

LURKER STATION

The night had caught them. And it was dark, from pole to pole. The land was arid, barren, without shade.

A man was hoofing it across the Antarctic ice sheet. His gait was more of an awkward tramp. He wore extreme cold weather gear. Ice crystals formed on the edges of his face. The crawlies, wind driven snow at ground level, snaked across his bunny boots. Above him danced the lights of the aurora australis. They glittered like the love of God, cold and afar.

A siberian husky paced next to him. The dog periodically watched him. Then he would scan the menacing skyline. He knew what the man knew. That something was following them. And that it would eventually find the pair.

The man recalled something a pal once said to him. In friendly or hostile country, a hunter worth his salt is no hunter without his dog.

Both continued on with their harsh trek.

The Sun broke the darkness in front of him. A warm golden hue reflected off the man's bronzy face. He carried his weapon: a Springfield Armory standard M1A. This kind of firearm was usually reserved for the horrors of war, or in moments like these.

And to this day, he did not know how the world had tumult out of control. Many claimed to know what happened. But few knew how this chaos had spun. This and other thoughts troubled him. For now, he pushed aside these concerns and marched on.

The Sun arced lowly over the horizon in this white world.

The man stopped at an insignificant frigid mound. He caught his breath. His bone tired body throbbed. His lips were dry and parched. He kneeled and picked up a grip of snow and ate it. The dog pawed the ice and ate it as well. They both appear haggard and frayed.

The man saw something off in the distance. His jaw ached from the bitter cold. It was difficult to get his fingers to work. He glassed the binoculars ahead of him. In his sights was a research station. And it was a blot on the frozen land. His lips curled.

He turned to check behind him. Something was there. They appeared strange and other worldly. This discomposed him.

Without delay the man set his backpack down. He unzipped it and retrieved a flare pistol. He inspected it. Then aimed and fired. Fireworks lit in the enormous sky. He eyed the descending signal flare. Then watched the station, and waited. No response came. With a clear choice he reloaded the flare pistol. And as a precaution, he pocketed an extra slug in a jacket compartment. And then he shouldered the pack back on, and with more emphasis, renewed his push forward. He felt he still had time.

The pair trudged on under an imposing sky. The Sun lowered even more. A slight snow began to fall on them. They could make out the station in the dimming light.

Abruptly, the dog halted. He turned to look behind. He began to growl.

The man knew it was too late. They would not make it to sanctuary. Nevertheless, he pulled out his flare pistol and fired. The flare vaulted in the direction of the station. Immediately, he reloaded and fired his last. He lingered, only to glass the station once more. Nothing stirred. All day and night was his slog. So close yet so far.

What to do? What to do? The man brooded for a moment.

Then he petted his dog. I know. I know. He tolled the dog. His dog continued to growl. The animal focused on what was approaching. Stop. The man said. Stop! This got the dogs attention. Sit. He tolled the dog. The dog obeyed. The man pointed his rifle at him. He released the safety. And put tension on the trigger.

The dog whined.

The man was ready to fire. But then he changed his mind. He brought his weapon down. And this was his decision. You know what. The man said. We'll do it your way. Okay. We'll do it your way.

The man turned to face his foe. He dropped into a prone position. Then he grabbed his binoculars. He spun the dial into focus. Then out of focus and back again. Now he could make them out sharper. There were many of them. They grew larger in his view finder. It was the crazies.

The legion ran with an unnatural rage. It was unlike anything he had ever witnessed. Many were frost bitten. Some hobbled on stumps that once were legs and feet. He pondered if the hissing might be them. But he couldn't be sure. The wind began to whip up, and made its own din in this desolate place.

Behind the creatures, the Sun was setting and it painted the sky red.

The man set the binoculars down. He picked up his battle rifle. The iron sights aimed at the deadly mass. He fired. Downrange went coiled up wrath. This sent with controlled precision. The nearest one fell first. He unleashed fury. More went down. A clip of bullet casings expelled out of the rifle. Then the guns bolt stopped in the open position.

The man watched his dog rush the foul horde. He refused to call him, and instead changed ammo magazines. He took aim and fired anew, this time with more urgency. They continued to drop. More bullet casings fell out of his rifle. He changed a third ammo magazine.

