place.

Jackson takes the truck left and heads down a winding hill. The buildings become grungier as you head down. Adult video stores, smoke shops, and "massage parlors" are abundant. From what you can see, most appear looted and empty.

"Jesus," you whisper, "What the hell happened here?"

"It's like I feared," Jackson answers, "They've all gone. There ain't no one left. Maybe we oughta try..."

Jackson's words fade away as you look down a passing alley, your heart racing.

"Jackson STOP!" you shout.

Both Jackson and Abbey jump.

"What!? What is it!?" Jackson shouts, frantically looking around as he slams on the breaks.

Your hands shake uncontrollably as you try to open your door.

"Wait! Where you goin' John?" Jackson calls to you as you exit the truck, but you don't hear him. You head into the alley. That alley...

Jackson picks up the shotgun from your side of the truck with one hand and Abbey with the other. He takes care to reload the shotgun and then follows you into the alley. When he finally catches up to you, you are staring blankly at a brick wall.

"Dammit John! What's goin' on!? Say something!"

A man and woman you've never seen before are walking down the alley. They are laughing. You hide in the shadows. Looking down you see a gun in your hand. The weight is familiar... too familiar. They are close now. You step out, pointing the gun at them.

"Alright, the two of you, get down on the ground and empty your pockets!" you hear your voice yell.

The two stop abruptly in shock. You can see the fear in their eyes. It makes you feel good. No... it makes you feel sick now.

"I said get down on the ground!" you shout again.

The man and woman look at each other hesitantly. They cautiously kneel down on the ground.

"Okay... okay..." your voice shakes, "Now, empty your pockets and put everything behind you."

"Alright... calm down..." the man says to you, "We're emptying our

pockets, see..."

"Just do it!" you shout at him, "Now!" Your grip on the gun tightens.

"Please don't hurt us!" the woman says, "You don't want to. I can see you are shaking."

That makes you angry.

"Hurry!" you shout as you walk over and kick the man in the stomach.

"Please no!" she gasps.

Completely unexpected, the man jumps at you. There is a struggle.

BLAM BLAM

"Oh my god!" she shouts.

The man is bleedings from his stomach. You step back in shock, looking at the blood on you and the gun in your hands.

"What have I done?" you think.

You see yourself running down the alley into the darkness, away from the sobbing woman cradling the dying man. You have twenty dollars in hand.

"I... I..." you stutter, looking up to Jackson, "I killed a man here."

Jackson, obviously not expecting an answer like that, is dumbfounded. He takes a few steps back. Abbey just looks around confused.

"But I thought you couldn't remember." Abbey says naively.

"I remember..." you explain, "I was here, and I was mugging a couple... and there was a scuffle... I shot him. Oh my God... I killed him..."

Shock overcomes you. You are a murderer. And what a pointless murder. What type of person are you? How many times have you done this? Is this who you are, what you've been searching for?

You feel sick to your stomach. And angry. It isn't fair. How could you have done something like that? It can't be true. You are better than that. You---

A loud banging of cans falling over down the alley brings you back to reality. Two figures begin to stagger toward you. At first you think you are reliving your memory again, but you quickly realize this is real.

GROOAAANNNN

Zombies. You clench your jaw in rage as you watch them hobble your way.

"Quick!" Jackson shouts, "Back to the truck!"
You turn to run back to the truck, but then you see Jackson brought his shotgun.

Run back to the truck pg.59
Take the shotgun and unload your rage pg.52

After thinking it over, you decide you want to check out the mall for yourself. While Jackson seems like a nice guy, you have a feeling that he would do anything to protect Abbey, maybe even deceive you. They need your food and you can't spare it. You have to go your separate ways.

"Sorry Jackson," you say to him, "but I really need to see this mall for myself."

Jackson's light-hearted mood instantly disappears as you tell him this. At first he doesn't even say anything, just stares at you, emotionless. You can tell this is not the answer he was hoping for.

"We ain't eaten any real food in days," he responds with a tinge of anger in his voice.

"I'm sorry but -"

"Don't! Just..." he raises his voice but instead just shakes his head, not continuing his thought. He takes a few breaths and calms down. Jackson looks right into your eyes and says, "I'm not lying. If you go there alone, you're gonna die."

He sees you hesitate. For a brief second you think of taking his offer again, but you decide to stand firm with your decision. And with that he understands your decision. Without another word, Jackson turns his head and drives away.

You watch his truck drive off toward the city until it becomes only another cloud of dust. Slowly you turn around and stare down the opposite direction of the road. It heads off into the distance, winding its way through giant hills until you can no longer see it. You begin your trek toward the mall.

The hills in front of you slowly grow larger as you approach them. They are brown, barren, and lifeless, much like everything else around these parts. Your stomach gives a little growl and you decide it's time to have another little bite to eat.

You sit down right in the center of the road. Other than the slight howl of the wind, everything around you is quiet. You open up your backpack and grab some dried fruit. You put a handful into your mouth. Hmpf, dried fruit, you think, I hate dried fruit! Wait... how did you know that?

Awhile later, you are walking down the road as it weaves between the dry hills. They are massive now. You can't see around any of the corners. You feel like a lab rat going through a maze, not knowing what will be around the next turn. It kind of creeps you out. Looking up at the hills, you see the sky is turning a dark gray. The wind picks up as

clouds move in. Rain is coming.

You use this time to reflect on what's been happening. Obviously, something horrible has happened. People have turned into, for the lack of a better term, zombies. Generalizing from your situation, you figure that other towns, and most likely other cities and countries, have succumb to the same terror. Everything is in ruins. How far does it spread and is there any hope? And beyond that you are no closer to finding out who you are then a few hours ago. In fact, you are further away. Why do you have William Holcomb's wallet if you aren't him?

The road begins to straighten out and as you take that last turn that guides you out of the hillside. Coming about, you finally see the mall. It can't be more than a few minutes walk now. From what you can see, nothing looks that far out of the ordinary. There are a few parked cars, street lights... the only thing out of place is the complete lack of people. It's like a ghost town.

It feels weird walking up to the doors of the mall, being the only living thing around. Things seem almost too easy. You walk up to the sliding doors, but they won't open. You attempt to pull them open, but you are either too weak to open them or they are locked. You can't be sure. Knowing there are potentially plenty of other ways in, you keep your hopes up and take a look around.

As you make your way around the mall, the environment drastically changes. Instead of parked cars, you see cars destroyed, lying upside down. The walls of the mall begin to look charred. Blood stains streak the pavement and bullet holes rip through the walls. It looks as if a war has been fought here. Oddly enough though, there is nothing to account for the blood. No bodies, no anything, just remnants of a past battle.

You walk around the next corner and a horrible smell burns your nose. It takes some strength, but you manage not to lose the little food you have. Even worse than the smell is what you see. About a hundred feet in front of you, there is an entire wall of zombies. There must be hundreds of them. They are all facing the away from you, pointed toward the doors of the mall. You hear them moaning and bumping up against each other. Every now and then there is a hiss or a spitting sound. They don't see you yet. They are entirely concentrated at the door of the mall, banging up against it, trying to get in.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA"

Out of nowhere you hear maniacal laughing. You look around to see where it's coming from, and suddenly bullets whiz around.

Instinctively, you duck down and run to the wall for cover. It sounds like some sort of automatic weapon. Blood and puss begin to splatter upwards from the mass of undead as they are hit by gunfire. Some of them begin to drop to the ground while others seem to be impartial. The firing stops and again you hear the laughing. You look up on the roof of the mall to see a man reloading a gun.

"EAT THIS!!" he shouts.

He once again fires carelessly into the group. Without warning, you feel a bullet rip through your left shoulder. Unable to hold back, you let out a shout of pain and fall to the ground. The man on the roof instantly stops firing and stares directly at you. His expression is no longer one of laughter, but of horror. To your own horror, those things are now turning toward you as well. As if on command, they begin to stagger your way, groaning as they come. On the roof, the mans run away out sight. You figure you should do the same.

Scrambling back to your feet and cradling your shoulder, you run back to the front of the mall. What are you going to do? You could try to make a break for it, but how long could you really out run them? From your last encounter, you remember they are faster than they look. And now there are hundreds of them! Spotting the parked cars, you get an idea.

You run up to one of the stable looking cars and try open it. Maybe you can find an unlocked vehicle and, if you are lucky, it'll have keys inside. You quickly move from car to car jiggling the door handle. Locked. Locked. Locked. Behind you the monsters slowly advance around that corner, heading your way. Locked. Locked. Locked. Wait! You go back to the car you last tried and see the keys still in the ignition. Some poor fool locked their keys in their car. You scramble for something to smash the window. The flashlight will have to do. Grabbing it from your pocket, you smack the window as hard as you can. All it accomplishes hurting your hand.

Hissing and gurgling sounds come from over your shoulder as the whole pack of zombies grow closer. They are only a few paces away now.

With one final swing at the window, it smashes, along with your flashlight. You quickly unlock the door and climb in. The zombies surround your car and try to grab at you through the window. In desperation, you turn the keys and, surprisingly enough, the car starts right up. You shift the car into drive and roll over a few of those monsters in front of you, making horrible squishing and cracking noises. After a few feet of that, the road ahead is clear. Looks like you're going

to New Hilstead.

