

DIARY OF A ZOMBIE SURVIVOR

by S. Michael Choi

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For the imprisoned

Project AURORA was a retrovirus research program that had gone horribly wrong. The attempt to splice poorly-understood stem cell science under STAP with brain neurotransmitter (serotonin/dopamine) chemistry had resulted in an 80 nanometer airborne virus that caused nothing more than simply... happiness... in all those afflicted. In the deepest level V biological research facility on Plum Island, NY laboratory mice deliberately injected with AURORA developed increased feelings of well-worth, eudaemonia, hyper-sexuality, and hyperactivity congruent only with a state of permanent and irreversible mania. The mice could never suffer another blue day, another sad afternoon. But the biofilm plastics containing the laboratory were rated for 40nm—and a micro-tear had appeared. AURORA escaped the lab.

Much of the history of the spread of AURORA or “the happy flu,” as the media termed it, or at least back then, when there was a media, is of course lost to history. The flu entered a bird's lungs, the bird flew to Massachusetts, and then stealthily, subversively, it spread across the human race. It's unclear where the jump from avian-variant to human-variant began, but then, nature was always a mix of unknown viruses and mixing and matching of RNA and DNA strains. Humanity itself was slow to understand or even react to the spread. What government investigated a 95% drop off in crime? What emergency program was in place to deal with a massive jump increase in productivity? Who would install curfews or quarantines when the sick rate at corporations across the world dropped to zero? In the end, 87.7% of humanity was infected before research institutions began to realize that the outbreak was real. The zombie apocalypse had arrived: but it had arrived in the most ironic form whatever.

The date is currently 2 December 2024. More than four years have passed since the AURORA outbreak, and as any philosopher could have explained from the start, the outcome was not, ultimately, positive. Yes, for two years in overwhelming glee, fits of laughter would break out in Manhattan; the streets of Manchester were filled with love-ins and free hugs. Crime had plummeted to zero, and the dissatisfaction and ennui that characterized modern life suddenly lifted as euphoria spread across the globe. But how long can the human brain maintain such a structure? Irises began to disappear as the virus recombined in unpredicted and unknown ways. From stadiums filled with orgiastic crowds the joy itself become unbearable, untenable. Suddenly glee-filled individuals were deliberately crashing vehicles into each other as the final joy of a joy-filled death. But yet, watching all this happen, I couldn't feel myself caring much in any case. It was my fate to be born to watch things with jaded eyes from the start. I remembered all those strange crowds; the weird tonals; I cared little as the final atrocities began. But even so, even when the white-eyed Happies overran the world and

then began to detect the presence of us remaining normals, even then I felt myself overwhelmed only with a colossal of boredom. Yes, I met Miss I, sure, the plague had overwhelmed 87.7% of humanity, and yes, we had surrounded the day to the still normal glee's, but, although I should have cared, I didn't really. I had known something like this was going to happen after all, after all in the end. 12.3% of humanity was immune, immune to AURORA and immune to becoming a zombie, but then our numbers began to dwindle.

Even before the plague, literature and cinema had become increasingly interested in the “zombie genre” as a self-contained and self-sustained zone of literature and entertainment. Many of these stories could have had multiple readings—weren't these the Islamics or a thinly-veiled coded reference to those ethnics? Couldn't we see “I am Legend” as a story about a lonely white man in a colored ghetto? From the 1960s on, the fear of Communism and the legacy of people's liberation had left its mark on Western literature only in this micro-genre of being attacked by swarms of faceless individuals. But, in that central irony, what if we, those still with colored irises and lacking the Eternal Joy, the Rapture that had long been promised, were now confined to compounds and single apartments, recognizing each other only furtively in our furtive daytime excursions and seeing in the night our mother, our coverage and blanket, our peace and our refuge from the nerve-stapled Eruptions of Joy? Time had found me in Unity City, and I had assembled out of the wreckage of humanity only a dozen odd individuals who recognized me as leader. Yet I, for all my Socialist leanings and affiliations with the Rouge Armies, found it hilarious for it to be my fate to be stuck in decadent capitalism, observing as all the wheels of history wound their way, and suddenly all the books were read in mirror fashion, for suddenly, certain philosophers and historians now in retrospect became hilarious. Out of infinite, endless, unceasing boredom, I sat, watched and followed by the suspicious Joyers, and I cared not that our revolution that we had planned deep in Upwater City had failed against the ruthless machinations of the machine itself. I visited the last, decaying remnants of the amusement parks that had once been needed and was complimented by hidden and sarcastic forces. Still, this was my default and my heedless lack of care for the waves of sorrow and joy and depression and commitment to work that would entail our scavenging survival amidst a city of ghosts and nameless lost souls. I built a radio. I scavenged metal and cloth and wood. My compound mates carried out their tasks in their strange, unarmed way, and without resort to analogy or metaphor or metonymy, I sought out that remnant of humanity which had survived first the viral flu, and then the crowds of mass destruction, and then finally the weirdness of our weird coexistence amidst the Happies. Is this a sequel? Do I deconstruct other and arcane works? The time for caring even for that had passed, for winter had arrived, and it had gone deathly and absolutely cold.

Fifty says I should be grateful for all that I have received. Yet, the radio buzzed with offers to join another clan. But I tuned that all out? Everyone was free to enter or leave my compound, my place with as much or as little license as permitted. Complete security was complete imprisonment. The necessary illusion of freedom was pursuing an unfindable network amidst an ostensibly peace-loving society. The traitor was making broadcasts across the wires that couldn't be breached, and paranoid Englishmen proclaimed to me that something deeper was going on. But what after all, was I, but THE AMERICAN. What could I do but exercise my Second Amendment rites amidst the sea of Happies. Nobody had anything else close to but the 3.5% unemployment rate and Voice of Counsel declared, "actually things were better long ago."

It had been my error.

The Easterners, with their German laws and mask-like faces, never were really more than a 6/10 out of happiness. The idea sunk in, finally, after statistical research, and now finally I had solved the problem of the questions of national destiny and suppressed freedoms. But, this truth being achieved, I had gotten my compound all the way in order and then been harassed by the denpa issuing forth from long-forgotten crystal radio sets and all the weird conspiracy theories floating around the network. Each compound, everywhere, was broadcasting the paranoia and theoretics of each of its founders. And though all of us, each in our own turn, were sane: we remembered history, we knew were the normals, still realized that amidst such a sea of zombies that nobody could ever restore order again and the time would arrive yet again to arm, and be weaponized. So this was my stockpile:

4 AK-47s

5 AK-74S

2 FN FAL

6 M-27 IAR

1 M240

4 M-16

3 M249

4 M4 carbine

1 Saiga-12

5 FN SCAR

1 unknown type hunting rifle

3 Steyr TMP

1 SVD “Dragunov”

1 UMP-45

41 guns in all. The Arsenal of Democracy.

Of these weapons, organized only by list of alphabet, one will note the heavy and unusual presence of Russian weaponry. For some reason these survived in salvageable condition whereas many a precision Western made weapon decayed or rusted away without care. One will note, moreover, that although we have plenty of assault rifles, our compound is defended with utmost care by a number of light machine guns. The advantage of the LMG is the heavy rate of fire, through which wave after wave of happy zombies can be mowed down, as they go through their periodic waves of sudden attacks. The Saiga and the Dragunov are useful for point defense, long-range on the latter, heavy and broad defense on the other. All in all such tools are the necessary tools for the defense of what remains of humanity, although in another sense of course we will all die out and the happies will eventually settle down and breed and be, “humanity.” Their only flaw is that since they have become nerve stapled into such perpetual happiness, all of previous culture seems utterly incomprehensible to them. They retain a limited intelligence. They have culture and go about their lives. What they simply don't understand is that a change had occurred, and that we are the sole carriers of the flame.

[some hours later]

This is “hurried text” or “scribbled notebook” because the mechanics of salvaging and weapons searching and ammo conservation and life amidst the happies is time-consuming, and so I write in disjointed fashion, leaving behind some record that one day, some day, the retrovirus will be eliminated, and humankind will regain the earth. Possibly I have to repeat myself; the story isn't clear; I'm babbling. What can I say about these end times? Well: I'm possibly not doing any reader a disfavor just to repeat the history. What had happened? There had been an Idealist. We know not absolute details about her life, only that she had been brilliant, over-looked, not found by the usual talent search programs and never recognized to be this weird Da Vinci that had popped

up and not fitted into the usual categories of “maths specialist” or “biological whiz.” The Idealist despite a 2400 SAT and straight A's at high school had been rejected by the Ivies and then found her backup liberal arts college missing her paperwork. Panicked, her parents had landed her in a Foundation Year in Essex, UK hardly qualifying her for the middle-management career that awaited her. But then the fates rolled their dice again, and she ended up in Plum Island disease research center while a bureaucratic war waged between the CDC and DOJ and other government branches that wanted first research into Ebola and then science into AIDS and then genetics research after all. Nobody noticed that she had acquired the equivalent of a PhD level understanding of Physics all by herself in her lonesome years, and no categorization allowed anyone to understand that she was able to combine computing and biological research and neuroscience in a completely unexpected way. Left alone, once again, to scrub laboratory vials and test-tubes while the “real” scientists were off on their assigned task, she created AURORA because she felt all of humanity's sorrow. She had found the golden key. She had discovered the way to make people Happy, Happy forever. But that was the tragedy.

We've lost her name. We don't know absolute details. The chaos surrounding the first wave of degeneration after Happy left us with conflicting reports and few information about how exactly the virus was created or if indeed, as some claim, the Idealist deliberately released the thing. The only thing that became clear was that depression, the blues, the black dogs, the nightlings whatever term sufferers had long termed it, were banished forever from the experiment called humanity, the condition called being a human. For months afterwards the wars all over the world ended. The chaos and terrorists and crime plummeted. AURORA spread across almost 88% of humanity and nobody reacted, nobody thought anything strange was going on, because it was infecting everyone at once. Only slowly, imperceptibly, indiscernibly, certain hidden military bases and security cities, laboratory complexes and cut-off defense cities realised what had occurred. Then what began was the waiting game.

The problem was everything was unpredictable. Sides blamed other sides. Nuclear forces were put on alert. Hazmat suited individuals tried to contain the important strategic stuff, but soon it became clear, 13% were immune. How was this to be? Africans, were their genetic diversity, actually did quite well. North Korea, which was supposed to be in all the pre-zombie literature completely capable of dealing with zombie infestation, suffered a 99% infection rate due to their genetic homogeneity. The end result was just the breakdown of national groups, as rifle-armed compounds became the last outposts of society...and we are dwindling. Our numbers are clearly decreasing, because the Happies are mindlessly reproducing. They have no sense of tomorrow, or of declining crop yields, or of the chaos ensuing as repetitive tasks lead to less and less results and nuclear reactors designed to fail-safe, have on the whole failed-safe, sparing us at least that catastrophe. But although every once in a while the Happies

surge, although there are outbreaks of overwhelming joy in which entire skyscrapers are ripped apart, still, us, the normals, remain locked behind multiple layers of closed and barricaded doors. I had been always the worst of strategists and the best of tacticians. And so with rapid-fire machine guns covering the approaches to my 838 complex, I've assembled a group of a dozen of us who remember the pre-outbreak world. Yet now today, even immediately, there's a crisis, as Ian Murphy, my first and most important ally, took a severe beating on a supply raid and is claiming he will soon leave for another group. I can't keep him from going, if he really desires, it is just that his history has been inextricably entwined with mine. I don't know what his decision will be. But the day draws to a close, and I must print out the letters:

3 December 2024

The midnight hour has passed, and although I'm still writing not long after the previous entry, I am on "night-time" so to speak, as are most survivors, for it is nothing so banal as to watch the happies go about their day, completely incognizant of our presence, until the moment when one suddenly looks up, detects one, and then paranoia sweeps over your presence. Did that zombie sniff me out? Was it purely instinctual? Or am I just imagining things amidst a sweep of broad sensory data, meaningless information, television static. You know, way before, there used to be black and white scattering noise on television screens if there was no signal. Then things went digital. And so the blue-screen of signallessness was invented. How many things like this are unrecorded. Moreover, how many political theories, philosophies, and untoward factoids are lost, will be lost, and these words will be lost, sucked by the Great Attractor at the end of the Great Crunch and either the universal divergence into complete quantum nothingness or the retraction into the meltdown singularity the final predictions of 21st century physics.

It's time for a confession. Ian Murphy, my first and closest compound mate, has threatened departure. This threat, you know, it tears at my heart. For the fact of the matter: I've been lying. I know far more about Aurora than I've let on. In the very early days, after I had learned I was immune, I led a squad deep into Massachusetts to find out the identity of Ms. I, the Idealist, and ascertain what her genetic plague was going to evolve into. I'm ready to steal here from theories of the "Umbrella Corporation" and other such brilliant works of millennium cinema, but the fact of the matter is that I've scarce begun to piece together the true history of my own history, my own compound, and my own comrades. Wasn't I, once, just some US Socialist holding meetings in my RV, expounding on theory, the weird "academic?" Yes, I feel vague recollections of such. But even if your brain is resistant to the AURORA virus, memory loss is pretty standard

with the package. I can't even account for all my memories of the past seven years, only bits and pieces, data flottage, and I thought I knew it all until I realized I knew nothing at all. But Ian. Ian, man, he was there from the beginning.

The thing is that Ian is Black. What that means by US American terms is that he was a member of a discriminated skin color and minority whose history usually came from slavery. I was moved when he confessed to me that he had briefly managed to visit the Ghana slave docks from where his long-ago ancestors had departed. This was the crime that we Americans struggled with, from the 1960s onward, but with no end in sight and the liberals always pointing out that there was further progress to be made and the conservatives insisting that property rights and equality before the law had to be maintained. Actually, weirdly, this time period is an anniversary. 10 years ago today, Ferguson, Missouri erupted in riots that lasted almost a month as a young black youth of 18 years age was shot dead by a white police officer. Like every Rashomon story, there were no fewer than a dozen points of disagreement from a dozen supposed eyewitnesses. But the state triumphed in the end, even as the National Guard had to be deployed. There was talk of curfews. Briefly, people thought it would be race riots across the country, but come on, that wasn't going to happen. The police had been militarized; tear gas was too strong; and a source within the NG even indicated that chemical weapons were being prepared if it had come to that. The state was powerful. The state had tools at its disposal. Every revolutionary organization was doomed from the start, and the ironies of a group entirely composed of police organizations sending in their investigators had already occurred: the joke had become reality. Ferguson was put down. Hong Kong was put down. The real struggle on that date (I am relying on microfiches of the old newspapers) was still the geopolitical and push-pulling of great powers. Maybe I had been cursed by my love affair with some godless prostitute. Maybe I had achieved spiritual strength by only writing about prostitutes. Maybe people criticized me because, -ugh- I had slept with Happies convinced with my academic theory on the whole thing that Normal girls were pointless. But Ian, nevertheless, was still there from the start.

Ian and I had made our friendship because of our difference. He was a weird, strange man, with an Aztec face and an obsession with chocolate and a desire to point out the inconsistencies in people's positions. But in that first raid I made, when I was young and had to know the truth and led, through risks that now seem foolhardy, an expedition into Massachusetts to recover whatever data I could on AURORA and Ms. I, was just a reflection of my data-centered, information-centered, need-to-know warped personality. What a girl she was, right? Ignored, ignored, and ignored. And then, suddenly, one day, boom, she invented the new category: Quantum Retroviral Stem-cell Pluripotential re-jacking. A girl, not more than 28, had invented the way to rewrite the very code of the human condition. And nobody had ever noticed her. Nobody had ever assigned her anything except the duties of cleaning out test tubes, rebooting the Plum Island supercomputer, and ignoring everything that she saw within the genetics laboratories.

Suddenly, like a lightning bolt across a mountainous landscape, the truth crept in: SHE WOULD END HUMAN UNHAPPINESS FOREVER. SHE WOULD SAVE THE HUMAN RACE FROM ITS SUFFERING, AND THE HAPPY VIRUS WAS HER GIFT TO MANKIND. If only there had been some intervention.

But I get back to things.

Ian and I, you know, our bond was forged in a Ford pick-up racing down Route 95, racing down from Lexington (birthplace of liberty!) to the ground zero site. I can't forget that darkness, the crazies in our illuminated headlights, the knowledge that our world had changed irrevocably and the answers lay only at Woods Hole or at Plum Island. Why did it happen? I mean, what's necessary a confession? I knew more than I let on? I had done the original research on locating these "hidden talents," these people whose skills don't fall into categories of Physics, Chemistry, or Biology as if these are discrete subjects? This was me. The folder of boundaries. Part of interdisciplinary studies, cultural studies was understanding that cultures derived their own ways to generate knowledge. What was chemistry but the off-shoot of alchemy? What was physics but a Newtonian game. How had WWI been fought except between German zeppelins and UK dogfighters? Every culture had its own view of knowledge and of technology, and the US helium embargo was the direct cause of Lakehurst. Yet, simultaneously, as somebody who was always going to exist on the boundaries of things, I surrendered myself simply to the flow and to the knowledge that my tears, collected as they were into liter jars or gallon cans, existed simply to be stolen. Maybe I sought her out because I thought she was a kindred spirit. Maybe I knew she existed because I knew of so many other liminal souls. But where umber folded into shadow and darkness grayed darker into black, finally I saw as we drove and drove and drove and calluses developed on my hands, that yes, this was how friendships were forged. He rode shotgun, literally. We were terrified at that point, in those chaos years, as the eyes of the infected grew white, that it would become, as indeed it eventually did, a game of us vs. them. They were out to get us. I was a killer in my heart.

I can't plumb Ian's soul. I don't know why he rejected women although not being homosexual. I knew he was ugly. But I think he wanted, on some level, this to have happened all along. We talked about America, because much of life in the aftermath is just so much waiting and then there's the question of preparation and then there's the idea that survival is really all that life offers after all. I wanted to bring up, one last time, Pei, whose tears flowed and flowed, but I knew she was gone; she too succumbed. But no matter what lamentations reached the heavens, on the physical face of the earth itself, the disease spread, and then the final era of humanity had begun. Religion had no more answers and no more solace. There would be no more green fairy to grant me my wishes or whisper promises in my ear. We argued, heavily, over the meaning or allegory of Sucker Punch, but he was on his own wavelength, and he wanted me to know, absolutely,

completely, I WAS BORN TO BE BLACK AND UGLY. I WAS BORN TO BE SPIT UPON. MY SELF-HATRED IS ONLY THE DAM THAT KEEPS ME FROM HATING ALL THE REST OF YOU MORE SO. Aztec face, Negro black skin, a working class education and background, but as disaster reports spun across AM news radio, the zombies were multiplying and reproducing and they were spreading like a plague across the earth. The population might very well be 12 billion now. They have no checks on their behavior. They think nothing of producing even more zombie children. And we are the Legends. We are the Ancients that will one day be their fairy tales.