The man beheld the charge of his courageous canine. The dog reached and pounces on the infected. The end came swift. Several enveloped and tore into him. Others joined in.

The man fired an entire clip. All at the round mess of contaminated around his dog. He discerned more fell. Yet others passed over the death pile, and zipped toward him.

Take me to a better place. He said to no one in particular.

The man dropped his weapon, and stood up. He brought out his parang and kukri. The crazies surged at him, with ungodly stares and gnashing teeth. He engaged them in a fighting retreat; powerfully swinging, chopping, and thrusting. He fought to his last. He did not cry aloud nor feel any pain. Only that darkness overcame the light. As if a swarm of angry locusts had managed to cover the last rays of the Sun.

Gradually, the light became brighter. The man made out shadows in a room. Like slow moving monsters. As if, he was watching some bizarre horror movie. He felt numb. The voices of people resonated around him. He then realized that this wasn't a dream. And that somehow he was alive. He could breathe. Air went down and into his lungs. He had the taste of cardboard in his mouth. He closed and reopened his eyes. He began to make

someone out. She stared at him. He looked around. But his gaze met hers again. How did I survive? He struggled to say.

You didn't. She said.

What happened? His numbness eased away.

After we fought and defeated the horde. Someone said they thought they saw a signal flare. We sent a drone out. It found you. Or rather, what was left of you? We stitched you up, and prayed for a miracle. God is truly amazing.

I died? He asked.

Yes. The nurse said. She took his vitals. And then went over his bandages.

He scrutinized missing fingers and pieces of his body. Bite size chunks gone from his arms, torso, and legs. Large sutures covered his body. I feel like I have the world's worst crud.

You're going to feel this way for some time. She wiped away mucus and blood, from his nose. We don't have any medication. She quietly said to him.

He winced. His numbness was replaced by something entirely different. He felt his world was on fire.

Do you want to drink water?

He nodded. She gave him a cup to sip. Even lifting his head to drink was agonizing.

Morphine? He asked? She shook her head.

Tylenol? Ibuprofen? He continued to ask.

Nothing. She said.

They both heard a commotion outside the room. It was in the hallway, near the door. He noticed armed soldiers standing outside the room. Behind them an emotional woman screamed: burn him, burn him, why don't you just burn him. Several soldiers held her back.

Remove her from this area. Spoke a military non-commissioned officer. The soldiers at the door made a hole for him to enter. He had bloodshot eyes. And appeared put through the wringer. He was a bolo. Someone who burned-out-left-over: far too long, on this unforgiving terrestrial glacier. Who are you? The NCO said.

I... I can't remember my name.

Loss of memory should be temporary. She said. Do you remember where you're from?

Southern California. The man said.

Good. She motioned to the NCO.

Why are you here? The NCO asked.

The man focused at a point on the ceiling. This helped dampen his intense discomfort. Then he began. We were five in a sailboat. He said. We were a thousand nautical miles off the Chilean coast. A radio transmission broadcasted coordinates...

Who broadcasted the radio transmission? The NCO asked.

NATO. An Admiral something from nato. He said there was food, and shelter here. We voted to come. It took us three weeks. The weather was manky. It became dark as we approached. We were close to the harbor, when a boat full of those things rammed into us. I made it to the rescue boat, me and my dog. I paddled and then we landed. There's a parade of cruise ships and oil tankers out there. Many of them were crashing in

to each other. I could see people and creatures spilling out. He paused to recall those haunting memories. We left, and humped it after that.

Why not fish? The NCO asked.

No fish. The fish were turning up dead. We hadn't caught a live fish in weeks, maybe a month or two. We received radio transmissions from all over, all the same. No fish. No one knows what's killing the fish. There's no food. No where to go. Nothings left of civilization.

We expected better news. The NCO added.

The NCO's radio squawked. Wolf thirteen to Papa Wolf, come in. A young male voice excitedly said over the radio.

The NCO pressed the radio button to speak. This is Papa Wolf. He replied in a calmer tone.

From the west, is an ice haze. It's approximately thirty three clicks out.

Roger, I'm out. And with that Papa Wolf left.