As you are about to make your escape, you see the man who was shooting at the zombies standing at the mall doors on the far end. He is holding them open, desperately waving at you to come in. Undead are again starting to encircle your car in all directions. Is heading back to the city your only option now, or can you make it to the stranger at the door?

Try to get to the stranger pg.39
Head back toward the city pg.46

Quickly, you stand up and stumble toward the nearest house with four solid walls. The house stands four houses down from your current position, now three, two. You look back and see that thing limping much quicker than you expected in your direction. For something so decayed, it moves with inhuman speed. Not at all graceful, but somehow managing a steady forward momentum that you could not match in the same condition.

You reach the house and frantically try to open the front door. It's locked. Looking over your shoulder, with your hand on the door knob, you see the monster hissing with each awkward jaunt it takes toward you. You quickly take a few steps back and begin kicking at the door. It gives a little, but not much. You keep kicking. If you weren't so weak, you feel you could easily bust it open. The monster is close now. Filled with fear, you kick faster and harder. With the monster less than ten feet away, you finally manage to break the door open. With one loud crack it swings inside and bangs against the inner wall. You hobble into the house and close the door as hastily as possible, leaning your back against it to hold it shut. You're in.

You can feel banging against the door, undoubtedly that thing trying to get inside. In front of you, a little out of your reach, you see a sturdy looking chair. It could barricade the door. There is no way you can reach it while holding the door shut. Hoping you are faster than the thing outside, you make a mad dash toward the chair. By the time you reach it, the door swings open and the monster begins to enter. Picking up the chair, legs out, you run straight at the monster, using the chair as a ram in hopes of propelling it back out onto the street. When you collide with the monster, one chair leg punctures its abdomen and a foul erupts into the air. It struggles to bite and scratch you, but you use your leg to kick it back out the door. Moaning, it topples onto its back. You slam the door and prop it shut using the chair.

With only your heavy breathing filling the air, you put your hands on your knees and stare at the door. Sweat pours down your face as you wonder if the door will hold. On the outside, you hear the monster scuffling around and banging again at the door. The door shakes with each hit, but it doesn't budge. The door is secured, but the banging continues.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

And then it stops. Has it given up? Silence.

Creek.

Before you can turn around you feel teeth enter the back of your

neck. You let out a painful scream as you violently claw at your neck to free yourself. Out of the corner of your eye you see another one of those things eating your flesh. It wraps its arms around you, chewing further into your neck. As pain shoots through your body you fall to your knees. Your eyes bulge in terror as you think of how to escape. You weaken and fall forward, right onto the chair blocking the door, knocking it loose. Lying on your stomach, the last thing you see is the monster from outside lunging at your face. Coldness ripples from your neck throughout your body, then numbness, then nothing.

You have died

"But.. I... UGH!" you grunt in frustration as you stand up. Why does nothing ever work out right? Why are there always problems?

Derrick hands you the bag of supplies and walks out of the hut with you. You can barely see anything. He points his finger towards the forest.

"If you stay straight from this direction, you should avoid any watchtowers, but you must stay quiet."

"Thanks," you say sarcastically. You try to walk away, but he grabs your shoulder.

"John... I *am* trying to help you." he says solemnly.

Derrick releases you and you angrily head into the forest without another word between the two of you. You seethe with anger. Here you are again, stuck with no one but yourself, wandering through the forest, with no idea where you are going. YAY! You trip over a branch and land hard on your side.

"Dammit!" you shout under your breath.

You hear rustling up in a tree close by.

"Is someone down there?" shouts a voice from up above.

Where is that voice? Can he see you? Should you respond? More rustling from above and then a blinding light shines on your face.

"You! What are you doing?" the same voice shouts.

Placing your hand in front of your eyes you stutter, "I... um... well..."

Before you manage to get out a full sentence you hear shouting coming from behind you. It's Angelica, along with a few men, sprinting from the camp.

"Stop him! Do not let that man leave!"

Your instincts kick in and you prepare to run, but before you can, a net drops over you from one of the trees. You struggle, but it is no use, because now there are other people on top of you, holding you down.

"Angelica, what is happening?" you ask.

"Quiet John. Stephen, Daniel, pick him up and bring him back." Angelica orders.

You are dragged back to the encampment. While it was calm when you left, many fires are now lit and people are coming out of their huts with confused looks on their faces. Two men are restraining Derrick. He looks at you.

"Oh no..." you hear him whisper.

Angelica walks straight towards Derrick and slaps him across the face, knocking him to his knees.

"Do you know what you could have done!?" she shouts. "What would have happened if he attracted some of those unholy creatures before our journey!?"

She slaps him again. He turns his face up towards her with an indignant look.

"He does not deserve this. We have accepted our fate, but he has not even been offered a choice!"

Angelica bends down and glares into his eyes, "It is too late for a choice. The time to act is now! I'm sorry, but we can no longer wait until tomorrow for you two and your treachery."

Angelica walks into her hut and quickly comes back out with two cups of liquid. She walks over to Derrick and holds out a cup to his face. For a few seconds he resists, but eventually his face is covered with defeat. Derrick grabs the cup and gulps down the liquid.

You watch all of this from inside the net you were captured in. Nothing is making any sense, but you're used to that by now. Angelica walks over to you and offers you the cup. Unsure of what to do, you look to Derrick. He makes eye contact for a second, but then turns his sight to the ground.

"John," Angelica begins in her eerily pleasant voice, "It is time. The journey is on you now. There is no turning back."

The men pull back the net so you are able to grab the cup. You feel defeated as well. You don't know what to do. Looking into Angelica's eyes, you don't know if you are looking at your savior or your condemner.

With nothing left to do, you reach out to grab the cup. As you are about to grasp it, Derrick collapses. On the ground, his body remains lifeless and his eyes roll into the back of his head. You quickly pull back your hand, but it's too late. The men around you grab you again and Angelica plugs your nose. You shake your head, but they grab it to hold it steady. You fight, but eventually you have to open your mouth for air and that is when Angelica grabs your jaw and pours in the liquid. You manage to spit some out, but not enough as Angelica holds your mouth and nose shut. Your eyes bulge as you fight the temptation to swallow. The desire to breathe is overwhelming. Objects around you begin to spin and your will power weakens. You swallow. Angelica lets you go and you gasp for air.

"Shhh...", Angelica whispers into your ear.

In your last fits of strength you struggle to get free, but the two men are still holding you down. Your body grows weaker and weaker.

It's getting hard to move at all.

"It's okay John," she says as you begin to weep, "Jesus is waiting for you. He's waiting for all of us."

You have died

You hurry to get up and stumble back to the house you came from. You are going to need something to fight this thing off.

Not far behind you, the monster is coming up faster than you'd expect. When you first saw it, it lumbered around quite slowly, but now it moves as if possessed. While it moves awkwardly, it somehow manages to travel at an efficient pace. You can hear its hissing coming up fast.

When you reach the debris, you quickly spot a wooden beam, not much unlike the ones trapping you so recently. Grabbing one, you spin around to see the monster a few yards back. It mindlessly hobbles toward you as you wind up. Closer... closer...

SMACK.

The blow knocks the head straight back with a sickening crunch. It remains standing for a moment before finally collapsing. Looking down, you see it twitch a handful of times until it finally lays motionless.

You drop your weapon and stumble a few steps backward. You turn, place your hands on your knees, and vomit. Then you vomit again. Everything starts to spin and you fall to the ground unconscious.

...is your number one station for news, weather, and...

"Oh my god!"

...unknown sickness continues to spread...

"I said get down on the ground!"

...shocking footage just received...

"Please no!"

...more at 6:00...

You awake to the sun burning your face. How long has it been? Your head pounds as you sit up, confused. On your right, that thing that used to be a man lies motionless. The flies buzzing around the corpse

assure you it isn't getting back up. The sight of it makes you feel slightly ill again, but you manage to hold it together.

You had hoped it was all just a horrible dream. That monster, your amnesia, everything. Sadly, it appears there is no escape from this world and you are no closer to answering any of your questions.

Your skin is dried and cracked, and your stomach feels like you haven't had anything to eat in days. Maybe you haven't. Who knows how long you were trapped in that house? With the adrenaline subsided, your body again aches all over. A dull sting reminds you of your cut up arm, still bleeding. You need to get out of here.

Managing to get back up on your feet, you examine your surroundings. You are on a residential road that leads in two directions. In one direction, there are more houses. It's your stereotypical suburban neighborhood, except completely massacred. In the other direction, there is a short walk to what appears to be a major road, perhaps a highway. The choice is obvious.

Before you head out, you have to find something to eat and drink if you stand any chance of survival. There are a few houses that remain mostly intact and hopefully one of them has something of use.

A few homes down is the first potential house. You try the door, but it's locked. You toy with the idea of trying to kick your way in, but reason overrides that thought and you decide to peak inside first. You have a gut feeling that there may be more of those monsters running around. Walking around the house peering through the windows, your suspicions are justified. Inside, you spot one of those things mindlessly lumbering around. It doesn't notice you.