You are expecting further confession of course. Shocking reveal: I invented Aurora. No, of course not. What I was was an interdisciplinary person. I knew and had sought out everyone whose academic specialty lay between the defined fields. Had things gone differently, Ms. I would have been the Newton of our age, the first quantum physics-viral folding-neuroscience founder of an entire field that would have its new name, Retro-Dopanomics or Silico-serology. We'd had universities dedicated to this new science and new area of research. But she had been ignored, according to the dominant and masculine and warlike atmosphere of the time, and in her martyr-like, jesus-complex desire to save humanity, she had destroyed it. No more answers in science. No more political theories of Marxism or Kant. We are just the few, the last, the remaining, the rememberers. Outside, with whitened eyes, the zombies go back their high-tech society, but completely unaware of where they stand in history or their fate in the maelstrom we once called background studies.

So confession: I am a theorist. I am an academic. I live in books or at least used to, and held socialist meetings in my RV. I found Geronimo's rifle atop the air-conditioning duct, but it held no bullets and he had put up no defense whatsoever, the dervish or household god finally whirling away, and the trend that had been called for, was called for, through ways nobody will ever be able to decipher. All knowledge is husbanded or guarded carefully, except aboard the crystal-radio nets which is the net of a million lies. Deliberately confused explosive formulas are actually recipes for the self-destruction of compounds, and gasoline, the fuel that once powered pre-outbreak economies, is now husbanded drop by drop for those expenditures that truly matter. Maybe the environmentalists won after all: nobody really can expand any more because the virus also prevents pure research. The happies are content in their applied, mechanistic ways, but they have lost all sense of time in terms of the past and the future. They have become zombies in the worst possible way: unaware zombies, white-eyed zombies, joy turning into bloodlust of the kill and they smell us out, and we are barricaded behind barbed wire, metal posts, woodwork, everything that we can to secure our existence, and in singles or in pairs or in groups struggling to survive in our last chapter of history, we read books and tell each other stories, and sometimes the ionosphere cooperates and contact is made with India or Africa, where huge populations of normals remain. The

final irony had been that the whites and Koreans and Japanese and Russians had been the most vulnerable to AURORA. The world has gone black.

[After sleep time, later that day.]

Later on some “literary theorists” or whatever will pronounce this the genius of this “work,” that I'm simulating the weirdness of being able to half scribble down what are disjointed and disconnected thoughts. But that is AURORA which has an effect even on those genetically immune and that is the nicoalyamines that Nicotine Nicolas, our house chemist and mad scientist cooks up, or something along the line I just have to report that I used to—just two years ago—be able to spin through great authors from pre-outbreak like lines of coke, or eating cheerios if you don't care for drug metaphors. But all I have to say is that last night was horrible, wretched, disgusting, stomach-turning. Ian held one of his famous chili dinner night outs and assembled the entire team around him, hinting at but not directly stating the conflict and just letting the chorus of voices show who is the more popular. But of course I'm not popular. I'm the leader of this compound. Everyone's still alive, aren't they? I had to make command decisions and I had to give orders. I had to assign people to do two hundred hours of stitching to make bandages if that is what we needed because that is what we anticipated we needed, and nobody remembers that do they, nobody remembers that was the right call. With his big beefy muscular arms and Aztec face, Ian just hints at controversies and issues that have existed in our four years of survival and nodding faces all around (with a few exceptions; girls always understand these subtleties), makes a laundry list of all my faults. But everyone's bandwagoning with him, because they can only see my flaws and have no understanding of why I chose to do the things I did.

I mean, back when the raids first started, I razed a lot of the nearby buildings so we'd have a clear line of sight and even before we started finding sniper rifles and being able to use them to establish a free-clear zone around our compound, others were angry because it attracted attention, a lone building standing around so much rubble, but, as things have clearly shown out, now there's now heaps of these “lone buildings” and much of the city has been lost or blasted or burned to the ground as the Happies hold their raves and forget about old things such as not setting off fireworks where you're next to a wall of polyurethane. I don't know. I wake up; it's past noon; snow has fallen on Unity City, which is supposed to be a sign of closure or cleanliness or purity, and maybe in a sense this is all Ian's little mind game, but nonetheless he established his point in three hours of candle-lit barbecuing and of so superior “allusive speaking,” whilst suddenly he's surrounded by crowds of people begging him not to go, while our unstated conversation remains. I remained silent.

[After lunch, I had crept off to eat beans out of a can by myself, enjoying the look of the snow. Purifying, symbol of death and purification.]

My feelings about Ian are complicated. The first thing that I would have to say is that I'm calling the bluff. He ain't going nowhere. But if he does, I will be sad. I will be grief-ridden. The thing about friendship is not just that it is forged in experience or even in danger, but also that sometimes it's about the intense differences. I am a Karl Marx-reading black-jacket wearing looks-like-shit academic, he is big beefy black man with thick arms and can swing a baseball bat or fire a M249 with one hand. He was the first; we had gone to Plum Island vicinities ourselves to solve the issue of the AURORA plague or "the Umbrella Corporation" as all the fanboys on the Internets were terming it, right before it became all very real, and it then it became realer than real. He talks a lot about social disadvantage, about never having been giving the chances in life even though a prep school gave him a football scholarship, and he had that chance to have entered college ball had he not decided that his family was more for him. I guess he was blue? He was a heavy marijuana smoker back in the day? But all that talk about blackness and race and discrimination isn't really so annoying if that's just his baseline topic, and he had other things to talk about. And I've noticed I've switched to the past tense as if steeling myself so my mind is reeling and I'm not so absolutely sure he won't leave after all. This is adult life. Do we stay here or do we ally with her? Do we find common ground with Sally or do we join the fight again Doug? No matter how much time has passed, in a sense we are envious of the zombies, we wished we had the "wrong" genes after all and were now walking around with whitened irises and a beautiful dream of the future and families and children and balloons and clowns and birthday parties. But that went whatever way it went.

"Why do you talk about race so much, Ian?"

But he has response already ready.

"The issue is that since you're white, you're unaware of how it operates. You and I walk into a bar: I'm six feet, I'm muscular, I'm a prime specimen of the human race, my skin color is superior in dealing with cancer and in combat situations. I can hide in the night or in jungles. But, the way society works, you still have a slightly better chance than me to take home a girl that night."

"But Ian, human society is over. Look outside. The world is overrun with zombies. It's just us and our dwindling number of normals as the zombies start to degenerate and Happy Plague starts driving them schizophrenic. What do you care about the United

States of America or the legacy of slavery or your meaningful visit to Ghana? The system has collapsed.”

“That is the reality that I have to deal with. I am forced into certain kinds of behavior in order to survive in a hostile world, and then that reaction elicits fear and paranoia out of other people.”

And so the argument goes around over and over and over again, but I've known this guy too well. I know there's an element of choice.

“Don't you shy away from girls? Didn't I see you reject Vivian's advances and when Nancy wanted to be alone with you you said no?”

And all meets me is that Aztec face.

This is adult life. That sere, featureless landscape called being both turning middle-aged whilst the remnants of society collapse around you, and you, if you're clever, sleep with Happies even if it disgusts people who find out, or if you marry one or you hear rumors about normals being born to Happies and the zombies just kill the child immediately, 'Up Syndrome.' I could delve deeper and deeper into Ian's psychology, but I think he won't leave. You know, we built this thing up when it was just bare and weathered concrete and a handful of sniper posts, handguns, and where will he go? Start another band of survivors? Break out for the allegedly virus-free Africa or India? I tend to think not. It's long ways out. We're in Unity City, the science city or constructed city and there are developments both positive and negative and the world is still awash with EM radiation, but who to know or care in any case.

I call the bluff. Although barely hours have passed, Ian won't leave. I'm going to leave the topic and the only interesting temporal matter is how many hours will pass before I finish up this Mead notebook, such a piece of Americana and I guess the disintegration time of paper, and then the idea that one day the human race will rid itself of the Aurora virus (unlikely) and some future society will discover what happened and realize the dangers of meddling with its own neurochemical structures. The science will rise, after all, and Idealist, for all her meddling, will be the founding scientist for a new science. But aside from this issue, there's also simply what I discovered about the woman herself. She was a character. Yet... then again, maybe this topic too I should delay...

4 December 2014

Two or three raids yesterday, which is normal, easily held off except the shutters went bang in the early morning and the zombies are ever so slowly degenerating. Scientist I, the Idealist, had released an engineered retrovirus into the human population to give it the happiness that so eluded it, yet likely not lived to see the results of her wild-field experiment, sluggishly developing schizophrenia amidst a population who, after all, never really should have coded to be joyous beings to begin with. Man's lot was to suffer; his time on earth was supposed to be spent in only moderate if even that content, and the rest of the time, we were to occupy ourselves with work and days.

The weird thing about life, though, after the apocalypse, is that in some ways we have actually recovered some of the sense of struggle and accomplishment that was lacking before Outbreak. Actually, studying closer the activities and patterns of modern life, there was to be sure happiness in the developed countries but at the same time, much of time was spent in cubicles or in discount supply stores as stock clerks with an abundance of repetitive and meaningless tasks and a careful hoarding out of actual cash and profit. One of the scraps of newspapers that has survived from so long ago records the story of a high school graduate who opened a chain of sandwich shops and then eventually donated a million dollars to his school. Yet, we wonder in our way, had we had that much equivalent wealth in gasoline (the currency of the post-zombie world), why we would ever do such a thing as support a completely humanitarian project. Ironically although I was a socialist agitator in my pre-fall days, I have grown to understand in these sere years of middle life that actually it was the pure idealists who caused the most damage of all. Marx truly believed he was heralding the final evolution of man. Stalin wanted a Russian defense that could stand up to the emerging forces on Europe, the historical threat to Russia. Even Hitler, still agreed after the zombie plague to be the worst criminal in history, in his own writings believed that what he was doing was for the best of mankind in the end. It was only that his racial theories were deconstructed and we evolved the multiculturalism at the end that was the best and worst of societies. Ten years ago today, Ferguson and then the Eric Garner chokehold: what were these issues we were arguing about in the last years, right before the retrovirus plague spread like wildfire across the world? Only, possibly, greater control of resources, the struggle to get a bigger piece of the pie, access to thin and desirable women, and data and information. By the very end, people were life-casting their life using wearable body-cams and "checking-in" to popular restaurants to share reviews and pictures of their own compositions. We had become an electronic society, and the elders among us shook their heads.

It isn't really so much useful or productive for me in this tattered notebook to record thoughts about the pre-Fall society. This future archeologists can do, or more likely the Happies will reconstruct society after their own degeneration and the new species Homo feliciens will achieve only that which had long eluded the masses of humanity. From Africa and India issue radio broadcasts that human civilization has survived there; but

many are wary. The footprints enter the cave, so to speak, but none leave. Rumors of cannibalism and slavery, the retributive African answer to what other continents had done to it, cross the crystal-radio and amateur-band spectrums. There are techniques and technologies available even to chat across the whole of the entire planet, but everyone in their compounds has their own ideas and ideologies and interpretations, and there is not much point in spending hours listening to the scan all day. Much of chatter consists of the same: rice or wood for ammo or gasoline; mutual assured safe-passage that hides an actual evacuation attempt as a compound falls to a rival clan; deliberate creation of crackpot theories which have proliferated endlessly since the Fall in order to confuse and demoralize other groups of survivors. The enemy, it had come to seem, was mostly actually us.

All in all a normal human being walking around the zombies is typically not molested, and some have reported living even years without anyone noticing anything unusual. But the patterns are various and there are urban legends of a normal even taking up residence in a zombie household and everything completely normal until one day without any warning at all they tore him to pieces and ate him. Urban legend? Factual history? Nobody knows for sure. The techno-geeks have assembled burst-zip compressed videofiles that anyone with even a basic 21st century smartphone and solar charger can view, but anything that can be transmitted can also be faked. The actual histories are obscured.

Since, however, the trend does appear to eventual stabilization (the zombies will slowly turn schizophrenic, and then finally the ones who are most stable will live while the least stable ones will die off), I suppose in a sense an answer has appeared: I am writing for the eventual crowd of Happy-infected homo feliciens, who will eventually re-generate their society and wonder, “where did this weird, industrial society filled with strange artifacts and incomprehensible script arrive from? Where did we get this oral tradition of a strange nocturnal species called vampires who lived in caves and crept out only in the darkness to kill us in our sleep?” Like the famous zombie novel of all, the legendary one, we remaining few dwindling compounds of normal human beings, those who remember the past and know that there was a virus free humanity, will become the stuff of mothers' fairy tales and bogey monsters in the night. We are the eventual source legend of what will be encoded in mankind's racial memory as the terrors of the night, those who drifted apart and then assembled in terrifying teams. Happy zombies can detect any pair or trio or more of us together, that is almost certain. So in carefully rehearsed ladder steps, we send teams out to far reaches of the city to scavenge, and in contact with the mostly friendly other survivors, we exchange information or trade goods and develop a better sense of the landscape.

Because a concentration of more than a dozen human beings immediately invites relentless zombie attack, most survivor bands are only about ten people, although there

are stories on the radio net that as many two or three hundred people are living together in especially fortified compounds, destroying the zombie attacks faster than they create new baby zombies in their relentless optimistic way. It's rare not to see a zombie woman who isn't pregnant; they have no heed for financial planning or for long-term purchases; wherever they are, they have a half dozen children. They have extended kinship and clanship networks.

This leads in turn to the "classic" compound design, eight or ten people, three watchtowers, a bunch of loophole-style firing ports, barbed wire and barricaded metal garbage bins, which in turn reveals the "personality" so to speak of the survivor group, but tends to have weak points, covers too much, and seeks too much control over all the sightlines in contrast to my compound, focal, defined, and with multiple layers of defense.

Before the AURORA virus was released, people were, so to speak, unsettled. The world was always restless and nobody ever stuck on one thing indefinitely. There was always a sort of brushfire conflict going on somewhere, and weirdly, because you find old books wherever you can when you're scavenging, I'm reading now about the Falklands War which was a war in 1982 between two conservative governments. It already seems practically like ancient history, although it was only forty years ago, and theoretically people are walking around who remember it. The thing is only that even in a heavily-studied micro-conflict, there are still disputed reports. Coinciding with everything else, it's been roughly 110 years since the outbreak of WWI, and that too is conflicted.

So I sit behind several layers of security and read battle reports that really do hinge on the Belgrano, don't they, maybe there is something to political theory and the unilateral declaration of a sea exclusion zone, since that ship was possibly the turning point of the war, in reality, after all.

5 December 2024

The clock has turned, but I weary of scribbling away with my nub of a pencil in this notebook that will never reach a reader. I have already found a hiding place, and Ian remains in the compound, though sulky, and we had some minor scrapes in our last supply raid. The city goes on. The sun goes up and then it goes, "on a day just like another day."

[sleep cycle finished]

Although we understand that pre-infection human beings will die out, and that only the new humans will remain, the Happies, the zombies, whatever terminology that's been tossed around, and that this wave of schizo-degeneration will pass and eventually some ritualistic society will develop that stabilizes its own complete and utter delirium with its somewhat retarded IQ and failure to develop any further technology or research or art, still nonetheless it's impossible to escape the feeling of writing "for other human beings" rather than the imaginary New Person of the future, whose art forms I'll barely be able to understand, whose legends will be replete with stories of the night people, and whose folk tales will refer mostly to night-crawlers or ghosts. What are we to them, after all, but a bunch of cave-dwellers, troglodytes, who operate mostly in the nighttime and spend our hours scavenging from the remnants of what was our own civilization. Further, even as other compounds adopt a wide area-defense type model, I know myself to be one of the more unusual compound leaders, insistent on information gathering, scientific management, and study of the joy-rages rushes that never quite breach our perimeter.

One of the continuing debates amidst survivor groups whether to pursue a "herd-style" management of your immediate vicinity (the so-called economical approach) or to ride hard for top quality gear and rare resource finds. Although under normal circumstances more inclined to go the latter route, more instinctual, more joyous, better for group morale, of the last few weeks I have been conducting an experiment of sorts on the population and understand what triggers the rushes and how to carefully hoard gasoline based on the fact that 99% of the crashed and smashed up vehicles out there are already drained dry.

The fact of the matter is that it is bitter cold. Winter arrived with an onslaught from the great steppes to the north and I play a little coy game to deny where Unity City actually is, even if it is rumored in other sources to be the source of xultation. As I consider the trade-offs of walking single outside, my possible minor cold could be dealt with with a white face mask, but I then also did a minor two-person pair run with Ian, my first since his outburst, and we carried off the day if not directly addressing the issues involved. Ian's thinking, in so much as it reflects survivor thinking as a whole, also brings up the question of lingering racial issues in the survivor community with it known that in some parts of the world, the racial balance is now 55% black / 20% Indian / 25% other. The minority white-world is of course inevitably a slowly shrinking circle of heavily armed individuals fending off both the zombies and the changed social dynamics of the human beings, but of course the blacks don't realize in their own way that inheriting a world full of genetically-altered individuals is going to be no honeymoon. I mean, what if Ian is right, and racial divisions still exist in compounds; what is going the point of the declaration of Black supremacy right as the final infrastructure supporting zombie culture breakdown and they resort to mass cannibalism of uninfected human beings (a

trope that has escaped this particular outbreak, ours being manmade and not supernatural).

It feels very lose-lose. We are going to be maintain one final generation of literate human beings with an eye on history and the ability still to understand its place in time, and then the mindless DNA-modified Happy Humans will replace us with their Joy-joy Burgers and Rapture Shakes. Then, eventually being able to decipher the civilization that preceded them, at some point the New Humans will simply our society as being terribly chaotic, ridiculously unhappy, barely human, much as a modern human today regards a chimpanzee. That seems to be the fate. The other is that Ian and the rest of his black survivors form a black supremacy and systematically eradicate the zombies through sheer brutality and perhaps mass radiological warfare. But then that too seems an exercise in futility, as the untouched African continent and Indian subcontinent become the remaining powers of the world, but inherit after all so little but a bare subsistence existence. They had never been industrialized and seem unlikely to do so of their own accord.