The guardsmen at the door stared at the man with morbid curiosity.

Who are these guys? The man asked the nurse.

Arizona National Guard. She said.

The man stared back at the guards. He then asked her. Can I see a mirror?

I don't recommend it. She said.

I've been through a lot.

I can't stop you. But I'm going to have to recommend one last time not to look.

I want to.

Here. She hands him a small metal mirror.

The man glanced at his reflection. He quickly dropped the mirror. What looked back didn't appear human. He had patches of a green complexion, with sutures, around his face. I look hideous. He tolled her.

We can get you a mask. She picked up the mirror.

A mask?

Yes. It's the best we can do.

A mask?

I'm sorry.

Who are you?

I am the station nurse.

Why am I alive?

You're strong.

I know.

It's complicated.

Try me.

I used an old healing remedy.

You mean bewitchment? He said. The man continued to muster strength over his agonizing body.

I'm Native American; my people are the Yaqui tribe. I'm a trained nurse. And I've studied other traditions. Including, ancient Greece and Egypt. Listen. I will always favor the science of medicine over mystic wisdom. But when I hear the need, I'll use these esoteric arts. It wasn't until the noise of civilization died out. That my gift for

healing, unfolded. A few are guided to become seers, hypnotics, or something else. I heal the sick.

I was dead.

Yes.

I don't get it?

You were found on the ice. Twenty clicks from our station. You were in pieces. Dismembered; a real vulture soufflé. Anyway, the guardsmen wanted your gun and backpack. I went with. It seemed like you bought the ferry. So I left. But then I came back. Something clicked. I had them bring you in. We performed general surgery. We then followed up with an evocation, on the act of creation. We were effective in resurrecting you.

Let me get this straight. I was trying to find food and shelter. But I ended up getting killed by the infected and the undead. These things we call crazies, zombies, or whatever. An Arizona National Guard unit finds me, out there. And you bring me back to life. But I have to wear a mask; because I, nor anyone else, can stand to look at my face. That's the gist of it, right?

Yes. It is.

Good god, this is a nightmare. How many times have you done this?

You're my first two legged guinea pig.

Incredible!

The guard's radio crackled. Papa Wolf this is wolf thirteen. It's the Zulu's. They're fifteen clicks away, and moving in our direction. He said over the radio. Roger

that. Papa Wolf replied. The man and nurse listened. But they refrained from responding to the communication.

I usually help the Hasselhoff's around here. She said.

Hasselhoff's?

Folks with unexplained injuries.

Lot of that going around.

Yes.

When I was on the sailboat, I couldn't find anyone that knew what was going on.

He pulled at some of his sutures.

You should rest. She began to leave.

Please.

I should get going.

What is the sickness?

The nurse paced. She wrung her hands together.

What is it? What spun our world upside down?

The nurse pursed her lips. She stood motionless for a moment.

He kept quiet and gazed at her. The nurse looked away. She poured a cup of water, and drank. Then she sat down, and gave him her full attention. He was riveted to her.

Alright. She wiped her hands over her face. Do you remember how the outbreak began?

Yes. The bed bug flu. It took out a billion and half people.

Do you recall what followed?

The news said we were getting unexplained cases of Asian tuberculosis, and Middle East cold sores.

Correct. These were extremely contagious and infectious. We shot gunned like mad. We got nothing. The mortality rate was very high. They were plagues. Together, these three epidemics took out a third of the world population.

That was by the third year?

Yes.

I was holed up in San Diego when that was happening.

I was in Corpus Christi. She paused for a moment, and then continued. On its heels were vicious forms of smallpox, typhus, and cholera. Even the bubonic plague made a reemergence. She drank more water.

At about that time is when we decided to head out to sea. My brother was in L.A. He left for my cabin in the sierras. He said.

We did the same. We left for the sea. My mom, she was the strong one. She held us together. The nurse paused. She restrained her emotions. By the sixth year, these diseases had depopulated whole cities. We couldn't keep up. Then the crazies came crashing in. What ever order we had, tried to end them. But rather than die. They reanimated into the undead. Then they were really hard to kill. They rolled over us. They preyed on those that survived. We pissed on ourselves and fell over. That was when we left.