Continuing with this strategy, you manage to find two houses that are safe to enter. After an hour or so of searching, you scrounge up a backpack, a few unopened water bottles, some dried fruit, a blanket, a flashlight, and some bandages to patch yourself up. Your first gulp of water stings your throat, but is still amazing (even if it's hot). After just a single bottle you feel rejuvenated and ready to head out.

It only takes a few minutes to reach the end of the road that connects to the highway. A sign stands directly in front of you.

**< Super Mall 1.7 Miles
New Hilstead City Center 183.5 Miles >**

Well that settles that, you think to yourself. A city would be nice, but a mall is just as good. It should at least have some more food and

shelter. And maybe, if you're lucky, there will be some information available to clue you in on what is going on.

As you stare up at the sign, you hear a low rumble coming from your left. Looking down the road, you see a cloud of dust rising from the street. As it gets closer, you can see the sun reflecting off of something... the hood of a vehicle! It's a gray pickup truck, coming right for you.

You are pretty confident that that thing you killed isn't capable of driving, but you are still cautious. You walk into the road, slowly waving your arms in the air to get the driver's attention.

The truck is closing in now, still moving fast. You are sure they will slow down... they'll slow down... they aren't slowing down...

At the last second you leap out of the way and land in the gravel on the side of the road, the truck zooming by you. That was close. As you lay on the ground watching the truck, the break lights illuminate, followed then by the reverse lights. You slowly get back up onto your feet as it backs up toward you. Hesitantly, you walk forward to take a closer look. The truck continues backward until it's right next to you. From inside an older man draws out,

"Mah God man am I sorry!" You'd guess he is in his sixties. He isn't bald, but his hair is gray and thinning.

"I coulda swore you were one of... of... those things." He is wearing blue overalls and a white t-shirt. And, much like yourself, he isn't looking too good. His skin is pale with a yellowish tint and his face is gaunt. Despite that, his spirits seem up.

"But I nev'a seen one of them move like that before. The name's Jackson."

You walk up to the truck and see now that there is someone else sitting in the front seat. A little girl with short red hair. She is sitting quite still, facing forward, as if you aren't even there.

"This here is Abbey," the man tells you, "And what, may I ask, are you doin' out here?"

That, indeed, is the question.

"I... I'm not sure," you respond, "I woke up in one of those houses," you point, "in that neighborhood down there. I was sort of... buried. Then I ran into some sort of, I'm sorry, this sounds crazy, some sort of zombie."

Jackson looks a little bewildered. "What?! Are there any more of them things?" he asks nervously.

"I noticed a couple more, but they seemed locked up pretty well in their houses."

"Hmpf," Jackson grunts. "None of them managed to bite you did they?"

"No. One got pretty close, but I... I took care of it."

"Mah God...," the man sighs in what appears to be relief, "You've seemed to have had yourself quite the adventure. So, where are you headed... um... what did you say your name was again?"

You stand there awkwardly for a few seconds, wondering what you should say. You decide that it'd be best just to get it out in the open.

"Will, I guess," you say reaching into your pocket. "The thing is, I can't remember anything before I woke up in that house. The only reason I even know my name is because I had my wallet." You hand Jackson your driver's license.

Jackson looks at the picture and then stares at you skeptically. "So you're tellin' me that you've got no idea what's happenin'?" he asks you.

"All I know is I woke up under a bunch of rubble, climbed my way out, was attacked by one of those... those things!" you raise your voice now, "And I still have no idea what the hell is going on!"

The man looks a little shocked by your response.

"I... I'm sorry," you say, "I'm just confused and obviously not having a very good day."

"Well," Jackson says, "If what you say is true, then this ain't going to make your day any better." He holds up the driver's license and points to the picture. "That ain't you."

You stare in shock. "What do you mean that isn't me?" you ask, somewhat irked.

"Well, I'm lookin' right at yah and I'm sayin', this ain't you." Jackson leans over to the glove compartment, grabs a small mirror, and hands it to you. Looking in the mirror, it's confirmed. You are not Will Holcomb. You are... this face, yet another you don't recognize.

Because of the distraught look on your face, Jackson drops any skepticism he may have had about your story. "Where you headed?" he asks.

Taking a few seconds to snap out of your confusion, you respond, "I had settled on going to the mall. I managed to gather a little bit of food and water for the journey..." you see Jackson's face light up as you say this, "and figured the mall would be the obvious choice from here."

Jackson thinks for a few seconds and then responds, "Well, I can tell you this. There ain't nothin' back there at that mall for you. We just drove by there and, well, you think what you've been through out here was bad... you ain't seen nothing'. Let me offer you this. Me and Abbey

are heading toward the city right now and apparently there is some sort of refuge set up there. We've got room for another, if you wanna come along, and I could fill you in on what the heck has been happenin'. Only thing is, we're starved. So how about it? You share some of your food and we'll bring you to New Hilstead. We should be there by the end of the day."

Do you have enough food? Can Jackson be trusted?

Go with Jackson pg.35

Go to the mall pg.12

You can't just abandon Abbey and Jackson, not again.

"Alright," you shout to him over the rain, "Just hurry up and get her in the back."

"I need help! She ain't herself! I can't take her alone!" Jackson hollers back to you.

You can't help but think about how bad of an idea this could be as you go over and help Jackson pick up Abbey. Jackson grabs her under her arms and you grab her feet. Abbey is starting to struggle now as the two of you haul her to the backseat of the car. Jackson goes in first and pulls Abbey in with him.

"I'll stay back here with her," he says to you, "She needs me."

"Jackson, I'm not sure if that's a good id--"

"SHUT UP AND DRIVE!"

You try not to let Jackson's tempter get under your skin as you get back in the front seat. You realize now that your only chance is to make it to the city as fast as you can. Maybe there they will have some way to help Abbey. You start up the car and drive as fast as possible toward New Hilstead.

"Don'tchyou worry Abbey," you hear Jackson whispering to Abbey as he pets her hair, "Everything's goin' to be alright."

Your field of vision has declined further since you last drove. Even with your headlights, you can only see a few feet in front of the car. Sporadically, zombies pop in and out of view, sometimes requiring a quick swerve. Wind whirls through your broken window, slamming against your face. The sound of the rain smashing onto the car is deafening as well, only being interrupted by the hissing in the backseat.

"How is she doing back there?" you call back.

Jackson doesn't seem to be in the mood to talk to you. In the rearview mirror you see Jackson trying his hardest to restrain Abbey. She is kicking her feet now, ramming them into your seat and the doors, anything within her reach.

Again, you shout back, "If we're going to have any chance of making it, you are going to have to hold her down better!"

"Don'tchyou... think I'm... tryin'!" Jackson struggles to respond as he grapples with Abbey.

Suddenly another window explodes as Abbey smashes it with her feet. The sound makes you swerve and before you can recover you collide dead on with another zombie. The car skids out and lands in a ditch. You fly forward, smashing your head against the steering wheel, almost knocking you out. Everything is getting dizzy now and pain seers

through your forehead. You hear screaming in the backseat, from Jackson, but you can't react. Your bloody hand fumbles for the door handle and you manage to get it open. Stumbling out, everything is a blur. Blood is pouring out of your forehead and into your eyes. As lightning flashes, you can see zombies all around you, heading your way.

You try to open up the backdoor to get to Jackson, but the sight inside is horrific. His screaming has stopped. Abbey is on top of him now... eating him... Doing the only thing you can possibly think of, you try to run. Your legs don't work like you want them to. You fall over. You try to get up. Your arms aren't working like you want them to. All around there are splashing sounds, gurgling, and hissing. They come at you from all angles. They pounce on top of you and you are trapped. Struggling is no use. You forget about the pain in your forehead as you feel pieces of your flesh being ripped off of you. You try to scream, but all that comes out is a dry croak. Pain overwhelms your body and everything goes dark.

You have died

It kills you inside, but you know if you want to live you are going to once again have to leave Jackson and Abbey behind. Sadly, you walk up to Jackson and place your arm on his shoulder.

"Jackson, I'm sorry. I can't take her with me. I wish you could under--"

Jackson tackles you to the ground. It is shocking, the amount of strength coming from a man his age. He is on top of you now, trying to punch you. You don't want to hurt him. You try to put your arms up to defend yourself, but you can barely lift your right arm now because of the gun shot wound. He lands a few good shots to your face and stands up over you. Your nose may be broken.

He walks to the back of his truck and starts rummaging around. Holding your nose, you sit up to see Jackson pointing a shotgun at you.

"How dare you!" Jackson shouts at you. He shakes fiercely, from fear or anger you cannot tell. "You bastard... GO TO HELL!"

You hear a shot come from the gun and enter the ground a few feet from your head. It makes your heart jump up into your throat. Jackson starts to cry.

"What's happened to this world..." he weeps, "What's happened to me!?"

"Jackson please," you plead with him, "please... calm down. You don't know what you are doing."

He becomes furious again. "Oh! And you do!?" He starts to wave the gun wildly in the air. "Ha! Mr. 'I don't have no memories' all of a sudden knows what's bes--"

Then everything happens very fast, yet somehow it seems in slow motion. Jackson flails his arm around uncontrollably and you hear the gun go off. Next, you see a bullet rip through the truck. A giant fireball erupts from the truck bed, lighting up the world. Fire engulfs Abbey first, then Jackson, and finally you.

You have died

Why even continue?