Other rumors off the crystal net, the net of a million lies: a prophet in India centralizes power, there are some Shangri-la-type valleys in China where survivors are maintaining agricultural communities, and there's an un-touched databank in north Unity. Actually I might go explore that, even at the heavy cost of abandoning our current management of the swarms in our vicinity.

[after the runabout]

In spite of (or perhaps because of...) the cold, the zombies were listless today and unreactive, going about their tasks in a non-violent way and gearing up for the turn of the year. Despite the megabytes streaming across the Net of a Million Lies, certain facts are impossible to hide, viz., even without having physically seen the terrain of Africa or India, it's widely known that these areas survived genetic plague far more effectively than the supposedly "superior" industrialized civilizations. It's said homo sapiens went through a genetic bottleneck when it migrated north out of its origin point in east Africa, and thus, the "racially pure" societies such as Korea or Germany were completely vulnerable (even 99.8% infected) whereas primitive human societies remain in southeast Europe and according to rumor, great parts of the Caribbean and Brazil. The genetic mixture of once discriminated against skin colors proved more adaptable to AURORA, today's net buzz was that Puerto Rico apparently has an entirely functioning navy, army, and quarantine zone, and there is talk it intends to take the offensive against the 11 billion. It probably won't be a wise decision. These aren't supernatural

rise-from-the-dead brain-eating zombies: these are the viral ones, the ones created by genetic plague and they retain an IQ of 80 or 85+ even as they sometimes sit at a malfunctioning machine repeatedly pressing the same button but getting no results. Further, cultural its own effect on how each infected race group acts. The inherently pacifist Japanese, although 100% infected, are apparently carrying out in some sort of primitive sericulture / rice paddy-level of society, a harkening back to their Heian days. Some warlord is in charge there, having returned their capital to their celestial city Kyoto whereas Tokyo itself having accepted some influx of Russians on humanitarian grounds apparently suffered a catastrophic fire and records similar situations to most Western capitals (i.e., zombies living and reproducing mindlessly, the 0.01% uninfected holed up in single-person apartments). Yet, that is the information that travels over jammed and deliberately obfuscated broadcasts—it all could be a lie. India is said to be automatically assigning slavery to every new confused refugee boat that arrives on its shore, if such a vessel isn't immolated immediately. The concerns of the entire world, of course, are one of the objections that Ian (and a few others) have—or rather, that I actually try to ascertain the lay of the entire world is one of the objections, for far more are immediately concerned with the immediate confines of Unity City and whether, indeed, we should accelerate things and formally join one of the alliances.

In the aftermath of outbreak and the degeneration of AURORA syndrome among the infected, survivor bands are to some degree linked up in affiliate or regional groupings, though as anyone can point out, if there is an alliance of 7, so to speak, one headquarters and six compounds around it, the one in the center is really reaping all the benefits. The people who live there enjoy completely patrolled streets and relatively few hostile clan or zombie attacks while the ones circling it are only partially secure. Groupings of the next level up, the circle of 7 surrounded by a circle of twelve more, has apparently been attempted on some level, but the total number of survivors that entails (roughly 10×19 , or almost 200) is apparently very hard to achieve because as anyone retaining a modicum of common sense will note, this now leads to a situation of one “totally secure” leader, 7 “almost absolutely compounds” and then the suckers on the outside who are affiliated with the clan but derive a limited amount of resources from it. That's Unity City dynamics at present, 2024, a simple question of two-dimensional plain dynamics, although, again, the networks are abuzz with rumors that there are such groupings or formations underway. As point of fact, I myself have received an offer to evacuate our current place to join up with something in the eastern city, but I asked the clan leader to stand by, as there's more to just being an apparently impenetrable target in a single location rather than having to accept clan orders to assault rival groupings or to put aside the interests of our band in favor of the larger alliance. Injuries are commonplace. Deaths are not unknown. New singletons drifting in become fewer and fewer by the month, and not everyone who passes by with the claimed magic talents of chemistry or military small-unit tactics is who they claim to be. At the worst, if you join a group of

entirely dysfunctional people and dynamics, the result is sometimes a mass suicide or a shoot-out within the survivor band. This isn't unknown by any means.

The really one unadulterated positive, one might say, in a strictly academic sense is that with the fall of civilization and the disappearance of all industrialized countries, we can now see, with a clear and unjaundiced eye, the exact meaning of religions and conflicts and culture wars. Auster did it best, perhaps, in that striking capture of 8 September 2011 with a black transvestite homosexual in Manhattan City, but with a tattered copy of the Falklands War and all the commentary I've assembled, autistic wise, we can see multiple movies and literary references made to what was the largest naval conflict post-WW2, the idea of "political decision" by the Iron Lady (attack authorized by London against the Belgrano even though it was outside the exclusion zone and steaming west), and the presence as well on the battle field of those "trope-types" that persist over and over and over again in human history. Lt. Col Herbert Jones of 2 Para leading 690 elite troops against the dug-in

1000-odd Argentinean draftees holding higher ground became the last highest ranking military fatality ever to fall in battle from the British military but his actions, both praised and criticized by his own establishment, reveal that he was the true "Death-seeker," personally leading a charge against a dug-in Argentinian position even though higher command later both awarded him a medal and then advised their other senior officers that they were to lead the entirety of their units and not just seek the schwerkpunkt doctrine established decades before. His counter-part, also LTC, Italo Piaggi, was after the war kicked out of the military and died peacefully in bed. Did not both get what they sought? And how much do we believe out of all these strange databanks and rumor-mills that generated that the French were both equipping the Argentineans and defusing their own devices? Were the Russians really supplying Libya which was then airlifting to Peru? Only now in 2024, with the world having fully fallen to the AURORA virus, can we read battles from forty years and recognize both similarities and differences to armored and urban warfare as we know it. The zombies are everywhere. I've geocached a supply drop near southeast Unity; my own compound mates wonder why I am always lost in books and theory and perhaps sentiment shifts towards Ian as the new recognized leader. Maybe this was his plan all along. But we're independent and armed to the teeth and our compound is loaded with traps. It is a dug-in building amidst the cold of winter, and theoretical theories are all that occupy my time when I am not turning the dials on the frequency jumper and listening to the buzz tone that is the final swan song of old humanity.

[Secondarily, our last raid managed to finish just in time to cull down the numbers according to economic-type analysis. We have established a safe zone and averted the tragedy of eliciting another outbreak of joy-rage.]

As I approach the half way of this notebook, this Mead notebook with all its Americana a weird artifact to have discovered and scavenged, the thought does occur to me in that microcosm of our society we still have replicated only the eternalities of the human condition after all, and our little social dynamics just reveal that our lot still lies in the conflict and the struggle for resources and the dynamics of social justice that have its liberals and conservatives and its survivalist bands and its communities of weirdos that somehow thrive. Society has fallen. History has ended. Yet even as Ian's threat grows more dim, I buzzed out to one of the more prescient compound and in its background saw the wealth and happiness that had been the fate of those who had had the pure coincidence of chance to live next to a biosecure laboratory or large military compound in the northern latitudes. Holstein City reports that with their automated defenses, they have no less than ten thousand living in a controlled and regimented district, but one that is safe from all zombie infestation. Some have won the lottery of where you were at moment X, and uninfected or immune, they live amidst well-stocked libraries of audiovisual tapes and all the entertainment culture of circa 2010 society perhaps that last "golden year," the year when it had become clear to everyone that the last generation had arrived and the specialists and the only remaining task to do was to regulate all commercial, economic, and defense related activities into one last beautiful perfect society of happiness without the Happy Virus, environment ministries pushing into chamber of commerce turf, local law enforcement working side-by-side but also in rival with the instruments of federal defense. These connections are rare: the ionosphere has to be perfectly aligned and all the frequency match-ups absolute perfect, but yes, in the year 2024, you can still maintain some kind of fuzzy and static-flooded audio-visual link with compounds located across the world. Am I filled with joy that that heavily-defended arks of paradise exist? Possibly not. But, whoever you meet on the Net of a Million Lies, you see that in the end, even this very sentence contains within the same meaninglessness as a meaningless clash on the Falklands, a long-forgotten, Borges' claim "a fight by two bald men over a comb." Beaudrillard, Foucault, the great last humanists, had left behind a legacy that generates only so much academic cant, yet in our ways, in our declining twilight, we turn over the world to the New People and care not for the immediate battle reports that buzz in also, often in an incomprehensible language, but the tonals clearly indicating either despair or triumph. Way back in pre-modern times, in the ages of rifles, nations had warred through the expression of their national will, yet even in this purely psychological age that remains, where clans battle clans, I am also aware that I am not so much filled with a sense of infant wonder and joy as I am cognizant that the stir of reunited fighting across the "crescent of instability" merely marks once again new temporary alliances of convenience and the ever so deceptive use of camouflage to become what one was inevitably destined to become all along.

Establishing radio contact with one of the major clans controlling Unity, I was informed that no active battle for supremacy is underway over my city itself. That is welcome news, of course, insofar as heavy survivor activity generates a corresponding wave of unease amongst the undead, usually resulting in higher activity overall. The issue at stake is not just one of the many traps we have set for the viral-infected or our overall strong defenses, but even that these raids, as beneficial some claim they are to personnel weapons-handling skills and small-team tactics, tend to distract one from the overall sense of well-being. It's like being under siege, continuously, and with vast barren and unpopulated or infected zones to all sides, this brings the curious question of what I was doing in Unity City in the first place, which brings us of course to the Idealist and her scientific project, which reflected, as I wrote, the mix of racial-sexual-cultural politics that had defined our late and departed multicultural world. What I had realized, reading through all the academics, and that they were no more aware of the truth than anyone else, but had merely succeeded in establishing a cult of sort, a priesthood of the PhD, and while countries in wartime had trained skilled pharmacists in ten months, typists in two, and even combat officers in three (the "ninety-day wonder"), we had evolved into a highly regulated and regimented society that had lost, in its efforts, its spontaneity and soul. To the graveyard of the departed human world, my thoughts could only tend to its battle literature and non-fiction, and I found myself wearying of authors who I had once read to the very last word. Even this too, half of this notebook being completed, a probable audience of zero, amounts only to a data creation that will suffer finally data loss and data break. We are left only to have the scanner going continuously, recording brushfire engagements in harsh battle language and the distortion effects that are almost certain the result of hostile survivor groups that see the world simply in terms of, the fewer survivors left, the more scrap we can scavenge ourselves. Conversation on the crystal nets revealed a ceasefire had been reached, but which clan had triumphed and who would be banking on what new temporary coalition next? My back ached and I yearned to walk it off in midnight streets

6 December 2024

which is what I did using outdoor fitness equipment and the stiff breeze off the river reminding that winter's onslaught was entirely real. It was a question of the loneliness of command; command having by nature to be neutral and non-participatory, yet finally, we had reached also the time for confession, for my presence in the science city Unity City was also not an accident, since I had known something of the AURORA project from its inception. Idealist was my pick, a psychology I had probed since she was seventeen and commissioned for nothing short of three thousand US to see for the

potential for future breakthrough. Eventually the universities said no, but my guesstimate had proven fatally accurate in the end: this was the one. Ms. I, the idealist scientist, had in fact been the one to probe deeply into the interstices of human knowledge and solve the universal theory of everything was a neuroscientific problem that had eluded politicians and psychiatrists for millennia. Utilizing a Cray supercomputer, she answered what was the interaction between dopamine and serotonin and rejiggered the genetic code of the human race. Yet she had been caught up in the political problems of ten years ago, when race was the continual topic of the national discourse and the police and the minority communities were raging about conflicting senses of what constituted justice. There was no justice. There was only the nerve staple, and AURORA was her pet project.

If I am correct in my interpretation of events, what had occurred deep in Plum Island was simply a bureaucratic power struggle between a minority researcher of moderate talents and society's demand that affirmative action be extended even into the realms of the scientific research community itself. Passed over for promotion, left alone with her test-tubes and an inadvertently protein-modeling computer, she had surpassed problems that had confounded mathematicians with degrees infinitely exceeding hers and honors and citations that had been the simple numerical measuring score of a scientist's prestige. Somewhere in late laboratories in time she worked solely on her own, and the result was so stunning elegant, such engineered brilliance, that actually the wonder of it all was that AURORA had never evolved naturally. The retrovirus, based a third off Simian Infectious Virus, encoded just enough instructions to return adult human neurons to their pluripotential and then returned them back to neurons but with a permanent coded setting of elation and glee. Human beings infected by the AURORA virus became the Happy Zombies, the perpetually grinning, schizophrenically mad, white-eyed monsters that shambled about in ecstatic waves of ceaseless joy, and the result was the world we have today.

So then, my confession: Ms. I was my creation, in a sense. The tragedy was only that all the historical forces had to combine in that sense and in that one laboratory so that a minority researcher with half her talent was promoted above her, and in one half-contained biohazard laboratory, the entire future of the human race was rewritten. All religions, too, then, in a sense, ceased, as there was no more talk of a paradise that awaited or a hell for unbelievers. This was Scientist I's poisoned gift to humanity, but it reflected merely that everlasting trend throughout history of the totally unexpected, and the full shape or size of humanity now remains to some degree a mystery. Out at sea, there are rumors of quarantined ships struggling to survive off fisheries even as they dare not put into port to repair their steadily rusting hulls. Low Earth Orbit space stations, failing to receive their resupply rockets, are almost certainly now lifeless. But yet, despite it all, despite the apocalypse, still there are apparently confirmed reports as well that agricultural seeds are being frozen by arctic teams deep in the north and that

an emergency science database has been sunk deliberately into old salt mines to await whatever future stabilized society returns. Though most of humanity is still engaged in raids and resource runs into tiny micro-wars of three hundred or fewer, in half a dozen locations across the world and in remote islands that have refused any port of call, a few struggling agriculturalists survive, and in this sense at least even in these final days there is still the tiny steps taken to keep a human existence alive of some kind, even if in some cases this amounts to a derelict military base of alcoholic ex-soldiers, genetically immune, and expending massive ammunition in ceaseless and fruitless continual warfare. Nobody, not the prime ministers, not the lords of finance, foresaw this catastrophe, but the lights, going out one-by-one, still evoke a sense of pathos and fruition, and then of course there are those who simply live amidst the white-eyed and with ironic smiles observe the besieged compounds of the pure humans, and await their own unpredictable and untimely deaths but prefer, after all, life among the Happy.

I sleep with the Happies. It's my way out of the element of sex that would otherwise issue raw fissures within the community I lead. Ian is using the race card to keep Sara in his bed, and Nicholas is too busy with his alchemies and nicotine-amyls to pay too much attention to internal compound dynamics, Sean is an invert, and Ricardo the wild-card is possibly being played by Adriana who is keeping Robert in thrall, but whatever nook or crannies the lovers go off to remains out the range of my concern, because they're all just subordinates, after all, and their peccadillos are rightfully their own. I'd like to be the active leader, the player of Beatles songs over loud-speakers in the mornings, a charismatic, but it's not true guidance to do so, it's more sophisticated to be the semi-inscrutable non-talker and ambiguous communicator of non-directives. Should we fuel up some of the working vehicles we found and try to live out in the countryside? But that's supposed to be the hidden danger, trying to avoid society when we're inextricably tied to its resources. Do I settle a dispute between the ex-military Kelly or the outdoors specialist Sara by assigning one's favorite weapon to the other, even if its less effective? To do so would only invite a conflict the next month, as suddenly somebody discovers a trove of irradiated forever rations and the fight is on for the tiny bottles of mass-produced tabasco sauce or the true luxuries of coffee or real cigarettes. In this way, my compound is less driven by directives than by a deliberately concocted chaos of the unreal. My only really pressing wish is the problems of concentration or readership now that so much pre-outbreak literature just seems so unreal. Entire novels now read differently, of course; and now I can barely abide what used to burn like fire before my eyes.

Part of it, most of it surely, has to be the nicotine-amyls that Nicolas cooks up. In fact, I'm inclined to just think of him as Nicotine rather than his real name, but the issue with post-fall chemical experiments is that nothing is absolute pure anymore so we're not absolutely what's coming out of the beakers and tubing and distillation stills that we've set up. It's well known that alcohol can be brewed from simple wood, but we've operated

under a strict non-alcohol rule since another of catastrophes have hit some other compounds, and that only leaves that one plant poison, the insect-killer, nicotine, which does something just wonderful to the brain in terms of relaxation and atmosphere. To be perfectly, the worldwide trend against tobacco is one feature of the pre-infection world I'll never understand, as every Hollywood movie from the 50s show, the hard-boiled interrogation between detective and suspect; the femme fatale; the execution before firing squad; the soldiers blackened by war, were all necessary parts of a smoking equation, and it was actually Adolf Hitler who first proposed a society-wide smoking ban and since he was after that war used as simply the benchmark of evil, then why has his one intensely personal preoccupation become mankind's universal crusade? The liquid nicotine derivatives we have cooking up in our stills is not quite the same as a drag on an old school machine-rolled pristine white cigarette, but I think it has much of the same effects even though I'm not entirely sure what's going on in my brain. All I know is that two or three years ago books came alive, and now I can barely get through five or ten pages. Some subtle interworkings I guess, but on the other hand, I haven't lost the capable to scribble out barely decipherable words using the nub of a pencil on a beat-up notebook that will be lost to history. I also actually came down with symptoms of a cold yesterday, and although it looks to be a mild one, still, I'm a frenzy even if I appear outwardly calm, and the world feels ablaze even if the alliance leaders are claiming there's a ceasefire in Unity City, and strangely it feels like everything is going to collapse all at once, even when after all that would have to be impossible.

With the brain ablaze and unable to smoke any of my preciously hoarded supply of cigarettes and the next batch of Nicotine Nicolas's chemical stew still two days away, I guess to a degree my brain is in on fire, and I'm spewing out word salad, short of whatever supposed digression we'll get to the science compound that'll be accepting in the immune on February, some sort of half felt rumor of a forgotten year or is it memories now that I can't be entirely sure about since I don't know exactly what biochemical outcome is now the completely recondite outcome. Aren't I in Unity City because just a few years previous I had been in China or in some dusty factory city where endless gray concrete housing complexes led to burning trash in an alleyway, loose dogs and cats, the tricycle junk collectors, and ever so randomly the Mercedes that passed by? I have some distant collection of some kind of job when such a thing was possible looking for the real mega talents, the pure mathematicians, the in-betweeners, possibly neuroscientist teenage or older who might be in those futile efforts possible to turn back the plague, some sort meta half-functioning when we were all half Happy ourselves or the change had not yet gone apparent. I have some distant memory of some kind of motion, traveling as if in a dream effortlessly through streets broken up and torn by uncaring maintenance and piles of trash blowing about everywhere and pollution in the air, for something like China had created all viruses and influenzas and weird chemical stews for quite some time, and was itself resistant abnormally in a way the

Koreans and Japanese were not, even if they were to succumb as well to the wave-like compressions of zombie infestation and their weird skyscrapers too were to be burnt and wasted. I don't know how much is memory and how much is AURORA effect (as I said, even if you're immune, you still suffer memory losses and even artifacts), but somewhere amidst all that pollution and smoke and grease in the streets and noise and tumult and rude people, I had a recollection of having arrived somewhere, that Shangri-La that was just one room and one other person, a girl in tattered pantyhose but smirking back as if she had all the cards. All the cards except one, and that was the two Jokers snuck into every mass machine manufactured pack, Shanghai 838s, White Rabbit milk candies, and the sucker punch of the weird dried teas that had arrived, unintentionally organic, at a tenth of the price of Whole Foods.