Not very many folks made it out.

No. A lot of people got left behind.

My brother, he made it to my cabin. He took his family, and our parents too. I spoke with him over the radio. But the ocean around the coast of California was dangerous. A lot of those things were in the water. They kept catching us by surprise. Finally, we had to leave. I haven't heard from my brother since. He sadly said.

We ran out of food. A navy boat picked us up. My family perished on that ship. She wiped a tear from her eye.

I'm sorry for your loss.

She nodded. I hope your brother and family are alright. She said.

I expect them to be good. After a pause, the man asked. It's been nine years, right?

Yes. We learned much in that time. One of the major discoveries was it isn't even terrestrial.

It's not from here?

Correct. The viruses appeared and behaved, unlike anything we had ever seen. Scientists at the international space station confirmed our suspicions. They investigated a hostile craft above the Earth. Even these jingo's, motioning to the guards, claimed they shot a small one down.

We're being annihilated by an alien force?

Yes.

Did you tell anybody?

The power went out. We sent couriers. We never heard back.

Thank you for sharing this with me. He said.

The nurse nodded slightly. All we can do is hide. She said.

Silence fell again. After a moment, the man took notice a something in the room.
He touched his sutures. Can you get me in that wheelchair?

That will be a challenge. She said.

Let's do it.

We should wait.

This won't be that bad?

Alright, but you may feel a pinch.

Together they struggled to get him the wheelchair. She lifted his upper torso off the bed. She then swung his legs out. He still hadn't taken any medication. With each movement he felt, stabbing and piercing, hot pliers all over his body. This would be an eleven; on the hospital pain scale of one thru ten. Extraordinarily, the man managed to sit in the wheelchair.

She slaps him on the shoulder. It stung him. You're right, it wasn't so bad. She said. Then she rolled him out of the room.

The guard followed. His radio blasted. Zulus are six clicks out. Everyone eyed each other. They picked up their pace.

The hall was full of soldiers with civilians mixed in. They were going in all directions. Many of the soldiers carried ammo boxes. Some carried boxes. Yet others held large tools and construction material. Several had determined looks about them. A few wore armor. All were getting battle ready.

On the wall someone wrote: tell our families we fought like heroes.

Where you taking me? He asked.

The basement, it's safer. She replied.

Scared civilians filed by both of them. The man saw it in their eyes. They had a sense of hopelessness, the fear of the unknown, and most of all the terror.

The radio squawked again. Zulus are six clicks out. Wolf thirteen said. What size? Papa Wolf responded. If the last group numbered four hundred, I say this group is over a thousand. Wolf thirteen said. Roger that. Papa Wolf said.

They arrived at the basement. They were greeted by guards. How can I help you? One of them asked.

I need to bring my patient inside. She pleaded with the guard leader.

You can come in. He can't. This is non-negotiable. He said. Others in the basement agreed, voicing loudly that the man should not stay.

Without arguing, the man and nurse backed away. They began to climb the stairs, one at a time. It was clumsy with the wheelchair. But they made it to the ground floor. The guard shadowed them. He didn't even offer to help. They reached the halls. Only to discover them deserted.

Look, I don't want to be a burden. The man said. Why don't you leave me in the room?

The guard's radio crackled. Zulu runners are fifteen hundred meters from the wire, at our nine o'clock. Permission to fire? Wolf thirteen said. Engage targets with effective semi auto fire. Conserve your ammo. Papa Wolf ordered. Roger that. He replied. Almost immediately, gunfire thundered outside the building.

I really wanted to help. She said.

You did more than most. He said.

There's a baseball bat next to the desk.

Bye.

Bye. She gave a small wave. Then she left him in the room, alone.

The guard waited. Until, she turned the corner. Hey slackgash, thanks for bringing the Zulus here. We expended half our ammo on that last wave you brought in. The guard mad dogged him. Don't leave the room. You'll be shot if you do. He slammed the door, and left.

The man sat there in his chair. He hung his head down, and sighed. Sadness ebbed from his soul. He breathed in a gulp of air. He looked around the room. He saw a bed. And a small table with a chair next to it. At the table was indeed, a little league Louisville slugger bat. He wheeled over to it, and picked it up. This will have to do. He mulled over. He put the small bat across his legs. He tapped on the bat. Someone knocked on the door. It was the nurse. She opened the door.