Because anger is filling your belly. Because you are alone in a world that you have forgotten and has forgotten you. Because you won't let what happened to Jackson, Abbey, and the world happen to you too.

"Because I must," you say to yourself.

As the rain pelts your body you clench your fists. Your sadness slowly turns to rage as you get back onto your feet. The pain that was so prevalent before is washed away by your will to continue. The adrenaline helps too.

A bolt of lightning strikes down furiously in the distance, bringing light to the dark world around you. The zombies here fill the land in all directions for as far as you can see, except one. Not a hundred yards away, to the east, is a stretch of forest that the zombies have little interest in.

Ironically, a few steps ahead of you, is the axe you were so frantically trying to pull free. It must have fallen off the truck with you. You grab your weapon and make your way towards the forest.

Your pace turns from a jog to a run the closer you get to the forest. Dark blurs of moaning figures pass by you. A few get too close, but you take care of them with your axe. Hours ago you'd be scared, but now you are too angry to care. One is hobbling yards away. You could run around, but you instead head straight for it, and viciously hack into its skull. A terrible goo splashes on to your face, accompanied by a just as terrible smell. It bothers you little.

You enter the wooded area. The darkness of the forest makes the highway look like day. You squint in an attempt to see, but your vision cannot penetrate more than a few feet ahead. The longer you travel, the thicker the forest becomes, slowing you immensely.

For hours you continue like this through the blackness. You think of Jackson and Abbey. Their deaths were pointless. There was no reason they should have died. You begin to blame yourself, but you know that won't do you any good. It wasn't you anyways, it was those things. Even without you their fate may have already been sealed.

FWOOP

You feel something whiz by your head and hit the tree next to you. Whatever it was, it's stick out of the tree now. You can't make out what it is, so you use your hand to feel. Long and skinny with a feathery tip... an arrow?

FWOOP FWOOP FWOOP

You dive to the ground as they fly at you from all directions.

Getting back up to run, you try to shout out.

"Stop! Who--"

FWOOP

A scream of pain escapes you as an arrow pierces your left shoulder, causing you to collapse. This can't be good. As you lie on the ground, you try get an idea of the damage using your right hand. Reaching for your shoulder, your hand nicks the arrow (still in your arm you realize) and pain ripples through your arm.

"HOLD!" a commanding voice shouts in the distance.

Everything is catching up to you again in this weakened state. Old pain is resurfacing along with the new. You are incredibly tired and it's hard to move.

There is a rustle from the thicket in front of you, moving your way. You make a weak struggle to move, but in the end it's quite pathetic. You are helpless. Three bodies head toward you and you fear they are zombies. Instead of attacking though, they stand around you and whisper to each other.

"He's of the living," one says.

"Barely," another responds.

"Hold him down, we're bringing him back," a third one says. The voice matches that of the commanding one earlier.

"What!? We can't! Don't you--"

"I was not asking. Now do as I say."

Two sets of arms hold you down. The person in the middle approaches and kneels next to you. You can see now that she is a woman. She puts a hand on your chest and puts her mouth to your ear.

"We're going to take care of you."

Relief runs over you until she, with her other hand, grabs the arrow and yanks with one hard tug. The arrow leaving your body causes such a terrible pain your head spins. Then you pass out.

"Fine, just leave," you hear yourself say.

"I am!" she shouts back.

"Good!"

"That's just like you!"

"Don't tell me who I am!"

"You've never done anything for anyone! You're a leech!"

"Shut up!"

The door slams. She is gone.

A chorus of voices wake you from your sleep. You squint, this time because of the bright sun, as you look around. Your eyes haven't adjusted to the light yet. Slowly, you sit up and try to take a look around.

You are still outside, in the forest, on the hard ground. People roam about performing various tasks. A man and woman are cooking over a fire. Laughing children are running around a tree, obviously playing a game of tag. Many are gathered around makeshift tables, talking amongst themselves. There has to be dozens of people here.

Your shoulder is still in pain. You place your hand to the wound and feel that it is bandaged up under your shirt. Furthermore, you have various other wounds wrapped and taken care of. They fixed you.

"He's awake," you here someone say.

Two people head your way. One you recognize as the woman from the night before. In the light you see she is quite tall with long brown hair. Her skin is pale, but in a way that seems to suit her. Following her is a man, a little shorter and definitely stouter. His hair comically reminds you of a monk's, bald on top with hair around the middle.

"Greetings," she says to you. "My name is Angelica. I must apologize for the misunderstanding last evening."

"Misunderstanding?" you reply with a hint of anger, "You shot me with an arrow!"

"Yes, well," responds the man, "We are not used to the living running towards our encampment. We are used to... protecting ourselves from this new world, I'm sure you understand. My name is Derrick. And who, my friend, might you be?"

The question that seems to plague you is again raised. Who are you? Instead of telling everyone you meet that you don't know who you are, you decide you should settle on a name, at least for now. William Holcomb won't work. You don't want to be someone else. But... what

was his middle name again? Oh yeah, that's right.

"John. My name is John."

"Ah... John," Angelica replies pleasantly, "'The disciple whom Jesus loved.' Come now John, let us show you around our humble sanctuary."

She reaches her hand down to you and you grab it. With surprising strength she helps you up. Upon first movement your muscles ache. It's hard to walk. Derrick and Angelica help you along.

The Sanctuary is amazingly well built. The area has been mostly cleared of trees and brush. There are a number of huts constructed from trees and scrap metal. Many appear to be simply housing, while a few serve other purposes, most notably one with a cross nailed to the top of it. Together the huts create a circle, encompassing the camp. Inside the circle are picnic tables, chairs, a grill, multiple fire pits, and other things that would normally be luxuries this far into the forest.

Along the tops of the surrounding trees you see little ledges of wood constructed. Derrick notices you looking.

"Those are our watchtowers," he explains, "We have them randomly placed throughout the area. Guards armed with bow and arrow take shifts to keep us safe from the undead. Unfortunately... they sometimes make mistakes."

"Why bow and arrow?" you ask.

"Other than the fact that bullets are rare these days? Because the bow and arrow is a quiet and effective weapon. Noise from a gun shot would only attract more undead. Not that it would matter much after tomorrow."

"Derrick!" Angelica says to him sternly. She turns to you and explains, "It is lucky you came when you did John. For tomorrow we will be departing."

You are shocked. "You are leaving this place? Why? It seems you have plenty of reasons to stay here."

"Yes John, but you must realize that we cannot stay here forever. This is but a temporary stop on our long journey."

"But where will you go?"

"It is where WE will go John, for you are now coming with us. And as for where... of course, that will be where God takes us."

Derrick looks on the conversation with a distressed face. Not quite sure how well all of this sits with you, you decide that being with people is better than being alone.

The rest of the day is the most uneventful day you've had yet. You spend hours meeting and talking with new people. From countless

discussions, you learn that many of these people knew each other before the zombie outbreak. They are obviously a very religious folk and attend their church services daily.

Around 3pm, you attend one such service. Turns out that Derrick acts as pastor to their congregation, yet Angelica appears to be the camp leader. Ironically enough, Derrick is very much down to Earth while Angelica seems to be incredibly devout. During the service, Angelica rallied the people in an unfamiliar religious chant as well as encouraged them to have strength for the journey to come. It would be wrong to say Derrick isn't religious, for he obviously is much so, but Angelica is much more passionate.

The evening offers a fabulous dinner, in honor of the last night in the sanctuary. It's the best you've ever remembered eating.

As the sun sets, most everyone heads off to bed. Angelica provides you with your very own hut, complete with a padded bed. You quickly drift off to sleep.

...the street is empty...

...the house barely stands in front of you...

...Holcomb... Holcomb...

...will the floor hold...

...I need more, can't leave yet...

...creeeek...

...that looks valuable...

...so close...

...CRACK...

...CRASH...

...it all falls down...

...darkness...

"John..." someone whispers to you.
You feel groggy. Everything is dark. You are being shaken gently now.

"John, you've got to wake up!" the voice says urgently.
You finally come to and realize it's Derrick. Still lying in bed, you discover it is still the middle of the night.

"What's happening?" you ask Derrick.

"Be quiet! It's time to leave."

"We're leaving now?"

"No, not us, just you."

"What are you talking about?" you respond, quite confused.

"You cannot come where we are going. I have packed a bag with food and other various supplies for you. That should be enough for a few days. Now get up and get out of here."

"But I don't understand! What is--"

"There is no time to explain," Derrick interrupts, "Goodbye John."

Refuse to leave pg.50

Leave pg.18

While your food supply is light, you figure it's a fair trade for a ride to New Hilstead and possibly some information.

"Alright Jackson, sounds like a deal," you say to him with an assuring nod.

"Well alright then!" Jackson replies merrily. He reaches over Abbey and opens up the truck door to let you in. The fit is a little tight, but nothing too uncomfortable. Abbey is sandwiched between the two of you, still staring straight ahead.

"Come on now Abbey," says Jackson, "Why don't you say 'hello' to our new friend?"

"Hello..." Abbey says quite subdued.

Feeling a little awkward and unsure what to say, you ask, "Well Abbey, would you like some food? And maybe some water?"

She looks up at you from her seat and puts out her expectant hand. You smile as you dig through your backpack for a bottle of water and some dried fruit.