I dreamt it all, I guess, or it crept in uninvited through mental creep, the process by which a Happy succumbing to the virus poured out all their sense impressions in some mystic event to you, and thus in this fashion, I was sent ablaze on a three wheel bicycle to wander mystically through desert cities and torn-up concrete abutments. That was the name of the game: the search, but the search was elusive because AURORA was too invasive and too prevalent and too infectious. It was airborne and infected birds as well as humans. No population could complete escape its predations, and islands that had thought themselves completely immune would one day discover a washed-up seagull or albatross on a beach barely alive, but its beak fixed in an unmistakable grin of joy. A hot bath solves everything, I suppose, but we're working out of outhouses and composting and crapsack ersatz showers in which mold grows and the condition of a compound it is itself an advertisement not to attack if maintained or at least seemingly dangerous. Impression is everything. My black and white checkered non-alignment flag is countered by a yellow and blue Angle banner, and somewhere in the interstices of group dynamics, we are inevitably being drawn sooner or later into the alliance wars, with the key unique combat tool being the one-of-a-kind extended range long rifles, the only really devastating weapon in a survivor-to-survivor attack. Hidden behind loopholes or firing ports, but armed only with a Mac-11 or shotgun, a compound survivor has no chance against a skilled sniper with a 600m advantage. There is obviously an entire art form to the design and defense of a fixed point, but the one inescapable fact is the relentless battle for greater and greater range. Completely unsolicitedly, an alliance faction discovered word of my acquisition of one of these desired tools, and a generous offer was made: but my information seeking was already too forward, and I knew the value of these one-of-a-kind bespoke weapons.

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Saturday arrives, and although I realize that this will come off as slightly madness, I'm not entirely sure that I haven't entered some sort of mirror universe of a kind. Do you know the saying "you know it's a dream if you can't read any numbers or see any words?" That would be one explanation for why suddenly books are unreadable, and then I've looked up Datacentral entries on some of the past historical events and certain things seem subtly different. I'm pretty sure this isn't chemical effect; I may have slightly slid timelines somewhere in the past few months, but whether I have or I haven't, the essential reality of ten fingers, ten toes, being a touch underweight as a neurotic political polemist and survivor remains with my shock of black hair and my sallow skin.

I don't know, white page, now that all the political questions and cultural questions have been answered, what exactly we should do with our works and days. The project to go explore the science site sounds interesting although allegedly it isn't available until February which will be long after this notebook is filled up. Ian has made no further move to pack his belongings and he's probably completely oblivious to the micro-dramas in which he participates, however unknowingly or however dramatic the effects. Ten years ago today (according to Datacentral), there were protests and demonstrations and loose borders, but in my dream state or whatever or whatnot, I also sort of realized that the 'economic' strategy of herd management is actually self-defeating. It's a whole lot of work for minimal returns and you get just as much by concentrating on strict resource collection. It's a realization that sunk in only after some amount of implementation of planning, which in a sense lends credence to the whole theory of never living a life by a plan, but absolute planlessness probably results you wrapped up in the schemes of others, at least in this world or any world described in the history books.

My cough or contusion or whatnot being whatever it might be, still, I wait in the darkened cities over the grave of human civilization and contemplate that whatever else has changed, the human need for entertainment certainly hasn't diminished, and between playing cards and what functionality remains of old school electronics, still the average amount of time people spend in fatuous pastimes (the dice game or whatever it is being the most gag-inducing, that's just IMHO), does illustrate that man's central problem after he solved the issue of mere survival has been the entertainment question and so we're settling into winter months whilst the looks of my compound mates take on a drier air and I wonder also why not to submerge myself in some of those trivial "apps" that the surviving smartphones have, some being in some cases some complicated science fiction story of building robot tanks out of other tanks or even, on the salvageable computers, variants of what were once linked-together game worlds, the massively simulated persistent worlds that occupied greater and greater percentages of the world population's attention in the latter days, even as we considered the greater meaninglessness of it all faced with the bleak truth of absolute nihilism. The problem of everything, of course, is that there really was no substitute for war as the action of man

and that is why the nation-state began to engage increasingly deeper and deeper into this pastime, and why each generation in turn came to repeat the mistakes of its previous, as we pulsed—all of us—into greater and greater complexities of conflict, dominated only by new vocabularies and substructures. Wouldn't there have been some way, actually, to have replaced our patriarchal societies with women-led civilizations in those last few years we had before AURORA? But no, humanity chose battle over peace, conflict over consensus, and struggle over stasis. Nothing else could fill the void. And it became appropriate, actually in a sense, that the human race was finally destroyed by a woman. A woman had been the first to give birth to a child, and a woman was the last human being to contemplate its closure. There has been as well some explosion in the eastern part of the city, and I can read this only as a sign that Unity too is experiencing schizotypic breakdown, long thought impossible in these highly regimented societies. I don't know what untold sums have been expended to generate these words you read, but yet, still, amidst universal ruin, we see now that actually of course it couldn't have happened any other way. We lived in a world defined by the rules and structures of Newtonian mathematics and physics, and though ironically he had generated far more strange and recondite Christian mystic thinking, somehow the rationalistic system he had invented had taken hold, and however disproven by late 20th century relativity, nevertheless the systems collided as they did as inevitably as one billiard ball hit by another in the gravitational pull of universal entropic decline.

Problem of the day: (all problems being strictly of that period), I have the cough/contusion thing going on, but it's bitter-cold, and the weather doesn't permit the sort of stress-relieving long walks that are good to clear the head. Acquired a decent and durable, if somewhat polyester scarf that works for now, but still [editor's note: there is a line break here, inexplicably] nothing especial was accomplished, and at no huge advantage to any side. Actually, suddenly the thought occurs to me that I should join the general battles that have emerged, being as that is the ultimate challenge and perhaps the final functionality of existence. Such a dark thought on a bright morning, but the ruthless winter sun permits little else but bare facts of existence. And it is time now to get moving; I miscreated one work manifest but salvaged but whatever we could, and I got I believe our condition moving in the right direction even if we're working with that steady cough.

[much later that day]

Odd coincidence today in that after crunching the numbers so to speak and backing away from 'economic herd-management' of the hordes surrounding the immediate vicinities and concentrating primarily on resource pick-up, we still ended up

inadvertently meeting all the minimum requirements I calculated out to prevent or rather reduce the sort of rage-raids that occur against our living quarters. So that was the immediate weirdness of any day that technically has a weird moment, but it was offset later by one of our other raid teams being surprisingly discovered and ambushed by the infected out on one of very established eastern runs and that remains the end of that, because they had to throw down all the gear and seriously run for broke which tends to happen not infinitely often but does occur. We, the original remaining humans, since our brains having undergone STAP reversion and rejiggeration, tend to have superior coordination and speed when it really comes down to it, so assuming the first wave of degeneration joy-overload slaughters, actually now life has settled down to a sort of coexistence, however tenuous. Yet whatever the immediate situation, I find myself accountable for the performance of any individualistic day, and I think it wise, after some reflection, since we're off set solar time, to just start using double days as entry titles—in fact, I'll retroactively go mark this one in that way. So here is normally where I'd mark down the change of midnight, ghouls' hour, for we've become the ghouls, of course, and my thoughts meander without pattern although I think I've gotten the initial nicotine withdrawal and then also the problem of the cold is improving just a bit today (less body weakness, although still a little sore all around, and no headache per se).

I have received word that an old long-time friend from long ago has passed, which is how the survivor grapevine works and why most survivors tend to exist in a semi-cooperative way, information being the key dynamic to survival. On the one hand, you allow in known people to sup and dine with you, on the other of course they are learning microdetails about your living conditions, general health, and weaponry lying around. That is the way somebody on the crystal radio webs learns of my long range sniper rifle, bespoke, and asks politely about acquiring it, even without my even noticing at first what we hauled back from one of the warehouses near the port district. Similarly although we're on this

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Drifted off to sleep earlier today (or “yesterday” if one is permitted to just speak of natural day/nights) without finishing the sentence and now the sentence eludes me.

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Lost a day yesterday to include notes due to heavy salvaging, amongst which, was discovered, in an irony of our current situation the zombie movie “Resident Evil.” We are living amongst zombies and watching a zombie movie on a handcranked battery array-powered television set. Note the matryoshka doll features of this particular moment, marked by more staticky claims across the Net of a Million Lies, as well as the subconscious realization that Ian has staked out more space in his personal room. His object all along, with no follow-through on his claim to walk off. What do they say? It's all about the money? ← I think that describes our little inter-group dynamics. But I spend my nights walking the city deserted of inhabitants both because exercise is fundamental to any sort of mental balance, and also because the city at night more closely resembles lost civilization than the parody it has become with white-eyed happies. Some fairly desultory activity these past few days and lots of time to brood. How has civilization changed? It's the irony noted of Mao as well, having overthrown the Emperor and the Forbidden City, China was exactly the same before and after except for the lives of a few thousand peasants immediately around Beijing.

The immediate mood of today is that in one manner of speaking, although we're engaged in salvaging and now absolutely now for certain that we're the last generation of human beings, or at least normal human beings, still perhaps I contradict an earlier sentiment and say that actually, nothing has changed at all. We're still confronted with the banality or ennui of post-modern life, it's just that we really are post-post-post-history, and facing the more or less unstoppable reality that every second in a sense is an enemy, even if a year is not. I don't know, absolutely for sure, if this is really all communicable. It's just that, surrounded by bare concrete and slapped together boards and metal wiring and barricades, amidst kerosene heat, I wonder if our lives really are meaningfully different had not the plague broken out, and had post-post-modern society continued the way it did anyway, without any exposure to the downfall virus.

I'm not entirely I'm able to communicate what is incommunicable. We are in the “desert of the real,” as the French philosopher or whoever stated; we are in a blank white void, and nothing is really happening. The consolation, really, before the breakdown of global civilization was a mass-media culture and spiritual emptiness, against which we could only generate a greater and greater amount of fetishization and pornographic output. Without blinking an eye, we exposed our children to the sight of naked bodies on pirated DVDs and all over the world, the projectors were set to reverse mode and bounced off mirrors to create a larger image size in a smaller premium usage box, but \$3 or \$12, (or \$20 in Manhattan, before the collapse), the worst thing of all was to discover a sort of wearying down of all possible storylines and conceits. Towards the end, I think a surprising amount of popular movies were actually, despite multimillion dollar budgets, quite boring. That was the formica-cabinature and ceaseless increasing trend towards drug-addiction we waltzed into, including such extremes as the famous ecstasy-abuser of 25,000 pills or the media storms surrounding events that may or may not have

occurred in disputed circumstances and against which even our riots had become predictable and yawn-inducing. Wearing a kaffiyeh and setting truck tires ablaze, I attracted no attention whatsoever from law enforcement, and became a professional demonstration specialist jetting from city to city. My activities, I believe, were tolerated only because in every once in a while I did turn up the odd curiosity, the Idealist, as well as the fascinating conspiracy theory that End User Certificate fraudsters were the ones behind the financing of the anti-harmonization umbrella, but whether it had been the Disc Video Disc Disc redundancy that caused so much lunacy or the fact that I had actually been indeed the matryoshka doll, remained a topic that would inspire plausible undeniability. Or rather, what the Mullahs Didn't Understand is That They Revealed Their Limitations After All because the terminal in Shanghai had the cure for AURORA, and it was all there, it was a reversible condition, but they refused to reverse it.

I've written it before, the basic story must be preserved multiple times in case of damage to the notebook, ripped or missing pages used for fuel, or whatever inevitable will occur before human society with science and enlightenment recovers itself and the virus goes extinct. Sometime in the year 2010s, racial issues in the West became so serious an issue that finally affirmative action was intruded into hard sciences itself; a key figure, the Scientist known to us simply as 'Idealist' was left passed over promotion just as she had been rejected by Ivy League universities, and she went on to create a highly-contagious Human Happiness Virus (HHV) that went on to turn almost all of humanity into joy-filled zombies, degenerating first into schizophrenia, then recovering into murderous rampages of euphoria, and finally possibly showing signs of stabilizing into some kind of white-eyed stability even as those who were immune and remembered the world before the global pandemic sealed ourselves up into compounds to await, of course, our eventual extinction.

Different to the issues of Hollywood's fantasy tales about this issue pre-outbreak, there were no supernatural forces involved. The dead did not reanimate themselves, and the world's real zombies are not flesh-eaters but merely a mentally-stapled version of the previous version of humanity, living the same almost 60 year lifespan that is typical of humanity as a whole, and even carrying on some of the tasks of modern scientific society simultaneous to its unusual breakdown and strange OCD-type repetition of tasks that are fundamentally meaningless and reflect a complete breakdown from the processes that actually sustain industrialization. A zombie, repeatedly pressing a button at a factory that used to make machine tools, discovering finally that it is no longer working, might in his euphoria continue for some five additional months, never contemplating that the end of the power grid is the actual source of his problems and the microdefects accumulating in industrial society leading in many cases to the less-developed countries actually surviving for quite a bit longer. We know that north Europe is all wasteland except for a few survival arks; we know Africa is almost completely disease-free, but except for the occasional broadcasts across the crystal-radio webs, information which is

constantly injected with deliberate disinformation, we know only that Unity City is not an exception but a rule, and that there are increasing signs of Survivor-vs-Survivor conflict as the economics of stealing an entire compound's arsenal and ammunition become clear in cities salvaged down to their last scraps.

How are we different from what Hollywood had expected?

Hollywood: supernatural or viral zombies from the dead, engaged in furious attacks against human beings, flesh-eating, preternaturally strong, and held off only by immense fire-power as the ethnically-diverse, charismatic band of survivors heads towards the city of safety or the eventual showdown with the big King Zombie (or storyline somewhere along these lines).

Reality: we've been subtly infected with Happy Flu, a scientifically-engineered virus that increases human happiness but is showing signs of degeneration. Some sort of social activity continues but the normals are now holed up in compounds across the world.

Definitely false: the theory that the Western governments deliberately released the virus. After all: it hit the developed/industrialized world the worst.

A plausible possibility: the West and the China had a brief window of opportunity to seal an anti-virus virus release but refused.

Other conspiracy theories working the chatter-nets: military bases underneath large mountains still exist and await a final collapse of zombie society; the zombies themselves are actually settling down into a new type of humanity (my belief); this compound is simulated, and we are living in the carefully studied island of activities in order to better develop solutions to global pandemic (falsifiable, due to the capability to simply take a boat down to the ocean and look across the waters to other countries, where the lights are also flickering).

Fact of banal existence: we are still dealing with boredom and subcultures and pop entertainment that we now mine, but possibly even ten years ago we were reaching limits there as well. Moore's Law turned into Moore's Limit, and the nexus of creativity itself reached the barricade of all stories being completely told. Dealing with racial issues erupting in the 2010s, affirmative action had breached the citadel called hard science; a female scientist had unleashed the plague; and mankind's history had ended with a whimper, rather than a bang, amidst which we now re-read the history of our entertainment culture, mining and mining our late 20th century and millennial hyper-media to discover what was after all, the roots of Western culture and our identity-nexus. An argument breaks out in the compound: is Resident Evil a good movie? We're just recovered another distillation batch from Nicotine Nicholas's still, and the mood is good, yet a cold rain falls, a warming of the climate bringing the drenching rain rather than

the endurable snowfall, with the zombies quiescent, unreactive, and approaching the switch of the solar year with what can only be described as equanimity.

I offer in terms only the confession that yes, maybe, it's a moral atrocity to lay with the Happies, although in this private of private notebooks, centuries will pass before whatever new Homo feliciens civilization that arises un-quantifies its data content to reveal what will inevitably be heavily disputed and argued over, and probably dismissed as the ravings of a madman. But, yes, madness always only microscopically distant, however the nicoamines produced or the laughter that erupts from a social gathering. I feel isolated from the compound mates. Yes, Ian's victory is cemented, in a fake threat to depart he's gathered all sympathy around him and reminded everyone that the number two position is the key position to take. We're stuck in our siege mentality—everyone is, but at least we do have the option to sink into a retro-analysis of our own late society, and that is consolation. That is our prerogative.

CITY OF GHOSTS

My compound838: Ian Murphy, Tara Reed, Adriana Gomez, Kelly Wright, Nicotine Nicolas, Robert Ortiz, Big-S Sara, Sean Ortiz (no relation), Ricardo Cruz. A mixed bag of Westerners all associated with 8 Army of Unity, Hill Garrison or associated dependents and/or expats. Ian and Tara go back, way back, but Adriana and Tara are associated as well with that last straylight run, the last one anyone got to do, just Lt. Col. Herbert Jones of 2 Para got to be the last LTC to fall in battle, UK, mine was the last of the straylight runs, as the light dimmed from human civilization, and a Jeep Cherokee, maroon, racing through polluted smog clouds in industrial South China was the last chance to run the anti-virus virus, and save humanity, but was a failure of the West and Beijing to turn back the pandemic.

Was it a dream.

Was it a dream.

Was it a dream.

My memory is of motion through space, endless miles being swallowed up with me before the wheel, as UNITY had me in China, still confident it would survive the outbreak, and still believing in its own genomics. The West had misunderstood Beijing, believed it to be calling the shots, but everyone inside the country knew China's true capital was Dongguan, city of sin. Through brick or concrete or people carrying on their primitive rites what we were aiming for was the anti-AURORA, the viral genomes based off the weird chemical signatures that South China was pouring out, all those marijuana analogues they called "spice" and sold as incense from Tokyo to Tashkent, as the saying went, but more realistically to places like London and Hamburg. South China's gift.