You still okay? She asked?

Shouldn't you be in the basement? He said.

They wouldn't let me in. That pumpkin positive down there said, I took too long. Now there's no room.

That's a thrutch.

I agree. It's like they left the engine running with no one behind the wheel.

What now?

This room is as safe as any. We'll hide in the bathroom if we have to.

We should use the bed as a barrier. Maybe tumble it on its side. Place it in front of the bathroom door, somehow.

Alright, that's sounds like a good idea.

Together, they began to move the bed. They were about to knock it over. Put it on its side. But then, Papa Wolf appeared.

What are doing? He asked?

Where getting into a defensive position. She replied. Gunfire cracked outside the building. It was supplemented by a series of rapid concussions.

Not here. Follow me. Papa Wolf tolled them. He guided them down the hall.

The guards won't let him in. She said to the Papa Wolf.

I'll rectify that. He said.

We lost battle position Casey. The cry came over the radio. More intense gunfire followed. A massive explosion shook the building.

Zulus are in the wire. I repeat. Zulus are in the wire. A voice screamed over the radio.

Calm down. Fall back to wolf's lair, if you can. Papa Wolf said into the radio.

Roger that. The reply came. Another massive explosion rocked the building. The man noticed his rifle. It was slung on a guardsmen's shoulder.

I can kill. The man said to Papa Wolf. I can kill if you let me. Give me back my rifle, and I will kill many of them. The nurse glared at the man.

Corporal, return this man his weapon.

Where can I fight?

There. Papa Wolf said. He pointed to a c-shaped sandbag fighting position. This was a small defensive position. It sat in an open area. Just before the stairs.

Without any ceremony; Papa Wolf, his entourage, and the nurse began to leave. They went around a corner and down the stairs. The man's eyes met hers before she descended, and disappeared to the basement.

The man moved around the rampart. He got behind the c-shape sandbags. He adjusted his wheel chair. He got a whiff of burned cordite in the air. He examined his rifle. It was half loaded. Only ten rounds were in it. He placed the barrel over the sandbags. His sights stared down the hall. In his view, two guardsmen ran toward him.

Get out of there, Frankenstein. One of the guardsmen demanded.

Papa Wolf said I could fight from here.

I'm a bad-ass-motherfucker. This is my fighting position. Get the fuck out. Move!

The man reluctantly wheeled out. He lost his position behind the sandbags. The guardsmen quickly replaced him. They aimed their weapons down the hall. The man sat next to them. Just outside the defensive position. He could make out an awkward angle of the hallway.

Do you know what makes the grass grow? The second guardsman asked him.

Blood. The man answered.

The second guardsman moved somewhat. He motioned for the man to share a sandbag. This allowed a better firing position for the man. Now the three men stared down the hall. They waited for the inevitable, unbowed and unafraid.

Flashes of mankind's history flooded the man. Like thunder and lightning. They were of strong mixed emotional memories. He recalled our many failures, tribulations, and triumphs - turbulent and chaotic. It was of the great suffrages and epic struggles of people, the world entire. As if whispering to him of the past: from the crosses of our

ancestors, unconquerable spirit of our fathers, and to the eternal love of our mothers. He reflected on these truths with awe.

From behind the sandbags, the three men listened to Armageddon thumping outside the building. They heard rapid fire shooting, concussions of bombs, and screams of the dying? They steadied their resolve, as a blast of frigid air hit them, and the clamor of the war gods drew closer.

Zulus are inside the building. A frightened voice said over the radio.

In the end, there were no more men, nurses, or guardsmen. Save only what death brought. This was last standing outpost of the world. After this place fell. The lights of the world became but a rumor. Who will sing the scrolls of humanity? Who will listen? Who will remember?

Among the cosmos and in the silent deep, where the origins of man lay. Dine hostile stars. They lie in wait to slay companions in the cold of space. They feed on their neighbors and spit out their waste. Like when black widow spiders devour its mate: cruel, indifferent, godless.

The End