"Now don't eat it all at once," you say as you hand the food to her.

Abbey ignores your advice and wolfs down the dried fruit.

"Come now Abbey, say thank you," Jackson tells her.

"Thank you..." Abbey says sheepishly with a mouth full of food.

Jackson gives a little smirk as he starts up the truck again and begins toward the city.

"So I guess you'd like me to start from the beginnin' then?" Jackson asks you.

"Huh? Oh yeah, that would be great," you respond eagerly.

"Well, I don't figure I've got all the facts, not sure if anyone really does. You see, I live... or I should say *lived*... out on a farm. Sort of secluded from everything, you know? Spent most of my days growin' crops and the like. Only real information I was able to gather was from the evenin' news.

"I'd say it all started a couple a months ago or so, kind of hard to say really. It wasn't anything big or dramatic, just a few blurbs on the television. People gettin' sick and what not. I don't know... guess I just assumed it was one of those things you hear about all the time, somethin' you just don't think about. And I mean, it was just so far off too. Africa, Asia, nowhere close. Just a few sick people started actin' all funny. You know, scratchin' and bitin'. No one had any real information. Just one of them crazy things.

"Slowly but surely it became more than just a couple'ah news footnotes. Started gettin' some real air time. No one knew where it

came from, but that didn't matter 'cause the sickness started spreadin'. Soon it made it over to the states and hospitals started to fill up. All of a sudden we had an epidemic on our hands! Sick people attackin' the healthy, infectin' them. No matter what doctors tried, it seemed no one could stop this disease.

"The government was trying to keep things orderly, but that wasn't happenin'. This sickness was just gettin' too outta control. They tried quarantinin' off, what people now took to callin', the zombies, but they couldn't be stopped. The infection had already spread too much. And to make things worse, normal people were losing it too! I'd say just as many terrible things were happenin' between normal folk. Survival of the fittest and all that.

"Then I'd have to say it was June 6th when things got real bad, or at least that's what I'd guess. That's the day when I lost power. And if I'm losin' power out on mah farm, thing's ain't lookin' too good. I was able to use the generator to get some electricity, but it didn't matter. There weren't no more TV stations broadcasting, same goes for radio. All that was left was a recording that kept repeating the same thing over and over."

Jackson flips on the truck radio.

--EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM. REMAIN CALM. PROCEED TO CLOSEST MAJOR URBAN CITY FOR REFUGE. FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE PROVIDED UPON ARRIVAL. THIS IS THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM...

"Oh my God..." you mumble, leaning forward and putting your hands on your face. "The world has been destroyed and... and... overrun by zombies!?"

"Yeah, well, it ain't too pretty, that's for sure," replies Jackson, "but I haven't given up on the world yet."

Jackson's story leaves you in a state of shock. You lay your head back against your seat, distraught, and look into the sky. Dark clouds have rolled in. There is a crack of thunder. Rain drops begin to pelt the window as you doze off into sleep.

...reports are coming in from major cities on the West Coast that the infection...

"Please don't hurt us!"

...It slices! It dices!...

"Just do it! Now!"

...victims may appear dead, but authorities warn that...

BLAM BLAM

...and the European Union is holding an emergency...

"What have I done?"

"Shhh... now now... it's goin' to be okay..."

"...come 'ere, let grandpa hold yah. There there Abbey, it's okay..."

Abbey's sobs wake you from your sleep. Jackson has an arm around her, comforting her. Looking out the window again, things have grown much darker. Rain pounds the roof of the truck. Headlights barely break through the darkness in front of the truck as it travels down the highway. A bolt of lightning illuminates the road, revealing a zombie standing not far off in the distance, directly in front of the truck.

"Jackson..." you say in anticipation as the car soars toward the monster.

You look over and notice he isn't paying attention, instead too busy consoling Abbey to look up.

"JACKSON! LOOK OUT!"

Jackson jerks both hands back to the wheel and pulls it hard to the left, slamming on the breaks. The truck tires screech as they slide across the wet pavement. Abbey screams. The truck bed swings around your side uncontrollably and smashes into the zombie as you come to a stop.

"Jesus..." mutters Jackson, "Good eyes there son. Who knows what would have happened if you weren't around. Jesus..."

Abbey is clutching onto Jackson. You open your door to take a look back at the damage. Barely able to make it out, a zombie lies face down on the ground. Slowly, it starts to move again, moaning as it struggles to use an arm to pull itself up.

"We're not out of the woods yet. Can you still drive?" you impatiently ask Jackson.

"Uhh... yeah... yeah..." Jackson huffs, coming out of a daze.

The zombie grabs onto the truck and secures its grip to the truck bed.

"Then I suggest we go now!" you shout.

You slam the door shut as Jackson gets the truck in motion again. The truck clumsily swings back onto the road. You look back and, in frustration, see that the zombie is still holding on. As the truck speeds up, the zombie's feet drag along the pavement. Unaffected, it uses its hands to shift toward your door.

You frantically look around the cabin for something, anything to knock the zombie off.

"Jackson, we need to get this thing off the truck or we're all dead!"

"I... uh... if you can get in the back," Jackson hesitates, "I'm packin' a shotgun. I think if you can get through the window it shouldn't be too har--"

SCREECH

Your shoulder slams into the door as the car swerves unexpectedly. Another zombie whizzes by.

"Sorry 'bout that," Jackson replies to your look. "Seems to be more of 'em out there. There's also an axe under your seat. Maybe you should try that instead."

Axe pg.5
Shotgun pg.55

You grip the steering wheel hard and swing the car around to face the wall of zombies hobbling toward you. Overhead, there is a crack of thunder and rain begins to pour down. You rev your engine and wait for the opportune moment to strike. They slowly come toward you and you see a weakness. To the right, only a few of them stand between you and the door. Flooring the gas, you fly toward them. You swerve left and right through the mass, avoiding zombies when possible.

CLUNK

Some blood spurts into the air as you swipe one with the front end of your car. You skid a little bit but manage to keep going.

CLUNK CLUNK

More blood flies. This is harder than you imagined, but you are still going. You are almost to the door when suddenly you realize a few zombies unavoidably stand directly in your path. Bracing yourself, you smash into three of them. Two go flying, but one you hit dead center and it stays on the hood of the car. Swerving back and forth, you attempt to throw it off, but with no success. Slamming into a few more you lose control and begin to spin out. Your car is heading straight for the doors. Out of the corner of your eye you see the man running away as your vehicle crashes into the glass entrance. The zombie soars forward off the hood and skids into the mall. You are a little shaken up by the crash, but you manage to escape the car and get into the mall. Down the mall hallway you see the stranger and you run toward him.

"No no no! What have you done?!" the man shouts at you. Looking back, the zombies are pouring through the door and over the car like a leaky facet. That can't be good.

He is still holding his gun and lifts it up to shoot.

"ZOMBIE BASTARDS!!!" he shouts.

You barely have time to jump to the floor as he unloads into the crowd. You crawl toward him as bullets zip over you.

The firing stops and he yells at you, "Come on!"

You get up off the floor and run toward him. He is fast. He darts around a corner. It's getting harder to follow him. You see him slip into a store and you run in after him, stumbling to the floor. As soon as you are in he slams down the gate and locks it. Your shoulder is really bleeding now and you are surprised you made it this far.

"I'll be right back!" the man says as he runs somewhere into the back of the store.

You look around and can't make out what type of store you are in. It has obviously been renovated by this guy. For the most part there are

empty shelves, but you do see some weapons lying around and a sleeping bag on the floor. He runs back into the room with some gauze and a brown bottle. He kneels over you and pours the liquid on your shoulder. It stings and bubbles up around your gunshot wound. He wipes it off and wraps some gauze around it.

"I'm really sorry about that man... I'm not used to seeing the living," he says to you as he finishes up. His mood seems to have calmed now that you two are alone. His voice sounds more relaxed and he is breathing slower.

"Yeah well," you answer, "I busted down your door, so I guess we can call it even."

"Yeah... We're going to have to do some--"

He gets cut off by a loud hiss as the zombies finally make it to the gate outside the store. For now, it seems, the gate is enough to hold them off.

"I'll show them..." he says as he stands back up and grabs his gun. He starts laughing again.

"Hey!" you interrupt, "I think it's OK for now. Just let th--"

"Shut up!" He shouts back at you. His eyes are almost glowing with anger. He turns toward the door and starts firing at the zombies through the gate.

CLANG CLANG CLANG

Bullets ricochet off the gate and fly around the room. A few manage to get through, splattering blood and puss as zombies fall. The sound inside is almost deafening and you see the gate is starting to lose some stability from the gun fire.

You slowly get back to your feet, which is much harder than usual. "This isn't doing anything! You are going to kill us both!" you yell to him over the noise.

"I said SHUT UP!" he yells, turning to you. He kicks you right in the gut. You fall back to the ground in pain. Anger now floods through your body as he begins to fire again. The gate is starting to fall now and he just keeps laughing. Adrenaline pumps through your body and the pain seems to go away. In an attempt to stop him from destroying the gate, you lunge at him, tackling him to the ground. You are both wrestling over the gun now as it keeps firing off into the air uncontrollably. Everything is out of control. You have no idea what is going on anymore.