If my past is bound up with Ian because we had taken a long car ride up -95 to Woods Hole and then Plum Island epidemiology, the straylight run was the straylight run because it was the last chance to turn back the plague and the secret was held not in the marching and patriotic songs of Red Culture China, but in the criminal seedy underworld of south China, the conquered China where Yard blood mixed with Fujian and Hakka was a code-word for Han invader, the bloody village massacres that mimicked our own American history of the 19th century but were completely ignored by the 20th century historian.

How could a Westerner understand? They understood it only in Western states-craft terms, where clean efficient streets showed that D.C. was the political nerve-center of a proper country, but the street knew in China that power and purity were actually in the corrupt. It was the breeding ground for the true patriotism, because you had to be 438Incense in order to decode the proper entry-sequence for f2f communication with the survival government, and in a marriage, in a marriage no less, between the daughter of a Dongguan party official and a gangster's corrupt son, I was delivered shotgun as Master of Ceremonies and then bowed to (a Korean custom, a Japanese one, but only ever so rarely a Chinese one) with hopes of access to the anti-virus, the mission that failed and the genomics never delivered.

The problem was always that of cultural dissociation. The West understood the hierarchy as being directly related to cleanliness, morality, and probity. Integrity, honor, and justice lay at the core of Western values as they were understood, but it was the Dark Three: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Sociopathy that lay at the foundation of the unbreakable stronghold that constituted south China's criminal order. Out of that hellhole had come all the HxNy influenza variants, but yet in the stronghold of disease and corruption was also the only key to turning back the Happy Flu, and in some dreamlike, pinball state, I and Adriana and Sara drove in the maroon Jeep Cherokee to attend the gangster's wedding and be tested, once and for all, if I had decoded the south of China.

I did. What more can be stated about the matter? By walking forward at the correct moment to bring the blushing bride to her firm and steadfast husband, I had carried out my duties as 438Incense to have seen through the undecipherable social codes and establish myself as the implausibly undeniable insider. At that moment, looking over the right of my shoulder, I saw past the white baseball-capped “gangsters” to see the fat chunky face of the true stakeholder, and locking eyes, I knew also too, my success was the failure type. In that Negated Moment of Awesome, we both knew that the marriage or union was established, but that the secrets of the counter-virus were therefore simultaneously at that moment refused. South China held the cure, but the West would not receive it. But then the plague took over South China as well, and so both entities lost in the end, resulting in final and terminal loss of all industrialized nations.

Westerners believed that title and hierarchy and cleanliness were associated were trust, but the trust of China was the trust of mutual squalor and despair. If we could have adjusted our values to deal directly with the dark gangster-criminals, we could have established true unification and a mutual world-wide cure. If they could have dropped their criminality and control to accept the clear and Apollonian standards of Western honor and trust, then we in turn could have brokered the successful anti-virus and seen the plague reversed back, humanity saved, the heavens breaking their wall of clouds to send down lenticular rays of sunshine and renewed hope. But the mission was doomed from the start, was it not? Lawlessness cannot combine with law; dishonorability cannot mix with integrity. The only deal that could never be sealed was the handshake of human rights and core honor with criminality seen as an inverse badge of honor itself. That was the key or pivot, and the moment too I touched history since, in the end, we'd have all been better off if the marriage had failed but the political alliance had been sealed.

Inside the genomic laboratories of Dongguan, there also existed both mystics and viral-coding manufacturers, German designed, and seven billion human lives hinged on reversing STAP, returning the human brains to their ordinary condition and seeing through a reversal of the zombie plague. But what did they want, after all, these gangsters and criminalities? Pleasure and the repetition of their gang rapes and druggings of naive light-skinned Han girls who took buses south. Our eyes locked: me and fat-faced 438Vanguard, but tragically tragically tragically the marriage took place, but the alliance or handover of the anti-virus was not effected. The Party member's daughter took the hand of the criminal's son, and South China endured for another three years, remnants slightly longer, yet we failed in the greater and larger sense of humanity's destiny.

Western trust began along a sense of mutual separation and then a system of values based on that trust. Southern Chinese values could only be the mutual joining of fates in a crapsack setting. Pollution, filth, and degradation everywhere, but the mask-faced

middle class refused to admit the rapes that went on, the iron-fist of trade union-society-party control that put down labor revolts and sent burnt or delimbed workers back to the streets to beg. That was our tragedy. Yet it seems dreamlike now, and unknown.

Nobody could have explained it, except somebody who had gone through the process and seen the wedding at work. Nobody else could have taken the hand of the blushing virginal bride and brought her to the criminal's son: so it was me, 438 Incense to watch the conflagration of the human race even though we were sacrificing our own species to the New People who would arrive. The wedding went on, for days on end as per protocol, with increasing dishes and round tables, and the celebrations under the heavy haze of throat-burning alcohol 2gt, yet we ended up with no exchange of the desired sequences with all the technologies and logistics of the West and all the data-secure technology of the hidden South. Tragedy tragedy tee are ei gee ee dee why. Then with our mission failed, we reboarded the Jeep SUV and drove slowly back to the port, the cargo ship and return to Unity City.

What more can be stated about the issue? Yet there was also in this travel my bonding with Adriana and Tara, and in Macao, Portuguese-blooded whites called themselves and were accepted as Chinese. We had failed. I made love to Adriana violently, in revolutionary style, knowing that we had trod on the grave of humanity. But, nonetheless, the mystical had been reached. I had seen the face as well of the Chinese gods, the mirror gods, who with malevolent eyes celebrated the final victory of political theory and pragmatic criminality. Because it was the third year of outbreak, because the plague was now finally out of control, we departed through haze and smoke and infinite concrete dust to reach our cargo ship and exit the land forever. And this completes, I guess, finally all confessions and my involvement with the AURORA plague. Now the history of my compound is revealed, as is too, in the end, why we reached this moment and the insanity of the second becoming the insanity of the week. Pursuing mere metal, cloth, wood scrap, we cleared out entire streets of the undead, and peace reigned for another 24 hours in Unity City, but again we know the moment is never certain, and the advantage is never perpetual.

INTERRUPTION OF THE INTERROGATOR'S VOICE

Prisoner 831 of the Unity compound 838 unaffiliated but designated 2/163 at latitude and longitude coordinates established by prior record, you are hereby advised that you are under investigation for genecrime and your participation in the AURORA genetic virus release. Your notebook, which you have written freely of your own free will and under no compulsion, constitutes an important part of your confession and possible acceptance of rehabilitation, as it has been accepted as Evidence A in our

continuing investigation of the AURORA event. But, at present, you have the right to remain silent. You have the right to counsel. You have the right if you are unable to afford counsel, to have counsel provided to you.

Very well, I wish to proceed. I do not request or require counsel.

We are completely aware of your identity and your leadership of the straylight operation 163 into Shenzhen, China in the third year of the outbreak. What are you hiding? What occurred in Shenzhen? Start from the beginning. Do not fear to repeat yourself. Describe events exactly as they occurred.

In O+3, in other words, in the third year of the outbreak, by then as we all know most of the Western countries had fallen, and it had become instantly apparent to everybody that something strange had occurred, but the protocols in place to deal with pandemic were simply too simplistic and unequipped to deal with a situation that had never been anticipated in the first place. FEMA had drawn up absurdist “zombie-attack” scenarios that were actually good preparation for actual viral outbreaks, and security-elements of all modern countries were prepared for military attack. But nobody had foreseen a stealth pandemic of human neurological recoding and many of the responses of the surviving elements of the governments and militaries were ad hoc and at times even mutually self-destructive. We know that a safe zone was established deep in the Colorado mountains but then a political decision was made in D.C. and congressional staffers were evacuated there—bringing the virus. Military bases across the world were put on lock-down and ironically, prisons became some of the most orderly places in the West, remember, AURORA barely affected black people, but where I was at the time, Ian with his shotgun, Plum Island the CDC, we had a level 5 biohazard safety laboratory, a few hundred immune, and operating completely outside normal governmental channels, FEMA and the CDC with associated National Guard units equipped no fewer than two hundred four-man teams to seek out any chance of a counter-virus or investigate reports of genomics that could return the human race back to its uninfected condition. I was team 163 of the STRAYLIGHTS, the number two in command, but #1 succumbed to cerebral edema and we continued our mission, flying in a Boeing737 in a circuitous route avoiding political or infectively dangerous zones and then chartering a cargo ship out of Unity off to the Pearl Delta River, South China, or the Shenzhen-Guangzhou-Dongguan triangle of relative unaffectivity. The South Chinese were the survivors; North China had been nearly wiped out. But the Party still had legitimacy, the only question was whether we could believe in reports that the disorganized warlord-

driven south Chinese actually had the genomic sequences they claimed and on what terms they would deliver it.

Your specific orders on STRAYLIGHT163 were to acquire the genomic sequences under any circumstances necessary, you claim you successfully acquired absolute knowledge of its existence; the south Chinese had the DNA codes but no delivery system; why did you not bring the genetics back?

Upon arrival in South China, circumstances immediately became hectic and filled with turmoil. We were assaulted on all sides by clanging-noises and hustler-cannibal-rip-off artists and harrassive warlord criminal gang types, believing us to be yet another refugee arrival and threatening us with assassination unless we participated in their newly reforming government. It was O+3, things were unsettled, and a north of China daughter of a Party member, virginal, white-skinned was being provided to a gangster's son. It was the proposed alliance of the criminal and the political, but moreover, it was the north of China's last chance to gain any sort of entrée into the new coalition government. Like Cortes before the Aztecs, we were completely outnumbered and with the death of our team leader, I could barely keep Adriana and Tara on task. I deliberately destroyed our radio. It was our only chance to prove we weren't spies for an invasion fleet.

*The specific issue is that you had held the future of humanity in your hands, but although you knew the Dongguan Biohazard Lab held the genomics, you failed to return these sequences, whether by radio or in physical specimen, back to the Centers for Disease Control and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
STRAYLIGHT163/2, why did you fail?*

Finding ourselves incorporated into South of China society, assumed to be Portuguese-blooded, I did what was obvious. Foreigners had always, always been a part of Chinese culture and Chinese politics, Chinese society. Our presence at the wedding provided face to the event, but the problem was that there was a tradeoff between the actual protocol of the wedding and my need to acquire trust within the south of China criminal societies. The girl from the north was provided, but suddenly froze in terror right before the beginning of the marriage rites. She was a light-skinned, virginal girl, maybe 16. Before her were the Dongguan criminal establishment. She felt...terror.

What you could have done was use the very event of the marriage itself to infiltrate the south of China biohazard laboratory and simply steal the genomics. That was always an option available to you. Why did you attend the wedding?

The wedding was the actual entry point to the emerging warlord government. By sealing the marriage of the north of China's white-skinned even blonde-haired Chinese from Harbin daughter to the south of Chinese criminal tongs, I could demonstrate that I had mastered the intricacies of a culture that was absolutely closed to outsiders. Nobody else but a foreigner could have grabbed her arm and forced the issue. Every group was required by the standards of Oriental face to conform to their group identity. I married them.

No, what you did is fail to return the critical counter-AURORA genomics in a timely fashion and doomed humanity to a complete collapse of all civilizations and governments. Now we are left with nothing but survival societies of two or three thousand here and there, and barely functioning anarchy amidst a sea of decaying society. You destroyed humanity. You were worse than Scientist I.

There can be no excuse or elaboration. I felt...possessed. It was as if the Chinese had gods of their own, and had temporarily taken over my body. The moment of awkwardness passed; the virgin bride was brought to the gangster's son, the marriage proceeded in five days of celebration, but no other solution was achieved. At the critical, I looked over my shoulder to the right, and the gangster's senior hierarchy was revealed, the way eyes turned in each direction to discover what the next order was revealed a fat-cheeked balding man amidst a group of clownish white-baseball cap wearing thugs was the senior crime overlord and the head of emergency security in the Pearl Delta Region. But the gods had spoken, and I was powerless before the mechanics of what was inevitable to take place. The Party joined the gangster government, and then that entity, as we all know, lasted another two more years before it too fell to the degenerating zombie attacks from the north, leaving no functioning country or government in this entire planet or universe.

By your own admission then, you have no moral legitimacy whatsoever to stand on. History must record you, next to the Scientist I, as sharing joint responsibility for democide.

CITY OF GHOSTS

15 February 2025

I've attached the transcript of my first interview with CDC/FEMA Brookline, Massachusetts along with my half-scribbled in Mead notebook, although the weeks have passed, and of course, as I'm writing, no solution was found in the end for the evidence that the straylight managers had uncovered, discovered through whatever imagined sequence of events they believed they understood. As I myself understood it, there were in excess of over 200 straylight teams although one mine had actually made contact with the counter-remedy, and its failure became the hallmark of straylight163, "the team that actually could have made it."

We couldn't, of course.

[later that day...]

I'm thoughtful and reflective on the events of STRAYLIGHT163 but the truth of the matter was that we are bound in the conventions and standards of whatever society or group we are in, and no matter how much cash had been invested in Brookline, Massachusetts, at the critical moment, it was me, my support, and a wedding underway. Does the south of China gangster group with its swine flus and avian flus and genomics and all the weird mixing of genetic material resulting in a swarm of people displaying every manner of industrial injury, chemical spill, or genetic disorder really amount in straightforward terms to the salvation of mankind? It's laughable. You had to be there. I was. The northern Han girl with her light pale skin, snow country skin, was to be married off to the dark Dongguan Viet-blooded Canto-speaker. All the disgustingness that constituted Chinese society was there for me to either tie together or unfold, and my decision sealed the fate of humanity, ranking me next to the xenocide as moral criminal #2. If only further the irony that I myself had scouted out the idealist in the first place, then of course I can only resort to the laughter that of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world she walks into mine. Chance, fate, the laughter of the gods playing their own games with mortals designing their own, none could say. The stability trembles but

never fully collapses, and SL163/2 enters the annals of history as containing the only true seed of possibility of reversing viral release, but eventually then all territory of the Himalayas fell waste to zombie control, and beautifully, perfectly, happily human civilization ended, not with a bang, but with a whimper, and we are merely left to confront time, our eternal friend, with every hour the enemy but every year a friend. It was after SL163 that I never again asked for another opportunity to serve mankind, although the moment Brookline came and demanded full explanation also served, uniquely, to mark when our compound was absorbed by a Unity faction and our independence as a free-boot colony ended. The Black-Flag faction marched by our deniably deniable compound and simply displayed the superiority of their high-calibre cannonry. With smiles, we agreed to accept suzerainty, as the terms after all, were so gentle: just send us whatever foodstuffs and water you aren't using, and look at all the wondrous advantages of affiliation with Black-Flag. We are now the 37th compound under Black-Flag affiliation, totaling nearly five hundred survivors and some single-digit percentage of Unity City under territorial control. With a reputation for relative pacifism, we're not inviting any additional raids onto our territory nor do we actively pursue aggression against other territorial groupings. The Black Flag waves above my stronghold, but the night is the same and the day is the same and the one's mood switches waterlike between the boredom and the panic and the light and the day and the echoes of fallen civilization where it had taken teams of five hundred merely to generate 90 minutes of pretty visuals, but I bundled up my sweater amidst late winter, the winter of change, and reflected on a life that had included, after all, so many extremes within the confinement of strict limitation. The crystal-webs were continuing to chatter with ever so many lies, and I craved caffeine and other such luxuries which have fallen into such rarity, but, few were to care or oppose the decision that everyone recognized as inevitable, and if our formal compound number was switched from 37 to 35 by direct order of Black Flag's high command, than that was merely the result of internal politics of which I knew absolutely nothing or little.

16 February 2025

The midnight hour having passed, I wonder how much of this notebook makes sense and how little or nothing can be comprehensible. Repetition offers clarity; this has never been disputed.

About ten years ago, the Western democracies began to be rocked by racial discord, responding to which the central governments instituted affirmative action in the form of guaranteed priority for black or dark-skinned individuals. Among the consequences, however, was that when a relatively incompetent Black-American manager was

promoted above an actually capable white American woman at a CDC bioresearch lab, a capable and intelligent woman was left to her own devices with access to some of the most advanced viral-coding machines on the planet. On her own initiative, she invented and released Happy Plague, which rewired human beings to be perpetually productive and joyous, and the outbreak went undetected for almost three years.

Three years after the release of the virus, it had reached almost every corner of the world, and emergency measures were instituted by governments including the launching of last-ditch “straylight runs,” which were three or four person teams sent to every corner of the world proclaiming it had advanced genomics research. I was the second-in-command of STRAYLIGHT163, designated 163.2 and assigned to bring back the genomic codes held at Shenzhen, China, Biohazard Level 5 research facility. But, arriving there, I discovered the panicked remnants of North Chinese government sealing its fortunes with the gangster/warlord South of China/Nanjing government, and rather than acquiring the codes at whatever the cost, I officiated at a wedding and sealed the fate of mankind. I did so, despite my atheistic leanings, because I felt compelled by a supernatural and preternatural force, a King in Yellow. The Communists, even with all their denial of the supernatural, may have had in their society forces of the preternatural, and I sealed the wedding. I brought the blushing bride as she froze in place and contemplated flight to the altar where the mayor sat, and the documents were signed that froze into place humanity's last functioning government, the Nanjing Enclave, which, as everybody knows, lasted only another four or five desultory years before it too succumbed to invasion from the north.

For these crimes, I will be remembered by all remnants of humanity as the second-worst criminal to humanity. Straylight163.2, who could have brought back the counter-virus, who had all of Brookline waiting with its dusting drones and the return of humanity to its normal uninfected state, declined by apparent personal choice to seize and return the critical genomics, now lost, that would have reversed AURORA. The corona-virus mutation of AURORA went through further iterations of stability/instability and finally the tide began to turn against even the Africans and Indians, and the reproducing waves of zombies are living even below the sea and trudging across icecaps in the far north, replacing percentage by percentage all of surviving uninfected humanity. History has ended.

Despite this personal outcome or the cross I bear for my crimes, I, 163.2, live a relatively unmolested life amongst the well-behaved zombies of Unity City and count bean-by-bean my possible contributions even as my once-independent compound 838 has become formally incorporated into Black Flag and I take my orders now from the BF high command. From a weirdly ironic position of occasional sniper raids into resource-rich territory, I've become reduced in rank into a farmer and scavenger of pure water, but we all know that BF itself can't stand indefinitely even in Unity City, and the stories

across the crystal web these days are that even Puerto Rico has fallen. The arks in north Europe have fallen. There's fewer and fewer transmissions across the ionosphere these days, and the candle-thin lights are flickering out even while the last optimists and builders make a futile push against entropy and viral spread. Goodbye, humanity, you were a great experiment if self-destructive in all your activities. I'm more obsessed with Nicotine Nicolas's new creations than I am in the battle reports streaming across long-distance radio.