TUKTUKTUKTUKTUK

Pain rips through your body and the firing finally stops. You look

down and your are bleeding in every place imaginable. The man crawls back in shock and everything starts spinning. All of your senses begin to dull. You see the gate collapse and zombies pour into the room. They pounce onto the man on the floor and you hear screaming, but it sounds far away. You are so sleepy. They are coming for you now. Closer and closer. Then there is only black.

You have died

"Let's keep going up Main Street," you respond.

As the truck heads up hill, you can tell you are entering the nicer, or what used to be the nicer, part of town. High end clothing stores, fancy restaurants and the like are abundant. But now they merely look like everything else. Looted, destroyed, and worthless.

As the truck reaches what appears to be the pinnacle of Main Street, you see giant cement blockades obstructing the road. There is no way around. The only reason the three of you don't turn around is a giant sign above:

**NOW ENTERING REFUGEE CAMP #36A.
VEHICLES PROHIBITED BEYOND THIS POINT.**

"What does it say grandpa?" asks Abbey.

"It says we're here darlin'," answers Jackson, "If there's anything *here* at all I suppose."

"I guess it's on foot from here then," you say.

The three of you load up. Jackson points you to more ammunition for the shotgun so you can reload it. You grab it and do so, as well as sling the backpack over your shoulder. You take out your flashlight and turn it on. Jackson picks up Abbey and the three of you head through the blockade.

The road again leads down into what appears to be a city park, but it's so dark it's hard to tell. The scenery here differs somewhat from the rest of the city. Instead of looted and bullet ridden buildings, there are trees and even more chain linked fencing. It doesn't take long to reach the park and what you expect to be the refugee camp.

Cupping your hands around your mouth you shout, "Hello?"

No answer. The only sound comes from a rusty swing on a lonely jungle gym.

You can make out a giant spotlight close to you, obviously not working. Yet, it does seem to be attached to some sort of generator.

"You think it still works?" Jackson asks predicting your next move.

"Only one way to find out..." you say.

You feel around the generator for any sort of switch. Eventually you find a big lever and pull down on it. A low hum grows from inside as loud cracks erupt from all around. Spotlights circling the park turn on, revealing the refugee camp.

Tents ranging from small to house size are lined up and down the park. Many of them have rips and tears on them. Some even have some

blood. The park itself has a spattering of trees and benches, but is still very much a city park. Chain linked fence attempts to surround the outside, but is breached in multiple places.

Jackson puts Abbey down and the two of you begin to search the tents for any sign of life. In one tent, you are disgusted to find a decomposing body, headless. The smell of rot fills the tent and you can only stay inside for a few seconds.

Inside another tent you find a slew of hospital beds. Surgical equipment is flung around. Blood is everywhere. You notice the beds have restraints on them, many of which appear to have been broken. Abbey screams from outside.

Rushing out, you see her standing and looking up at Main Street. Jackson is also running to her and gets there first.

"Grandpa! Grandpa! Look!" she shrieks in fear.

Abbey is pointing up the street you just walked down. A few hundred yards away is a single figure you can barely make out, stumbling down the hill. A zombie.

"Oh no..." Jackson murmurs. "What'er we goin' to do?"

You think for a few seconds.

"Alright, we need to stay calm," you instruct, "Obviously, this is no refugee camp, at least not anymore. We've got to get out of here. There is only one zombie in between us and the truck. If we stick together, we can get by it. Once we're back to the truck, we get the hell out of here."

Jackson nods, seemingly trying to convince himself it's going to be okay.

"We can do it... okay... let's go." he says.

"Grandpa no! I'm scared!" Abbey cries and she hugs Jackson.

"No time to be scared now Abbey. It's gonna be okay." he reassures her, although you think it didn't help much. He again picks her up.

The three of you head back up Main Street, with you taking the lead, shotgun in hand. You are hoping you can avoid using it, but if needed you will.

As you head up, the zombie follows your path, slowly heading to intercept you. You move to the other side of the street and the zombie mimics your movement.

"We're going to have to make a break for it," you say to Jackson and Abbey, "We'll all head to the far side of one street, wait for it to follow, then run around the other side. Hopefully we're faster."

Jackson nods in understanding.

As you all head for the left side of the street, the zombie lumbers over as well. The zombie is almost all the way to the left... now! The three of you dash up and around to the right. The monster catches on and with surprisingly quick speed hobbles over directly for you. You aren't going to make it around. You raise the shotgun and pull the trigger twice.

BLAM BLAM

Two shots rip through the zombie's leg and abdomen. It topples over and lands a few feet in front of you, writhing around on the ground.

HISSSS HACK

Squirts of a puss are ejected from its wounds as it makes horrible noises. It isn't finished, but you've got to keep moving.

"John..." Jackson says to you, "Maybe that wasn't such a good idea..."

You look back up at the top of Main Street where the blockades are and you see zombies starting to pour over it. Damn. The shotgun blast must have made them aware of your presence.

Okay... Okay... you try to think frantically. More ammo, we've got more ammo, we just need to... oh no...

More and more zombies continue to climb over the barricade. More than you can count. There's no way you'll ever take them all out in time. You quickly turn to Jackson.

"Jackson!"

"Yeah, I know. Run!"

You and Jackson run at full speed down the hill and back into the park. Hundreds of zombies pour down the street chasing after you. Running through the park now, you have to dodge around trees. Zombies envelop the path behind you like a plague. Jackson is falling behind. The weight of Abbey and his age are catching up with him. You run back to help.

"Let me carry her!" you shout, running next to him now.

"No! I don't need no help from..." he stops, hesitates, and says, "Alright, alright, here take her..."

"Nooo..." Abbey struggles, holding onto Jackson as you try to take her.

"Abbey, it's okay," Jackson tells her, "We can all get away faster if John carries you. You can trust him Abbey, he's a good man."

Abbey loosens her grip and allows you to take her. Without her weight on him, Jackson is able to pick up the pace.

The park grows darker as you get further and further away from

the generator lights and into trees. Brush and branches slow your running to a jog. Up ahead you see a clearing.

"We're almost out of this!" you turn to say to Jackson, but he's gone.

You stop and look around.

"Did you see where he went Abbey?" you ask frantically.

"I don't know... I don't know..." she shakes her head fearfully, realizing he is gone.

"John! I'm here!" you hear Jackson call a ways back.

You slowly head back to where you heard Jackson's voice. Terribly, you also hear the sounds of hundreds of zombies treading through the forest, heading your way. The collective sound of them is horrible, like an ocean of spewing, hissing, and moaning. There isn't much time.

Seconds later you find Jackson lying in the brush, looking forlorn.

"Jackson what happened?" you ask impatiently.

"My leg," he says, "It's broken. This is it John, this is what you promised me."

"No Jackson, no! I won't, I--"

"Dammit John, this ain't the time! You've got to go! Now!"

**Leave Jackson behind pg.48
Bring him with pg.7**

The man is waving at you to come forward as you stare at him from inside the car. Although he may have good intentions, he did just shoot you in the shoulder. Plus, there are about a hundred of those things between you and him. You figure your best bet is to just forget about him and head back toward the city. Hopefully, the fabled refuge camp will be set up there.

You push the gas to the floor and speed out of the mall parking lot, back onto the road from which you came. In your rearview mirror you see the man quickly get back inside the mall. The zombies forget about you and turn their attention back toward him.

Above you hear a crack of thunder and rain pours down. You mess with a few buttons and flip a few switches. Finally you manage to turn on your headlights and windshield wipers. As you head back through the hills, you realize how much shorter this distance really was. In mere minutes you are through the hills and back onto the straight road heading for the city.

Your shoulder is hurting pretty bad now. Taking a quick look around, you figure it is safe enough to pull over to tend your wound. You open your backpack and take out some bandages. Rolling up your sleeve, the shoulder looks pretty bad. Really, there isn't much you can do. You wrap up your shoulder as best you can and get back on your way.

The sky is becoming darker by the minute as a massive storm rolls through. It's getting harder and harder to see. It doesn't help either that you are driving with a shattered window right next to you either. You manage to catch a glimpse of a sign as you speed by it. You remember it from before.

**< Super Mall 1.7 Miles
New Hilstead City Center 183.5 Miles >**

It's amazing how much faster this all is by car. You have about a half a tank of gas. You hope that it will be enough to get you there.

As you drive, lightning flashes off in the distance that illuminates the world for a split second. Each time this happens, you think you see people in the distance. Only now you are starting to recognize them as zombies. Another flash and far away you see one. Things continue like this for awhile as you drive. A flash of lightning and a zombie or two looms around you.

Your mind races as you drive, trying to put all the pieces together.

Waking up in a destroyed neighborhood, the amnesia, and of course, the zombies. Nothing seems to make sense. The world is like a bad dream, a nightmare.

About an hour passes before you can make out something ahead of you. It looks like a vehicle took a tumble off into a ditch. The taillights are still on and some smoke is rising from the hood. Figuring this is nothing but bad news, you decide to just drive by. But, as you pass the vehicle, you recognize it. It's a gray pickup truck. Jackson and Abbey. You turned your back on these people once. You won't do it again.

You slam on your breaks and rush out of the car. It's raining so hard you are instantly soaked.

"Jackson!" you shout over the sound of the pouring rain. "Jackson! Abbey!"

As you approach the car, you see Jackson huddled next to Abbey, cradling her, leaning on the truck. There is a zombie lying next to them, barely recognizable as human. It appears to have been hacked to death. Jackson is covered in blood and an axe is lying next to him.

"Jackson... what happened?" you ask him. Slowly, he turns his head toward you and you see the anger raging through his body.

"You..." he says with more contempt than you've ever heard. As he moves toward you, you see that Abbey is twitching. Her eyes have rolled back into her head and her skin is pale. There are multiple bites along her body and she is making moans reminiscent of zombies.

You have no idea what to do. It's obvious that Abbey is becoming one of those things now. You have to get away.

"Jackson, we've got to get out of here. I managed to find a car. You can come with me to New Hilstead."

"I ain't goin' nowhere without my Abbey! You would just abandon her wouldn't you!? You abandon people so easily don'tchyou?" You think of the man at the mall. "Well I ain't goin' to let yah abandon her twice!"

"Don't you see," you try to reason with him, "that she's... she's becoming one of those things! Just look at her! If we bring her along we'll end up like that too!"

"I DON'T CARE! Either take us both or leave me here to die. I... I just don't care anymore..."

Leave them pg.28
Take them with pg. 26

It saddens you, but you know Jackson is right. You have to leave him behind to save Abbey, to save yourself.

You put Abbey down and she runs to Jackson, hugging him.

"Goodbye Abbey," Jackson struggles to say.

"Nooo..." Abbey cries into Jackson's shoulder as she grabs him with all her might, "I don't want to say goodbye!"

Jackson is obviously crying now too. "Stay with John. He'll protect you. Grandpa loves you Abbey."

Seeing the zombies grow closer, you realize there is no more time. It takes all of your strength, both physically and mentally, to pull Abbey off of Jackson. She fights and screams in resistance, but you manage to haul her off and into your arms.

"No..." she whimpers, reaching out a hand to Jackson.

You take one last look at Jackson, fighting back tears yourself. No words are spoken. Looking into his eyes, you see his moment of sadness turn into resolve. You did what needed to be done. You turn and run.

With only Abbey in your arms, you are able to move swiftly through the rest of the park. The wave of zombies behind you grow quieter as you make up some distance. The trees become sparse again as you exit the park and are once again back on a paved street that runs perpendicular to your position.

Without thinking you head left and start running. Perhaps, your mind races, you can find your way back up and around to the truck. Behind you, the horde of zombies flow out of the park, blocking any return path. They still have their sights set on you.

The road weaves left and right. As you dart right around one of the bends, you stop dead in your tracks. A few hundred yards ahead the road is filled with zombies. Hundreds of them, just lumbering around with seemingly no purpose. No purpose, that is, until they see you. Almost like they share one mind, they all begin to trudge your way.

There is no way out. All of the buildings form an interlocking prison with you in the middle. From both sides zombies close in. You are surrounded.

Is this how it ends? you think to yourself. Are you destined to die like this? Eaten by zombies while only having a couple days worth of memories? And worse, you've let Jackson down and taken Abbey with you. What was the point of even waking up if it just led to this?

As the zombies close in around you, a small rumble arises from the distance. You think nothing of it at first, but it slowly grows louder and louder. It finally grabs your attention and you turn your head around to

look, but you don't see anything.

Suddenly, down the street, you hear that terrible sound of zombies hissing and gurgling. They sound quite upset over something. The rumbling grows louder and you start to see zombies being thrown into the air by the hundreds. It is like a wave of zombies moving toward you, and fast.

What the hell?

Finally you are able to make out what is happening. Two snow plows driving side by side are heading straight down the road, bulldozing zombies from their path. A glimmer of hope emerges from inside you. You have to get their attention.

The shotgun. You point it into the sky and fire off two shells. Then you drop the gun and start to wave your free arm around, hoping to get them to notice you.

The plows keep on coming at full speed. You're getting worried. If they don't see you...

The trucks break through the final layer of zombies and keep on coming. Fear shoots through your body for an instant, and you almost turn to run, when you notice they are pulling to opposite sides of you. As they spread, you see vehicles behind them. Some cars, a camper, you aren't sure how many, but they are people! Living people!

The trucks barely pass around you, reforming their position, and continue to plow the zombies behind you.

An RV pulls up next to you and stops. You are overwhelmed with emotions: joy, confusion, happiness, bewilderment. The door opens and a new feeling surfaces, shock.

A man, a man you recognize, is standing there with his hand out.

"Come on," he commands, "We've got to get you two out of here."

Not knowing what to say, you hand Abbey up to him first. She resists at first, which warms your heart a bit. He reaches out his hand for you next.

"My name is Will," he says, "Will Holcomb."

"I'm..." you hesitate, "John."

"Funny," he says with a smile, "That's my middle name."

Congratulations, you have survived

"I'm not leaving," you declare.

"It is not open to debate John. You must leave immediately,"
Derrick responds.

"No! I won't! I am tired of running. I am tired of being on my own. Do you think this world has anything to offer me? Do you think I have somewhere to go? Well guess what, I don't! I didn't tell any of you this, but I don't even know who I am! I have no memory of my life beyond a few days ago. The only other people I've ever known I watched explode. So don't you tell me I have to leave and that I can't come with you! I have nothing Derrick... nothing."

A great sadness runs over Derrick's face. He looks as if he is about to protest your decision, but decides not to.

"So be it John. Your choice is made."

Without another word Derrick exits your hut. Perplexed, you lie down and fall back asleep.

The next morning you awake surprisingly well rested. As you leave your hut, there is a sense of excitement in the air. People are hustling about, undoubtedly eager for this great journey you've heard so much about. Only Derrick looks to have a bit of sadness.

A man walks by you who you think is named Daniel.

"Hey John, where you going?" he asks.

"I was just going to go get some breakfast." you reply.

"What? No no... come on now, we've all got to meet up now for our journey. This way John."

You follow Daniel to where everyone is gathering. Angelica is in the center standing on a platform raised a few feet above everyone else. A handful of people are handing out drinks to everyone in the audience. Eventually you get yours.

"Attention everyone," Angelica calls from the center. "Please, attention!"

A hush comes over the crowd. A few adults are seen shushing their children, who also have cups in hand.

Angelica begins by raising her own drink in the air, "Jesus gives us strength! To the journey before us!" and she drinks down the liquid. Everyone around you does the same, including Derrick across the way. The parents help the children drink all of theirs. You follow suit and drink yours. Tastes bad, you think.

Angelica continues, "It is now that we may begin our great trek away from this horrible world. I admire each and every man, woman, and child before me for the strength they have shown throughout these horrible times. But now, we will soon be free of this world and these bodies."

A bolt of panic shoots through you as you glance at the bottom of your empty cup.

"And of course, we must all thank Jesus for the strength He has given us during these times. For he has chosen us and we have survived. Now it is our time to join Jesus in the great beyond. May I see you all in the next world."

You start to feel dizzy and weak. Around you, others begin to topple over onto the ground, the little ones first. You see Derrick trying not to cry, but failing. Angelica falls off of her podium and lands awkwardly on the ground, a smile on her face. Your legs wobble beneath you as you stumble and fall. The sounds around you begin to echo and fade into the distance. Your vision grows darker and darker. So this is how it ends, you think. In a world full of zombies, this is how you die.

You have died

Jackson is running toward the truck, so you chase after him. You quickly catch up to him and pull at the shotgun he is carrying.

"What'er you--" he yells as you yank free the shotgun from his grip.

Jackson just looks at you like you've lost your mind and then continues to run back to the truck. That's okay, you think, you'll save them.

Turning back down the alley you grip the shotgun fiercely. The zombies are still too far to shoot at. You begin to walk towards them, gun pointed at their heads. Behind you, the truck peels away.

I'm not a murderer, you think. You start to run down the alley toward the zombies.

BLAM

The zombie on the left's shoulder disintegrates, but remains standing.

I'm not a murder!

BLAM

Its head disappears and the monster's body collapses. The other is unaffected and continues toward you.

As you race straight at the zombie, you turn the shotgun around and grab it like a baseball bat. You are close now. You notice you are screaming as if in battle. You swing with all your might at the zombie.

CLUNK

The shotgun handle collides with the zombie's skull, fracturing both. A terrible liquid spews from its head onto you as it stumbles about, trying not to fall over. You raise the shotgun again to lay another blow down, but another zombie comes crashing down on you from above. Your body smacks the ground unbearably hard from the weight of the monster. You feel another zombie land on top, sending another pulsing blow through your body.

They begin to scratch and bite at your back. Adrenaline gives you enough strength you fight them off briefly and get onto your back. Looking up, you see a balcony and another zombie crawling over the railing. It jumps. You try to move out of the way, but there are too many to fight off on the ground. The zombie lands on your chest, knocking the wind out.

The world begins to spin as you struggle for breathes in between the monsters' chomps at your flesh. Pain flows easily through your body and you grow cold. You stare up at the sky. Numbness from your wounds overtake your body.

I'm not a murderer, you think.
So cold, but no more pain. And then no more feeling at all.