My remaining obsessions are that of long-forgotten battles and historical arcana. Books are the consolation for the survivors living here and there and tending a few faint strands of bean rows or high protein rice-hybrids that we greenhouse or prepare with mechanized translucent sheeting in preparation for slightly warmer weather. Winter has passed this year without excessive trauma, and the mood of the compound is stabilized or as ordinary as it will ever be, despite the overwhelming realization that we are the ultimates and finals.

17 February 2025

Brookline CDC came by this winter and after action interrogation established that I “could have” brought back the counter-virus but did not. However, failure in itself is not a crime, and they went on their way although pointing out that next to the Idealist herself, I might be considered the second most responsible individual for the fall of man and its replacement by the euro-reprogrammed zombies who shamle about a snow-touched Unity City, wearing their fashions that are at times recognizable and at times off the mark. I don't know about the whole “zombie study movement” that has obsessed some academics in a post-academic world. These are concerns for other affinity groups and other agendas, although I mentioned, my compound, compound838, has lost its independence shortly after the departure of the Brookline team, whose activities drew so much attention to our vicinities that shortly thereafter Black Flag came through, politely showed us their autocannons and heavy howitzers, and pointed out that we're probably affiliated with them now.

They were completely nice about it.

Some changes: instead of the standard scavenging runs and attempts to glean ammunition here and there, we're being converted mostly into a greenhouse site, meaning we're going to be assigned primarily agricultural tasks and reap the benefits from the alliance of getting our immediate defense and resource needs taken care of. The head of the command, technically number three but seemingly the day-to-day

operations commander, Z, has roughly briefed me on changes that are forthcoming, including some mixing of personnel and some new ways we coordinate action in order to ensure a better overall state for everyone. To my surprise, I've learned there are only three really truly militant groups vying for control of Unity; the rest of everyone else, or 80% of the survivors, are happy to live on the fringes or in the mountains or off in hidden nooks, even if allied into groups of two thousand or more, and these three militant groups feud over Unity Central's military base, an arms factory, and a major pharmaceutical factory which allows for the creation of plastic explosives. At one point or another any of these three militant groups is holding one or the other, although their fatality rates tend to be high and they forcibly recruit new immune children if they see one being born in a zombie family; the style by which they live is the way of the gun and in a sense, they're completely happy the way they are even if their life expectancy is probably months rather than years.

Nothing has changed in human nature, so to speak; a few fanatics are off at war, but the majority of society prefers the pleasures of capital-rich society, and if in some compounds the survivors have giant IMAX theaters and aquariums and terrariums and HEPA-filtered super-clean air, at night of course the stars shine brighter because the cities are dying out one-by-one across the surface of the world and the world is returning to the state it really should be, human free, zombie free, and overrun by vines and gardens and natural animals (including, curiously, the somehow completely immune simians—chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys).

[sleep cycle over; we near again the end of the day]

Throughout today, the jump-suited assimilation professionals of Black Flag were busy at work, assessing our hydroponics and the state of our chemical laboratories, particularly impressed, as everyone always is, with Nicotine Nicholas and his heady stews, and examining in their precise, clinical, professional way how we're going to be integrated into the alliance with all the greater politics that had long escaped me. By chance, once again, I had managed to keep down herd-flow at the local vicinity even without particularly intending to do so, although we had some close calls and I'm wondering to a degree if I'm losing my touch, preoccupied as I am with both pre-fall entertainment culture and the sudden changes that are enfolding us. Sometimes you determine events; sometimes the events determine you. I didn't ask Brookline CDC to helicopter in and demand a debrief, but their flurry of activity suddenly drew activity to my previously hidden compound838, and now we've been incorporated, willingly yet without original intent, into one of the medium-sized alliances battling for regional control even if we have no desire whatsoever to try to take over the three key sites, the military base, the

weapons factory, and chemical factory. Nestled amidst hills that climb to 800m and seem to the layman to be mountains and are termed such by general consensus, yet I know that the kilometer mark is true cut-off, and I'm mildly torn between examining the state of late late capitalist culture, a new paperback which has found my way, and the bits and pieces of information that I am able to glean from my new superiors, who with militant and mission-oriented faces study maps and sketch out new drawings for how my formerly independent living quarters, 838, is going to be converted in straight-forward fashion into hydroponics station #39 of Black Flag, with fewer time spent on my end on the two or three man missions deep into plague-held space but more time, perhaps, to brood over the arguments that had emerged in the late days and the subcultures that had evolved, and the latest tiniest scraps of actually true verifiable information that had scattered across the webs back when there was a stable land-web and back when centralized governments exist. Are we better off. Do we actually care. The more fringe absolutists theorists say general Fourstar is setting up a new human empire thousands of kilometers away out in the northern steppes, but that's all abstraction and speculation and I may as well believe the Indians who claim to see tall seven-feet tall UFO aliens in the Himalayas and broadcast staticky video that reveals itself as only so much studio-produced gibberish. We have neither greater nor fewer answers than did the people before the fall of civilization, but at least unlike the survivors of *The Road* or other such true disaster works, we are fed and we do still have the opportunity to squabble or debate or foresee eventual plans, as science will one day recover, and the Happies will evolve into a true stabilized schizotypical normality, and I myself can lose myself in books this particular afternoon due to the heavy lifting and furniture rearrangement, on this, any particular of Mondays that used to be President's day, and George Washington was the first President of the United States of America, and he was a Founding Father, and today would have been the 249th celebration of the same had not, of course, infection I broken out or the H plague or whatever terminology that had generated its own self-generation terminologies across the swarm of masses and faceless names, nameless faces, the crowds that masqueraded themselves as "rationalistic" when they were subject just as well to the same weird highs and lows of emotion without any pattern whatsoever.

Yes, I guess I hated them too as well, but the final and irrevocable loss of independence does not really elicit within me any grand sweep of emotion, but only at last the realization that the journal contains within it the sweep as well of the microhistory of a microcolony at the end of time. More reports of compound collapse and/or over-run, and supposedly even of the great Swedish arks filled from fifteenth sub-level to fifth sub-basement and containing emergency quick-set plastics as final defense has itself succumbed to zombie infiltration, and some are even using weapons now and we are dying out, everywhere, all over the planet, and nobody cares; not with a bang, not with a blast; but with a whimper, with a pathetic death-rattle of feeble motions against our

extinction, amidst the sound of crying babies, refugee columns, and gunfire in strange quarters of the city.

The clock is ticking. Either schizophrenic psychosis or the zombies stabilize and then just simply brush us aside, irrelevant to the flow of history. I end today's entry here only because I'm in danger of just repeating myself, and my duty of course is to the 26th century or whatnot. It is to the end of days.

18 February 2025

Failure to complete a straylight run is not itself a crime, nor, technically, was the scientist who released the Happy virus and rewrote the code of human psychiatrics itself committed a crime, and actually the United States of America with its prohibition on the ex post facto law was probably the only country in the world in which Ms. I walked away free, unpunished, and known only through a gauze of mystery and theory and half-held beliefs, possibly even alive today, possibly even in some survival Ark off the shore of Japan or in Scandinavia or deep in Shangri-La. Nobody knows. Similarly CDC Brookline, the tall gaunt man who took my measure, expressed to me as his parting gesture that I was probably the second worst criminal in my participation in democide, but again, facilitating the marriage of a northern provisional government and a southern gangster warlord regime does not itself constitute an international crime, and had I done what I had done what I had done, than that did become what did becomes what it did. In any case, all the heavy rotor lifting and obvious movement of professionals drew attention from the Black Flag alliance and they swept in and the days of our compound autonomy are over.

We set up hydroponics today.

I got to meet the senior leadership, and noticed their style of jumpsuits and how some of the senior leaders liked me and others not so much, and others simply remained aloof, since human politics remain unchanged and unchangeable and alliances keep shifting and factions remain where they are. I have no idea how much cash and resources that Black Flag [BF] has invested in me, but they already are clearly carrying around clipboards and finding my food-stuff contributions adequate, and generally impressed with our compound combat capabilities, but have seen little on what is the real currency of this world, plastics and gasolines. There's talk of their moving Tara out and they'll be shifting in somebody else, and we're to maintain scout over-watch over our neck of the woods and they left some treats and some boots and other gear, and I'm to merely stand by for now, the larger changes are in the future. But I like to riffle through old

paperbacks and stare at the uncaring sky and wonder if things will always be the same, although they are all the same, and it's only too bad that I've degenerated so, it's all so bad humanity has degenerated so.

19 February 2025

Not all is as featureless as the gray and sere sky. Received report through BF that an old friend has been located and may be jetting into Unity City soon. In this age when 99% of humanity has perished, any sort of meeting at all is a rare event and how much better when it's CY, who I haven't seen in years. The February day outside is still chill, and perhaps I detect a touch of something viral in the throat-clearing cough that has increasingly been the custom in a post-viral age, but I'm waiting mostly for my smartphone to recharge and riffling through the yellowed pages of thirty-year old books and thinking about mostly the future direction of BF and the fact that eternally, conflict or not, much of life consists of waiting and that there is even in the resource-oriented alliances a tendency to focus on efficiency and standardization despite whatever advantages my old independent survivor group enjoyed.

I might look forward to the departure of Tara, who I'm not sure I always dissolved in paroxysms of joy around.

Mostly everyone is in the mood of the anticipation for new things, quiet without being ordered to do so, wondering what the next change will be.

Also philosophical thought of the day: right before the crash, a new era of entertainment and perpetual wearable game systems was underway. We would have all entered the data realm—if not for Idealist.

22 February 2025 [final entry]

The notebook is almost filled, and even if I were to make my script extremely small and try to squeeze in lots of additional facts, we've come to a natural break point and the story has been told and the fates, in one sense, have been sealed. CDC Brookline declined to prosecute any action against me because "failure to complete the mission" was not itself a crime, and Tara has been moved out and a new girl installed by Black Flag, Henrietta, which has a different combat style of two-person teams and all their jump-suited elites are already moving in heavy equipment and using forklifts to

integrate our building into their standard model. Yet, all the noise and traffic and the arrival of the Center for Disease Control team with their auto-rotors has destroyed whatever semblance of anonymity our living quarters once enjoyed, and we were sniped at twice by human survivor gangs, resulting in one case in a moderately bad shoulder injury to Ricardo Cruz. In any case, what I should do is use this remaining notebook to go over reunion with CY, Clyde Yent, who survived the plague and was an old student friend of mine. The advantage of integration into the alliance/clan network is that we are able to tap into information exchanges that we did not even know of, but in another sense, I believe I am not incorrect in realizing that my affiliation and sudden notoriety in Unity City probably spells doom for our particular compound. We've just become too...prominent. But it's a fate I accept since I was involved with AURORA and I ran the Straylight and I scouted out Scientist I, and I even knew about the early days after outbreak when the clock was ticking and none of us knew the viral re-writing code was upon us and human history would end.

Fukuyama and Huntingdon. Political theorists and mystics. Priests and political cadres: nobody could have anticipated this end to society, but it happened and we move on. And Clyde says, whatever else the situation, you'll have to accept integration into the alliance as inevitable no matter what that means to you, as the survivor gangs are larger now and independent compounds aren't necessarily surviving anymore anywhere. We don't know about rumors of single hunters living out in the wilderness nor are we absolutely sure that the AURORA virus will not mutate further, but guesstimations are that it is stabilizing and so I record the tomb writing of the human race on this white tree-pulp lined pages and spiral-bound notebook, and I read of ancient crimes and wonder about long-forgotten battles and think about Clyde. It was interesting to see him, who looked healthy on the whole if suffering some of the skin diseases that have become slightly more common since the collapse of the medical system. Further, he seemed very much enthusiastic about conformation to the alliance model come what may, and in that sense I am fortunate that at least a childhood friend is there to communicate with amidst a sea of strangers and unknown faces. Compound838 formally surrenders all autonomy as of this date 22 February 2025, becoming the 31st site or thereabouts of the alliance Black Flag, controlling some 6-7% of the physical terrain of Unity City although none of the highly desirable combat-ridden zones, and we live amidst a sea of white-eyed zombies remembering our fallen civilization and accepting that we in turn will turn into myth. We are legend. But Clyde was optimistic about the future and he knew that life held both the possibility of either sudden break out or sudden collapse yet he honored the traditions in which he had been raised.

CITY OF GHOSTS

Part III: the Diary

First, a recap. The date is 8 July 2026. Approximately twenty years ago a scientist known as "I" released, accidentally or not, an engineered retrovirus called the "happy virus" or "happy flu." 97%+ of human beings infected by the pandemic were converted into white-eyed mindless joy-joy maniacs who ran amok through the streets and killed any non-infected they detected. Human history has come to an end and like lights going out, one by one, the great transition from normal into maniac is unfolding. The only thing that keeps us going is that if you are immune, that immunity is for life--i.e., if you get bitten by an infected zombie and your immune systems fights off the infection, then you're good to survive--that is, good to survive in a depleted post-apocalyptic world. Some find this existence too hard and suicides are seemingly endless, but for those of us who choose to endure, we do so, one day at a time.

At the end of my last notebook, my compound (838) had fallen under the sovereignty of Black Flag--a multi-location network of survivor compounds. Black Flag didn't make any threats--they simply dragged up a few large caliber cannon in front of our compound and made their absolute superiority in combat clear. As leader of those had placed their lives in my hands, I made the executive choice to surrender immediately. And the choice proved fruitful.

We gained access to a more sophisticated radio net. We learned a lot about combat. Further, as we were assigned scavenging/agricultural duties, we enjoyed a brief respite from zombie attacks while our commanders reworked a 360-degree defense. In fact, in some ways I became glad to be drawn into the survivor wars, and it came as a surprise when BF was in turn overrun by a huge human alliance. Unity City now has three large alliance groups, but BF isn't one of them. I myself recently escaped assassination because of the obviously neutral nature of my group. And, as always, Nicotine Nick's hydroponics to bear plants meant a unique site that forestalled junking our current location.

So, in short, the more things change, the more they stay the same--or, perhaps, the one thing to change is change itself. And outside, in an unfeeling summer world, our make our way as best as possible. We had thought the oversight by Black Flag would mean more violence and becoming part of something much larger than ourselves. Instead, the sounds of battle cascaded and then moved on, and we were white-flagged neutral in the alliance wars and set to trade with anyone.

It was at this point, experiencing a brief respite from the clan wars, that I made the command decision to track down rumors of the "Science City," an alleged infection-free zone towards the north of Unity City and composed with a preponderance of scientific minds experimenting for a cure to the happy flu and a return to the world as it used to be. The only problem was that all talk of such things remained solely that--talk on the radio nets, which were not called the Net of a Million Lies for no reason. The entirety of the stories concerning Science City might as well be an elaborate trap. I couldn't risk the lives of my compound mates. I had to make the trip alone.

Three days after packing my rucksack and lacing up my boot strings, I finally made first contact with the Science City. Somehow, the terrain in the area just felt different--disease free and tidy. I picked a likely metal grating and knocked--but nobody replied. "Go away," they finally said the next day. "You're not wanted here," was the entire output's worth of feedback on the third day of that. I had to resort to creativity.

"My name is 838, I'm an independent compound leader approximately 20km south of here. I believe I can help with your mission."

"Our mission? What do you think our mission to be?"

"Eradication of the Happy Flu. Scientific research into the virus."

"But you're probably a carrier yourself. We have uncontacted individuals inside. And what special thing do you have so you can join us?"

"One of my compound mates is a highly experienced chemist. I have broad band security personnel as well as a well-stocked armory."

"We don't need these things. But wait, we'll let you into our outer perimeter." And the grating screeched and opened and I was allowed to enter the structure.

Following this period I ended up being confined for two periods, once for forty days and a second time for about fifty. Time flowed differently in confinement with the attitude "I can only think about today" being the only mental slogan to keep time. But for all the poking and prodding, the needles and x-rays, I was never apprised of my status nor permitted to enter the inner sanctum.

The Science City's director, "Bird who Shakes Ice off Wing, did relent on one element: I was granted an audience. When I asked to be advised what my status was, she told me, "evaluative detention." She had "to put the needs of the many before the needs of the one." I could have made a little fuss about habeas corpus what with the government procedures so long ago. In this case, Bird had all the cards; I had none.

"But look at this wonder we call Science City," said the matriarch a/k/a "Bird who Shakes Ice off Wing," a/k/a Lauren Gordon. Behold how life and research continues amidst the ashes of human civilization. I cannot allow asylum to anybody except somebody who offers something truly unique in talent."

"I have talent. I've led a group of survivors into hostile environment. I've known need and grown patient. My teammates can be valuable soldiers for your security defense needs."

"We are not in need of more defense personnel at this time. But, as it were, you may be permitted to have a rare treat--a guided tour of the inner part of Science City and some of its closely guarded research labs. Call it sympathy. We are not advise to having friends on the outside..."

And thus the city unfolded--not so much in a strictly walled away space, but a district whose character just felt different, whose atmosphere was of technical excellence and mission-oriented posture. But to what end?

"I should advise you," continued Bird, "Our space is a protected womyn space. Battered and assaulted womyn have a priority to whatever living quarters are available or whatever may develop."

"Well," I said, "That's called making two wrongs equal a right isn't it. Why should a man of good character and reputation not be allowed into the Science City?"

"The mistakes of the past world are precisely what is responsible for our current predicament. Everyone knows the scientist known as "I" was female. The story of her professional advancement being squashed are widely known--as well as examples from past scientific figures such as Rosalind Franklin, who discovered DNA and much more. Womyn continued to experience discrimination in STEP--Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics--before the Fall, and we are not simply going to go down easy in this post-apocalyptic world.

"Then at least offer us formal protection even if we don't actually assimilate into you. Again, I have a crack chemist and some of the best experienced combat personnel around."

"We will consider your request."

So with these words I returned to my compound and was warmly welcomed despite the long spell of disappearance. Surrounded by my mates, I was bombarded with questions.

"You were quarantined? How long?"

"Fifty days."

"How big was your space?"

"Six feet by ten."

"What did you do all day?"

"I sat and meditated. It was almost religious."

"Who controls Science City?"

"Apparently a council of elder women."

"What was their reaction to you? To us?"

"They're friendly, but not too close. Apparently they had problems with a 50/50 gender ratio in the past. It's now 20/80 male-female and that includes male children."

"So based on this gender balance alone, their feelings are alienated."