You have died

You stare blankly. Falling to your back again, you let the rain hit your face. Faintly, the sounds of undead are lurching your way. You close your eyes and tears run down your cheeks.

"I give up," you admit. You begin to shake all over. Whether it's due to fear or pain, you aren't sure.

"Always taking the easy way out. Of course you'd do that. If you've done it once, you've done it a thousand times.' That's what Fran would always say. I guess she was--"

Your eyes bolt open as you jerk back up. FRAN! You remember her. She... she was--

A zombie jumps on top of you and your thoughts become tangled. You struggle to fight it off but another one joins from the other side. You feel them bite into your flesh but your mind is elsewhere. In your last moments, you say the one name you remember from your past life.

"Fran.... Fran..."

You have died

"That's alright," you say, "I'll try my luck with the shotgun. We might need it later anyways."

You slide open the window hatch to crawl into the truck bed. From the window you can see the zombie's hands clinging to the side, slowly inching closer.

"Hey!" Jackson interrupts, "Remember to be careful where you're shootin' that thing. We're loaded up with gasoline back there."

"Isn't that a little... dangerous?" you ask.

SCREECH SCREECH

The truck abruptly swerves from side to side as Jackson dodges another zombie in the road.

"I can think of a few things more so," Jackson responds.

It's a tight fit, but you manage to squeeze out the back and into the truck bed. Your body is instantly pelted by the pouring rain, which makes it hard to see in the already dark world.

Tanks of gasoline fill nearly the entire truck bed. Jackson wasn't kidding. Now where is that gun? You shove some tanks around and see something long wrapped in tarp.

HACK SPLSHSHSHH

The zombie emits a terrible noise that reminds you of someone spewing up phlegm. You can see its hands edging ever closer to your door. You quickly unwrap the shotgun and ready it. There isn't any more ammo in sight, so you'll only get a couple shots at this.

You stumble your way towards the edge of the truck. Peering over the edge you see the horrible creature. It's quite upset to see you, but apparently doesn't have the strength to get into the back of the truck. Its face is covered in boils and its feet have been nearly eroded away by the friction with the road. The zombie looks at you with its colorless eyes as you aim the barrel at its face. Looking at the monstrous being, you hesitate. Then you pull the trigger.

SCREEEEECH

The shotgun goes off into the air as you fly backwards, landing painfully onto some gas tanks. Abbey screams inside the truck. As you scramble to get up, you notice at your feet that the zombie has dropped one hand off the truck. Instinctively you kick at the remaining hand with your foot. Over and over you kick, but disgustingly all you notice is its skin coming off. The combination of rain and decay seems to have made the skin quite weak. By the time you realize it isn't working you can see bone.

Securing the shotgun in your hands again, you pick yourself up for

one last shot. The truck is skidding around on the wet road as it avoids numerous roaming zombies. This time you hold the gun in one hand and stabilize yourself with the other. You lean over the edge again and point the shotgun at the zombie's head. But this time you don't hesitate to pull the trigger. The zombie's skull horrifically explodes as you hit it at pointblank range. Pieces of it land on you as the zombie's body falls off the truck and disappears into the dark.

You throw the shotgun into the truck cabin as you crawl back inside. Your heart is thumping wildly in your chest as you reposition yourself into the seat.

"Got him." you say in relief, lying your head against the back of the seat. "I got him."

Luckily, the next few hours are uneventful, but slow. The zombies seemed to have been roaming only that one particular area, as none have been around for hours. Instead, an abundance of abandoned vehicles has greatly slowed the journey to the city. Jackson often has to take the truck off road just to get around them.

The time is mostly passed by Jackson's talking. Apparently Jackson lived out on a farm by himself for quite some time. A retired widower, Jackson spent most of his time fixing up his old farmhouse and keeping up with hobbies. When the outbreak (as Jackson now took to calling it) began, his daughter Molly's family, Abbey's parents, came to him for help. Sadly, Molly was already infected with the disease, slowly becoming a zombie. Her husband, Frank, begged Jackson to take Abbey to the city for protection. Knowing it was the only way to protect Abbey, Jackson grievously left Molly and Frank behind.

Obviously, Jackson didn't put everything as bluntly as that, with Abbey sitting next to him, but that is what you were able to put together from his talk.

"Well, looks like it's time to fill'er up," Jackson says to you. "Why don't you come an' help me, er..., you really need to come up with a name."

"I think I have," you reply.

At first you thought about just going by Will Holcomb. Who knows where he is and how much would it really matter? But, you decide you don't want to live someone else's life, but instead start anew. Thus, you decide to use William Holcomb's middle name instead, and make it your

own.

"John," you say to Jackson, "You can call me John."

"Alright then, John it is! I'm gonna need some help liftin' that whole gas tank there. You sit tight now Abbey."

The two of you step out of the truck to refuel. The rain has stopped now, but the sky is still just as dark. The sun has set. You take out your flashlight and find your way to the back of the truck where Jackson is unloading some gasoline.

"We're almost there," Jackson says to you in a serious tone.

"Really? I can't see anything."

"Yes well, normally I'd imagine that from 'ere we'd see some of them city lights and what not... but with out electricity that obviously ain't happenin'. But I would think that, due to how long we've been drivin', we can't be more than an hour or so away."

You can tell by Jackson's voice that something is on his mind.

"That's a good thing though... right?" you inquire.

"Well... here's the thing. I'm gonna be straight up with yah. If we get there, and there ain't no refugee camp, I'm not gonna be surprised. I'm not sayin' it ain't there, I'm just sayin'. And if that happens John, I gotta rely on you."

You pick up the fuel tank as Jackson unscrews the hole.

"Wait a second, if the camp isn't there Jackson why can't we just keep on going? I mean, we've got plenty of fuel here to get half across the country."

You stick the end of the tank into the truck and begin to fill it up.

"Because if there's nothin' there," Jackson explains, "we're gonna be in a whole lotta trouble. Just think 'bout it. What we saw a few hours ago, all those zombies roamin' around... that was nothin' compared to what we'll see if that city ain't under control.

"I ain't no scientist, you can bet on that, but I know how diseases work. They thrive on big populations. That's how they spread. Ain't goin' to be poppin' up all over the place without people to carry it. And big cities, like the place we're headed, well, their just full of people waitin' to get infected."

Jackson motions to you that the tank is full and you finish pouring gasoline into the truck.

Thinking about what Jackson just said, you ask, "What do we do then? If that's what we find I mean."

"It doesn't take a genius to see that I'm gettin' old. If we get into any trouble, and I'm holdin' you back, you've got to promise to leave me

behind. But not Abbey. It ain't fair that she has to grow up in a world like this. So you've also got to promise me you ain't goin' to leave *her* behind. No matter what happens to me."

You see in his eyes that Jackson has already made up his mind and nothing you say will change it.

"Alright Jackson," you hesitantly say, "I promise."

Jackson was right. It only takes forty-five minutes to reach the city. The sign has seen better days.

Welco-- -o -ew Hilste--

The skyscrapers shoot up high into the night sky where they eventually disappear into the darkness. Cars, crashed and overturned, scatter the roads. Windows are cracked and shattered. Buildings all around are bullet ridden. A chain linked fence stretches as far as you can see around the city edge, but it's no longer intact. The fence has toppled over in many spots, and in some cases is entirely missing. Beyond the howling of the wind there is a disconcerting lack of activity.

"My God..." mumbles Jackson.

"Grandpa..." Abbey tugs on Jackson's arm, "Where is everybody? Where are all the helpers?"

"I don't know honey... we'll try to find them."

Jackson slowly drives the truck around the broken vehicles down what was once Main Street. You squint out the window, with only the aid of the trucks high beams, looking for any sign of life, or lack there of. You see none.

Up ahead, Main Street cuts right and goes uphill while James Place is a slight left heading down. Jackson slows the truck down.

"Well, which way?" he asks you.

Up Main Street pg.42
Down James Place pg.9

No, you think to yourself, you must hold back your anger and get to safety.

You and Jackson, with Abbey in hand, dash back to the truck. Seeing your haste, the zombies quicken their speed toward you.

With the three of you back in the truck, Jackson starts it up and floors the gas. Speeding down James Place, you notice more and more undead movement from behind. Zombies, noticing your activity, are starting to flow out of the alleys.

"Oh my God," you say, "There are so many of them."

Thousands seems to have been awakened and heading your way. The truck speeds almost uncontrollably down, down, down the winding road.

"John..." Jackson says apprehensively.

You turn forward to see a crowd of zombies at the bottom of the road. The truck is going way too fast.

"Oh no..." you whisper.

"Grandpa!" Abbey screams in terror.

"Grandpa loves you Abbey..." Jackson replies gravely.

Jackson turns the wheel in an attempt to avoid the inevitable. It's no use. The speed causes the truck to flip and tumble down the hill towards the mass of zombies. Tanks of gasoline go flying, spilling everywhere. The truck eventually begins to skid and sparks shoot up, causing the gasoline to erupt in a blaze of flames. It plows into the zombies. Seemingly unaffected by the fire, they pile onto and into the truck. They begin to pick at the bodies of Jackson, Abbey, and yourself. But luckily, in haste, the three of you forgot to put on your seatbelts. You died as soon as the truck flipped.

You have died