"I wouldn't say 'alienated,' but they would seem to practice reverse discrimination"

But upon this point my compound mates dissolved into a series of heated discussions. The previous issue last winter that had torn apart our unity was questions of race. Now, in the limitless heat of a Unity City summer, our fallen civilizations' sexism became a topic of which we would polarize into factions.

7 July 2026

Last winter the questions of race had raised its ugly face, and we were forced to examine the questions of whether we were racist or whether Black Americans had anything close to a chance to raise themselves in society. In a way, the questions were simple: the right wing decried "identity politics;" the left equated even minor infractions with Hitler. You belonged to one faction or the other.

With regard to the questions of gender, the situation was far more complex. The battle of the sexes was a war that could never be won even if feminist protestors dressed as the characters from "Handmaid's Tale" and publicized their grievances.

I did not consider my compound to suffer from gender-related questions. First, the two-person teams that we used to "ladder" up an infected street naturally fell into a male-female duality, with good spotters being light and heavy people needed to fling around a .50 sniper rifle. Furthermore, on larger raids women felt pulled towards medic or support roles. That said, there was an exception to every rule, and we had a strong and

quick point man in Adrianna Gomez. You could always tell who fought for the love of battle and who fought because they had to. Adrianna was one of the former.

One thing I didn't reveal to my fellow survivors was that I had started to develop a case of Stockholm Syndrome whilst under confinement. It was, in retrospect, inevitable. Outside: the danger of a zombie infested world. Inside: carefully sanitized nursing staff. Food that was provided--hot--three times a day. And finally, a library that they allowed me to explore, such that I got to review a broad spectrum of books that I would not have discovered on my own.

11 July 2026

If I were in the mood to be pedantic, I'd review critically the zombie movies and how they apply in a true post-apocalyptic world. I could even extend things into classics of post-apocalyptic without zombie--e.g., Mad Max, the Road, etc. But what matters now is to characterize precisely the details of how we fell into the suzerainty of the Science City without formal alliance. This allowed me the luxury of formally allying with one of the twenty-odd alliances present in Unity City, but not one of the top 3 which controlled the ammo depot, the arms manufacturing plant, or the massive hydroponics plant depot. And the fact is, this situation came about despite Science City quarantining me for forty then fifty days. Stockholm Syndrome indeed.

After returning to my compound after the fifty-day incarceration, I joined up with a formal clan alliance. One was as good as the other, except the top three which were impossible to join. Ours went by the name of "the Corporation" and obviously had some roots in organized crime in the pre-fall world. Our compound was ranked at the junior level of command, but this didn't concern me. I was happy to be a scavenger/gardener type member and I was pleased when we cooperated as a clan to do grand sweeps of territory to search for the hard-to-explore reaches of zombie-held territory.

Visions of the Wildly-Romantic Disintegration of My Romanticism

I had a dream the previous night that I was slowly falling apart, becoming less and less capable of command, perhaps indefinitely dependent on the Science City or perhaps losing command of my compound to a junior member. What I remember from pre-fall life was the blue romanticism of travel, a trip to an academic fair, ninety miles north to Unity City, and an event composed entirely of "talented youth." Unity City seemed

covered in a blue haze, the shroud of the unknown. In a dimly-lit auditorium, the adolescents with their parents could be seen, milling about and awaiting the right schedule to begin. By some measure, these "nerds" were far superior to their classmates, but in others, far less. In any case, it was a question of early exposure to the fellow peer group that was a defined goal of the program--many of the "talented and gifted" youth had never met students of their calibre before and the idea that academic achievement could be a great quality was actually new to public school kids where football was king.

Comfortable with "the intellectual elite," I now, more than twenty years later, could still feel relaxed with the denizens of Science City. The mysteries of the mystic-shaman womyn band that ruled the district was of course closed to me, but otherwise, I felt right at peace following orders and affiliating with the City even while joining or becoming under formal alliance on the outside. So the cycle began again, and the rounds of training, even as the first noticeable signs of shortages of scavengable goods become evident.

14 July 2026

In the post-apocalyptic world, it's not really talent, intelligence, strength, or even leadership that counts. It has to be luck, as the luck in acquiring a cache of heavy weapons or high-quality goods stored well. One thing is certain, however--I am an artist in spirit, or entertainer in piebald, who knows keeping the morale of his survivor groups is the most important task when there really is no hope for the future and violence is our daily mode of existence.

I do not feel that my little micro-society is sexist. That is to say, that when a sniper-spotter pair work together safely advancing down a street, it is typical that the sniper--carrying the large .50 calibre rifle--is male and the spotter, who should be lithe and agile, is female. Furthermore, in broad attacks when we cull zombie undead, spotter and medic support roles seem to fall automatically to the female members of survivor societies.

As for the civilization that feel before the virus, we wanted as humanity to experience some sort of apocalyptic catastrophe. The seas were rising and so was Islam, or Latinos were out-reproducing Anglo-Americans. But, cut off from this timeline and living into one that carried the living dead, my major concern, as I write, was to entertain and distract the followers. They looked at me for a reason to go one just one more day, and then again the next.

20 July 2026

"Things fall apart, the center cannot hold." This motto signified what was evident to more and more people, as time went by in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But, the Human Happiness virus put an end to that. We almost lost some of our team members today as a supply run. A scrambled message led one of our tank-type team members to advance whilst the team was evacuating. Meanwhile, I continued to climb the ranks by level of goods contributed to the alliance. Nothing wholly remarkable, just top-3 performance across products..

The DVD I scavenged was "Wonder Woman" and just a solid movie without any great gaps of quality but nothing to be dramatically affected by. I had also always had a cache of the Star Trek DVDs, Voyager series being about halfway completed before the compound decided a break was necessary.

21 July 2026

Conducted wide zombie eradication operation with rest of alliance group. Then I picked up some good loot--well-maintained sniper rifles. Briefly met representative of the Science City, and scavenged the DVDs that were pirated--odd packaging but contents worked out. All in all, things went more or less according to plan.

26 July 2026

Zombie concentrations are way down, thanks to the successful alliance sweep of the territory immediately around our compounds. Also received a second visit from Science City, now a three person team who apparently just wanted to inspect our living conditions. Place was, and is, sort of a mess, but that's inevitable with a scavenger type lifestyle. I don't know what their long-term agenda is, but Bird Who Shakes Ice off Wing doesn't go so far as to signify any sort of condemnation.

27 July 2026

Took a rest day today, much needed after the massive city sweep. Still, the alliance wars continue even at a lesser pace. There were some personnel changes in the leaders' units. I'm reverting to being a mere asset rather than lead compound as I was during the city-wide sweep.

Philosophical conversations on the table this day as some point out that eventually, after we're all replaced by the massively reproducing zombies we'll be considered the monsters who were eventually heroically overthrown. Yes, there are shades of such. But, what are you going to do here and now, that is the question. If you give in to this way of doing things, you may as well just off yourself already and surrender. Thankfully the actual zombies don't articulate these kinds of thoughts, just grunting and moaning. What a world we inhabit.

30 July 2026

A few minor scrapes and injuries in our latest run, despite whatever efforts we had taken to prevent such in any situation. Again, I called for a dust-off (an evacuation) but two teammates were too deeply into the zombie-held territory and only managed to reach safety after sustaining some flesh injuries. Other than this, I report only the heat, which brings out the smell of the post-fall world.

With little bearing down on us, I call for pistol training. Our stocks of .22 caliber ammunition is quite high, and combined with custom-made holsters, even a combat support-member has the lethality of a large light-machine gun holder.

The heat is quite massive.

31 July 2026

Visited the Science City again, in response to a request for a meeting. They are working on vaccines to reverse the zombie virus. I don't know how much help I can provide, and I'm uncertain I'd be willing to be a guinea pig if that's what is required. Also, news from the alliance: I'm being promoted yet again, with the rights to kick other members out of the alliance. I didn't ask for it, but they gave it to me anyway.

Heavy rain brings some release from the heat.

1 August 2026

I devote myself assiduously to the collection of spare ammunition and whatever other material the alliance needs. We have lost some key members to defection to other groups, but the thought of myself doing so doesn't cross my mind. I feel like I am experiencing a compulsion of sorts: a relief from boredom in a purposeless world. So I work: I scrounge and scavenge, and find unspent cartridges of any calibre, and try out ballistics vests of fair to excellent quality.

3 August 2026

Scavenged a working bicycle. Used it to teeter around and confirmed the brakes work. Handling was a bit tough, but I avoided any incidents.

5 August 2026

Rumors of a communication break between Science City and my alliance, the Corporation. The head of our alliance has not been seen for fourteen days now, which could mean that it's wise to leave, or possibly that a little more patience is required. Used car batteries properly charged to watch old DVDs and continued the obsessive scavenging, this time for wood scraps.

8 August 2026

Another visit to the Science City, where relations have improved to the degree that the scientists gave me a free dental cleaning. Unfortunately, it seems like I've developed an allergy to the undead. I have this constricted throat problem that makes wonder if I'm long for this earth. The scientists are at a loss of what to do, but hopefully, it will all work out.

Meanwhile, in the Corporation, there is talk of the current leader stepping down--and I'm one of the candidates to inherit the alliance. Talk about quick advancement. This

development has me at a loss. I'm not gunning for leadership rights, but I'm not opposed either. It would also help the alleged rift between the current leadership and the Science City.

More boredom control with old DVDs. Another couple episodes of Voyager, whose exile theme somehow seems fitting for our situation. We await, if it will ever happen, that the old world will return for us. During the interval to then, we can also seek out ways to control the Z population.

9 August 2026

It's official. Nobody's saying it, but I'm one of three candidates to succeed our departing alliance leader. I might be elected chief over ten compounds with a population of a hundred or so people. One of the three has already said that he doesn't want the position. So I might lead or I may not. It's a job with responsibilities. In a way, I dislike the average survivor--always needing some boost to his morale; taking without giving. But I feel leadership will be a good role for me to play, given the limitations on the roles that govern our over-run world.

10 August 2026

The first 24 hours of this citywide sweep have progressed, and in a surprise turn, although I lead in steel scrap discovery and am doing healthily in cloth, I'm a bit beyond the leaders in the more precious groceries and ammunition categories. So, I must resign myself to being--likely--a junior member of our small alliance even as my gun lockers fill full of high-quality weaponry and gear that is the useful addition to scrap scavenging.

11 August 2026

In a not altogether surprise development, I have not been appointed leader of the alliance. The candidate who won, Alex Rambeaux, had a longer history and more banter with the departing leadership. Still, we are not all that big after the removal of non-performing compounds. It will be interesting to see how well our new leader fares, in an exacting world full of danger and peril.

25 August 2026

I've left my alliance.

It was a matter of just getting up the nerve--not showing up during the city-wide sweeps and indeed, spending a minimum amount of time with my compound in favor of solitary hiking through the eastern hills, free of both Z and survivors.

17 September 2026

After a few weeks of wondering whether there might be ill-will from the alliance or any other negative effects, it would seem that things have barely fluctuated. Actually, an entire suburb of Unity City has fallen to the Z and our reflexes, skills, and tactics are being pushed to new levels to overcome the new threat. My old alliance might not be in a hurry to take me back, but records would seem to indicate that they have not exactly thrived without me. In fact, they would seem to have dropped in reputation to be a C-class rather than A-level alliance.

As currently stands, my strategy for the time-limited raids on scavengable areas is to keep 4/5 of my team close together to support each other with firepower and send off my one scavenging-specialist, armed with a pistol and carefully crafted holster to do the actual searching for top quality finds. This 4-1 breakup works a little less when the zombies are of higher level because they can overcome the 1 scavenger on the one hand, and even pose a threat to the 4 on the other. Hence, I'm at a loss at how to improve my tactics to take on the new higher level zones. A lot of tough work grinding is the only solution, combined with research into better weaponry and gear.

(Meanwhile, the heat has finally broken and fall has arrived. A few days of heat give way easily at night to coolness, and negativity within the compound is notably less.)

22 September 2026

I've learned a new word. Anomie. A-N-O-M-I-E: a state of being restless due to a lack of rules. Similar to accidie. This word succinctly captures life's condition post-Fall. The

only way to deal with the endless boredom is to carry out Z eradication sweeps for the benefit of survivor packs. Unfortunately, the Z menace is getting stronger. We're faced with larger swarms, tougher Z, and a longer travel to places that haven't been scavenged thoroughly. To deal with the toughest zones, I alter the structure of the team from 4+1 (fire team plus scavenger) to 3+2 (fire team plus 2 scavengers). The scavengers wield powerful pistols that are enhanced by custom holsters. With this method, I can barely hold onto things in the tougher zones of the city.

As for anomie that is an entirely different question. The Science City provides welcome relief--and medical check-ups. But at the end of the day, we're still ourselves facing the "long dark teatime of the soul." I try to create stories. That is a shaman-like thing to do--so I'm borrowing a page from the Science City. But creativity is difficult as well. We're talking about filling up a vacuum here; we're discussing the effects on morale of people getting their larger spiritual needs filled in a gray and fallen world. That's my job.

Aside from the pistol-packing scavengers, my team is getting access to a complex kit of armor--ballistic armor with integrated holsters and quick-access pouches for goods. When I send out the 3+2 team to the harder zones, I'm left with no scavenger for the 5 remaining members. I partially solve this by letting Henrietta, a scout, wear scavenging gear. By doing so, I partially solve the problem, but the solution is imperfect. Often, the entire zone isn't cleared before we have to evacuate. There is also the problem of keeping the melee unit front and center. Fancy footwork helps. Tactics rule over strategy.

In other news, I've made some new friends from other compounds. It's an odd moment to recollect, but there's an oddness to this world that hangs above us such that the moment of mutually recognized friendship leaves a sweetness to be savored. Deploy--scavenge--hunt--repeat. There is the cycle to days and then to months. The compound is secure and the survivors learn a little more each day.

I've begun unfolding a story to my audience. "What if the Z infection had never begun?" Turn back the clock a dozen years--or make it an even twenty. What if Hillary Clinton had won the election in 2016? Perhaps disease control would have been more effective--or possibly, it would be less. The variables involved are so complex, any story is possible. I'm left with branching outcomes rather than a solid plot. North Korea may have been a bigger issue, or it may have been less.

25 September 2026

I play this little game with my fellow survivors--what if? As in, what if nine years ago it was Hillary Clinton in office rather than Donald Trump. Relations with Russia would be

reaching a new low, but on the other hand, a Clinton administration might very well continued on a path of strategic patience with North Korea.

A larger, more important question would go--what if there was no zombie plague to begin with. Well, the questions of racism would still rage and Black Lives Matter would be a more society-altering force. Lacking an external enemy, there might very well be more confrontation and dissent within society.

In conversations like this, we go to sleep on evenings and chat the hours away. Then comes true nightfall and we lock down for the night.

In seeking to entertain, I am entertained. In seeing the world for what it is, my illusions are disestablished. We study tactics endlessly, and I can feel the onset of maximum trained.

26 September 2026

With Z-variants stronger than the norm and high-activity zones dotting the landscape, my faith relies on constant betterment through training and independent forays by my compound mates into tough territory. Right now, my twin pistol-packing scavengers can dish out the most Damage Per Second, but a good assault rifle could be just around the corner.

Thus, there's always a trade-off. The best gear I've scavenged includes integrated armor with holsters and ammunition pouches. Getting a few of these might make it possible for the 4+1 scavenger to really take off by himself.

Part IV: Halloween

My travels began at the age of nineteen when, like Kerouac before me, I swept out west in a hooaha thrill of joy. The only difference is that I relied on a North American railpass, and took with me a guidebook written for train travelers. It took a day to get to Chicago. Then, two more days took me through Denver and Salt Lake City to the wild impossible streets of San Francisco. The couple in the seats in front of me were seeking their future out west. It was the pioneer instinct alive and well in the late 1990s. I promised the couple they could stay with a friend of mine in S.F.--if I could contact her. But--alas--I

wasn't, and I spent the night in a youth hostel before seeking whatever it was in San Francisco there was to be found.

That was the night I met Tigger. Sitting on the street with a homeless Eritrean man, I was picked up by a walker wearing a jumpsuit. He was black and young. "I thought you were getting high," he mentioned. What he was looking for was a friend. And he took me to his hideout, where a bunch of teenage runaways slept on old pallets and discarded sofas. They were crack users. In the morning I bought them McDonald's breakfast and went on my way.

A couple of desultory trips between S.F. and L.A. later, I checked my email to find a \$350 airfare special to...Japan. Northwest Airlines could take me there for just what my budget had, and this became my first overseas adventure even if I had, during my teenage years, been to Europe and seen some of its marvels.

I still remember, years later, how Kyoto became the first Japanese city I visited. A light summer mist in the air, and red lanterns, lit up an evening that seemed touched by romance. A few minutes search north of the pedestrian area of the main city uncovered the backpacker's lodge. And then, the rest of the week and a day unfolded with marvel after fresh marvel--an abortive attempt to hitchhike to Tokyo, the eventual bus ride there, the madness of Roppongi, and all too soon, the return back to the States, where Greyhound would take me across the great U.S. to Philadelphia and university life again.

For years thereafter, I would keep track of airfares online through a community called Flyertalk.com. Some legendary stories surfaced--a man who bought tens of thousands of Healthy Choice puddings to earn mileage; people who travelled there and back again solely for miles. For the absolute cheapest price, I filled a passport, then the passport with extra pages, to Japan and other destinations. I used youth hostels and student discounts to discover the world, but there was always a special place in my memories of that first self-paid trip abroad, to Japan and its wild counter-culture, to the country that produced works of art that spoke to my heart.

(From a wild trip north to Wakkanai to the southern springs town of Beppu, I rode Japan Rail on a railpass, and saw the great sights of Nihon. Everywhere appeared as if made for you, and everyone seemed deferential and polite. It was a country designed for those whose youthful beating heart cried out for more, and an answer to the need for change and exotic foreignness, the Other, they observed.)

Following these wild trips to Japan, my most memorable travel experience was ten days in Europe with a Mercedes M-class SUV. Taking advantage of winter rates, I sped that vehicle all the way from Frankfurt to Manchester, making stops in Belgium, London, and Amiens, France along the way. I slept in the vehicle, armed only with a summer weight sleeping bag and wool blanket. Kilometer added to kilometer and I came to feel I

owned the territory I crossed. That trip was memorable for the quality of conditions I experience yet at the price a backpacker would have to pay, for sleeping in youth hostels and paying rail fares.

It is perhaps because of these travels that I ended up as leader of a compound. Travel liberalizes one--forces one to observe the inequities of the world and annihilates provincialism. When the groups of survivors began to hunker down in Unity City, I was the one with the broad scope of knowledge--the fighter who could also mend bones, the scavenger who could also conduct reconnaissance.

So--Halloween came and with it a resurgence of zombies. But, equal to the challenge--new containment weapons appeared and we fabricated these, taking our damage dealing to new levels. I equipped Tara Reed with a melee weapon, and armed some of the other survivors with death-dealing heavy weapons. The designs we used were decades old--but perversely for that reason, familiar and reliable. We mowed down the ranks of the undead, then waited for the next season to begin.

Winter hit us. It was cold. Once again, new challenges appeared in the form of exploding zombies and super heavy-weight hunter-killers. Of the new designs we could scavenge to contain the breaches was an automatic pistol with a cylindrical magazine. I made three, and equipped the scavengers and the medics with this heavy duty weapon. Total damage we could inflict out measured to multiples of what were we capable of before, we could now safely venture out in pairs and trios--even the occasional singleton mission. With the increased pace of operations, we accumulated vast stocks of material, ready with bandages for a rainy day and plenty of components to support research and development.

One of our new projects was to take a novice group of survivors under our wing, and offer support and guidance during their development. While the process of our own ascent into one of Unity City's foremost compounds had been long and fraught with peril, we were able to cut the development time of the new team's down to half or even a third. Contrary to popular opinion, we kept the team size small until about the half-way point had been reached; then, armed with the white flag of neutrality and improvements to their transportation to cut down on mission return times by 50%, we then transformed to developing the total team size. There was enough to go around. But, as the newbies had settled down relatively late in the city-wide scene, they could never have the same storage capacity, nor expect any naivety in trading, disadvantages which were only partly offset by relative luck in the scavenging end. The newbies found a weapons upgrading kit as well as rare clothing early on, and traded for better fuel scavenging abilities for the relatively cheap price of a lower level key card and fuel cartons. The newbies appreciated the help, and meanwhile, we felt better about

ourselves helping out fellow survivors in a dangerous world rather than merely looking out just for ourselves.

The new team has potential. Rather than being composed of long-distance fighters, we can attract--eventually--tough former soldiers and police who come equipped with strong tactical vests and can go head-to-head with the Z. When the numbers are right, we can complete tasks quickly and destroy the Z buildups as soon as they build up, and gain loot appropriately.

My new strategy does not come without risk. By maximizing firepower, I'm unable to take advantage of defensive gear and thus some of my fireteams are "glass cannons," high damage dealing but fragile units that keep battles highly tactical--where possible, I try to designate one unit a tank to absorb blows but that's not always present--enough tanks to go around. Perhaps I should retrain a long-distance recon unit to the tough tank-type, but the decision remains open for now.

For some reason, it's more fun to advise the new team rather than concentrate my efforts on the old. Some of it is the challenge of nurturing. But most, I suppose, is the value of good advice early on. For some time, we deliberately kept the size of the new compound small. But, after some trouble keeping up the tempo of operations, we made the necessary improvements to double the size of the survivor group, and this challenge took planning in terms of resource scavenging and mission attempts. Now our major problem is ammunition--building the supply drop is far off, and for now we don't use light machine guns because of their heavy ammunition usage. It feels like--even though it may not be so--that we lack enough high quality weaponry. But, taking each day by day, we deal with this issue among others and produce fuel, fulfill regular tasks, and take on the zombie hordes. Our new team is approaching the 10% mark of total completion, and we await the arrival of one more survivor to reach full size. The radio nets are full of chatter, and deals are being made that we might be able to participate in when we have reached a higher level.

29 January 2027

What a difference a few days make. The holiday season is finally over, and I've formalized the decision to retrain Sean Ortiz as a fighter rather than a recon. In the new compound we're nurturing, Samantha Foo has persuaded her sister, Kimberly Foo, to join up, bringing up our ranks of fighters to three. We also solved the ammunition crisis by acquiring an Ammo Conservationist book offering a 50% reduction in ammo usage. This took multiple rounds of wheeling and dealing, and cost us some research notes in

addition to upgrade tokens. To the surprise of some, we were, specifically able to convert 2 unique upgrade tokens into 6 premium keys, and then enough level 3 key cards to make the deal sweet enough for a regular trader to pass along the AC book.

With our ammunition consumption needs fulfilled, we now run missions with the ammo heavy light machine guns, and our concern now is acquiring enough resource storage capacities to further expand our ammo storage and collection. It's a long road ahead, but one that is surely marked by trading deals and cooperation with other compounds.

In other news I continue to attend the Science City, where personnel changes mean I'm manning the entrance gate in afternoons, leaving enough time in evenings to supervise my group of survivors. My main liaison, Emily, is now a new girl named Bo Hyun, and we pass the hours away in light conversation and stories about Before The Fall. The Science City has rich stocks of coffee, and we partake of this luxury as well, knowing that when it's gone, it'll be gone, but it's sweet to drink all the more for that.

My main compound runs a 3:3:2:2 split of missions, except when circumstances force a 3:3:4. My new compound is still 5:5 for now because we don't have any wonder weapons, except the one arctic pistol, and like to have a margin of safety for attacks by the elite undead. We don't have any medical shortages, but all the trading has depleted our research capabilities for now. It remains to be seen whether generous traders will be found in the future, and mostly, for the old group, I permit the survivors to run their own missions, or take on small security/gun shop sites. The overall condition is satisfactory.

30 January 2027

I found a buyer for the 19% permanent Peak Oil guidebook. It was a newbie--ostensibly. But I asked only the (fair) price of one level 3 keycard. Later on the trader mentioned he had "multiple" Premium keycards. I could have bargained for acquiring these, but I didn't feel like it. Just run on instinct, I guess.

Meanwhile my main goal is acquiring cloth for construction. It's the hardest of the three--metal, wood, cloth--to acquire. But with a little effort I can get enough to build superior collection platforms--and then eventually ammo collection. Even with 50% A.C. perm I still have to run the occasional foray into military bases to renew my ammo stocks. Upgrading ammo collection will ensure a ready state of affairs. We're making definite progress, and our forays into the city grow deeper and deeper. Eventually we might be one of the serious traders of the city. But that day remains far off.

31 January 2027

Found a trader who gave 2000 cloth for two low-level uni pistols and a rare low-level long rifle (a sportshot). Then, encountered John the Long Rifle dealer who offered 10 premiums for my best long rifle. Since I'm PVE rather than PVP, I took the offer. Now I have 5 premiums and 21 level 3 keycards, ready for resource trading and to speed up the process of maximizing my compound.

My missions went as best as could be expected, although I'm one short of clearing the regional bonus.

There are various reasons I don't participate in the survivor clashes--the best being that it brings trouble. I'm fully engaged taking on the Z menace, and although it isn't out of the question that I'll one day take on human enemies, for now I'm too busy securing valuable weapons and looking after my compound needs--think cloth and ammo--to go after human prey. It also just feels nice to cooperate rather than clash.

My main base turned down an offer of 1 premium for an AC30 perm.

I went to the Science City and learned out of my contacts there has recovered from appendicitis.

Found an old book about the Korean War and read it. Was interesting to learn about the initial invasion, the first battle of Task Force Smith, and the subsequent retreat.

1 February 2027

No trading last evening, although I saw the rare Sportshot I sold on trade, suggesting I had lowballed my offer. Oh well, I act on instinct and I got a 24-hour head start on my compound development. I also finished an infected bounty and immediately began a new one.

No communication with my contacts.

My main compound rests.

It's cold, but not as bitterly so as last week. Wearing a nice arctic coat these days.

2 February 2027

Carried out some light trading yesterday, including my main compound's top light machine gun. Felt motivated by a desire to keep things simple--and gained ten premiums plus a near-equivalent weapon in trade. Also bought an assault rifle for the newer group. The new group remains a bit short in weaponry--in some cases using weapons for an entire statistical deviation lower than the norm. But I'm hesitant from paying too much for tools that will eventually in turn be obsolete. The team is growing so fast in capability it is practically expected they outgrow their weaponry.

Awaiting completion of compound buildings. Took on the bridge for the first time--a success. Had to retreat from an elite zed, however, in another mission.

Why do I trade? Maybe--just to participate in the great marketplace.

6 February 2027

Sold an additional LR from my main compound. Buyer was a bit touchy--but a premium card is a premium, whoever it comes from. Otherwise, no additional trading or deal making in either compound. Ran some missions uneventfully. And confirmed the Science City is coming to visit my home today. So--spent some time on clean-up. Also purchased a small cake of brie--the cheese. A tasty concoction.

The new compound resides in a zone of the city with heavier trading than my old one. Look forward to the day I can wheel and deal with level 60 merchandise.

Some people feel my merchandise is over-priced. Others advise me to wait for the buyers. I don't know--am willing to entertain counter-offers, but not really selling as fast as I had figured.

Sports championship in the Terror Dome. The home team wins, to great acclaim and satisfaction. Lucky friend of mine got to attend in person. But tickets were \$6000 a piece, a bit outside my range. Did manage to catch the broadcast--or at least the final quarter of it. An exciting game with a satisfactory ending.

8 February 2027

Lost some interest in my main compound. Finished about 2/3rds of an infected bounty and then set my survivors to rest. The problem is of being maxed out--and not enough uniques being recovered during missions to justify the time and effort being spent. But I remain engaged in the secondary group, where survivors continue to level up, and I recently picked up a level 40 light machine gun. The game is a perfectly pitched fight to survive, and new areas of the city continue to open up as my leader advances.

9 February 2027

Was contacted by a prospective buyer although I did no advertising yesterday. The sale has achieved a life of its own. Character calls himself "TheWhopperTinger," and he wanted "Last Man's Decider," a 50% range bonus M107. Otherwise an uneventful day, as I await the completion of the ammo storage closets so I can boost the ammo salvage pads. Completed (or near completed) infected bonuses.

Had an early dinner with a contact from the Science City. Had Filipino food, which he ate with chopsticks and a vinyl-glove covered hand. Then we had coffee.

12 February 2027

Snow fell heavily last few days, cutting off contact to my secondary compound. Meanwhile, my main group is contacted by a recruiter for The New World Republic, one of the top three groups in Unity City, and I am admitted, to what future I don't know. Already I know things are more hierarchal than previous groups--I am not permitted to make alliance-wide announcements, and leadership itself is strictly divided into levels of privilege. The upside, one supposes, is that bonuses will be consistently activated, as the group is, as I wrote, one of the top-3, vying for control of the most desirable real estate in Unity City, and finished 2nd last war round, 3rd this one.

13 February 2027

Re-established contact with my junior compound, where I completed the infected bonus, fended off an infected attack, and got the ammo drop-off upgrades started (estimated time to completion: 3 days). Also finished a survivor's request (Katelyn Wilson), who wanted to go out on a few missions and polish her skills. Got a chunk of a new bounty completed as well.

Started my first round with The New World Republic, where survivors with the upgrade to their car have already made large contributions to the tasks. I figure I'll contribute more this afternoon.

Sold an improvised pistol for a premium card. Again--the desire to trade for trade's sake.

15 February 2027

The undead are celebrating a holiday, and I'm micro-managing my two compounds while keeping warm from the cold. My level of contribution to The New World Republic is quite high, it seems. Mostly I get the resources from missions to construction sites and the like, (wood) and large supermarkets (water). Wherever you go, though, the same--politics will decide how long I remain and what bonuses there are for me.

16 February 2027

An uneventful day. The undead continue to celebrate their holiday, and mostly things are closed over the twilight world. Snow lies on the ground, and there's a chill in the air. I carried out the minimum of tasking yesterday, and probably won't run more than the minimum today. Am also busy reading a book by Victor David Hanson as well as Unbroken by Hillenbrand. I have my eyes peeled as well for fresh clothing, particularly socks, and keep an ear open for the trading going on, as it relentlessly does. Note as well the junior compound came up with 100 fuel during the time they were unreachable. This makes up for some degree for the lack of tasking without my direction.

17 February 2027

I forgot to mention: a dignitary visited Science City during this holiday season--he was in and out the door before you could say "cheese." Group photograph, and no coffee. Guess he was "very important," as one staffer said. Otherwise, nothing especially special about days recently. Going on missions; taking care of infected bounties; listening to the trade radio buzz with offers and counter-offers. I sip coffee and look at the snow.

18 February 2027

Again, an uneventful day yesterday. Ran missions, worked on compound building at my junior building, eaves-dropped on a conversation by long-timers on the radio. Went on a hunt for new clothing and located some clean socks a couple miles to the south at an old boarded up super store. Weather slightly warmer than yesterday, spring is coming.

Engaged in trade with a survivor similar to me in experience. Sold him two melee weapons in exchange for a keycard, a research note, and a level 50 light machine gun. Overall, a fair trade for both sides. Then, shortly after the trade, found a level 41 assault rifle while scavenging. Unsure whether luck favors traders or if it's all just cognitive error. Meanwhile, the building continues at my junior compound; the senior one looks up the data files for next round's alliance war. Looks like I will be needing food, metal, cloth, ammo. Will be a real challenge finding four resources at once. But I'm confident I will meet alliance minimums.

19 February 2027

Finished off trading yesterday evening by purchasing a sleek Wehrmacht jacket in good condition from my mentor, John the Nutcase. It's a black jacket complete with Wehrmachtsadler or eagle on the breast. Very sharp and I equip it personally, ready to issue orders to an obedient survivor group. Paid two premiums whereas my main compound trading saw offers of 4-5. Otherwise little to report. Some building going on in my junior compound. The alliance war round draws to an end in my main compound with The New World Republic in third place, fourth place quite distant. Like I write, 3 main groups vie for supremacy in Unity City; everyone else is small beans.

I am concerned I'll find the next round of the alliance war difficult. If I scavenge Large Hardware Stores, I may run low on ammo. If I raid military bases, I'll be low on resources. Somehow, though, I'll muddle through. Reaching the minimum quotas

shouldn't be too hard. The question is of being one of the star contributors, since I don't raid human survivors.

20 February 2027

The alliance war has begun. There's now a four-way race to accumulate metal, cloth, food, and ammo, just as the data files said. Will wait a little bit to see which tasks need the most help before deciding on scavenging raids. Most likely I will hit up Large Hardware Stores, Supermarkets, and Military Bases. The question is one of balance.

Went bowling yesterday with Science City. Did okay--beat a few players, was beaten by others. It's not as easy as it looks. Then I made contact on the radio net with an old reader friend of mine. Happy birthday wishes close out the communications for the day.

At my junior compound, flaunted the Wehrmacht jacket. What is it about wartime German aesthetics that is so pure? Just the sleekness of a culture at war. But aesthetic perfection comes at a small price to real battle efficiency. I'm not wearing a ballistic vest so the uniform shows.

Statistical breakdown, round 205 of the alliance wars:

89232/240000 metal 37.18% complete

70601/240000 cloth 29.42% complete

17998/75000 food 24.00% complete

29437/210000 ammo 14.02% complete

alliance quotas

4800 metal

4800 cloth

1500 food

4200 ammo

already

2628 metal 54.75% complete

3130 cloth 65.21% complete

639 food 42.60% complete

251 ammo 5.98% complete

after one round

5034 metal 100% complete

4340 cloth 90.42% complete

639 food 42.60% complete

251 ammo 5.98% complete

after two rounds

5034 metal 100% complete

5430 cloth 100% complete

809 food 53.93% complete

551 ammo 13.12% complete

after three rounds

...

1757 ammo 41.18% complete

total alliance status:

102301/240000 metal 42.63% complete

79024/240000 cloth 32.93% complete

20068/75000 food 26.76% complete

35349/210000 ammo 16.83% complete

after four rounds

6237 metal 100% complete

5430 cloth 100% complete

1051 food 70.07% complete

3484 ammo 82.95% complete

total alliance status:

140864/240000 metal 58.69% complete

96019/240000 cloth 40.00% complete

27308/75000 food 36.41% complete

55078/210000 ammo 26.23% complete

21 February 2027

A question arises--should I donate heavily to the metal collection and let the outstanding numbers compensate for indifferent performance in food/ammo; or should I aim for the quotas evenly, although it means disappearing into the crowd of mediocrity? Metal collection is easy, and it seems next round I will need ammo and groceries (according to the data files). Ahh--these questions circle about endlessly. Actually, it's probably best to just do what I feel like. Although one effect already is that I am reconcentrating on my main compound after all the management of the junior one. It's good to renew ties.

In other news, I continue to main the front gate of Science City. It's boring. But I can still access the radio nets so I keep one ear open to news. Hours pass by as I stare at the city in snow. The hands of the clock proceed at their inexorable pace, and then I am

released, to go lead my compound in its scavenging and statistical analysis of the alliance wars.

day 3 alliance status

174971/240000 metal 72.90% complete

115469/240000 cloth 48.11% complete

33268/75000 food 44.36% complete

68050/210000 ammo 32.40% complete

my contributions

6792 metal 100% complete

5430 cloth 100% complete

1332 food 88.80% complete

3484 ammo 82.95% complete

after another round

alliance

178752/240000 metal 74.48% complete

119545/240000 cloth 49.81% complete

33961/75000 food 45.28% complete

69694/210000 ammo 33.19% complete

self

6992 metal 100% complete

5697 cloth 100% complete

1490 food 99.33% complete

3749 ammo 89.26% complete

Today also marks the sixth anniversary of the fall of Unity City to zombie hords. In celebration, caches of fuel have been unearthed and fireworks set off. It's with a festive mood we approach this holiday.

22 February 2027

192065/240000 metal 80.27% complete

126730/240000 cloth 52.80% complete

38601/75000 food 51.47% complete

83824/210000 ammo 39.92% complete

Finished. It's with time to spare I've finished my donation quotas and now the focus of my efforts switch to how much bonus contributions I can give. My recycler is working at full steam, producing the basic production goods one donates to the alliance totals. Metal, cloth, food, ammo--this is the order in which I can contribute, trying to get as much extra as I can before the tasks are complete for each category. I want to shine as a star, even if without a Deathmobile upgrade I'm stuck waiting 2 hours between resource runs into deeper Unity City.

In the meantime, before this afternoon's scavenging and donating begins, I'm spending day at Science City, where I await various tasks being helpful and contributing to operations. I'm thinking as well of getting another dental cleaning, paying out of pocket, since six months have passed since my previous scaling. It may be a fallen world, but some professions are still available. Further, we may eat a diet of canned food, but oral hygiene is as important as ever.

To be perfectly honest, I don't know the names of all the SC staffers, who know me as an outside compound leader and friendly ally. Still, it doesn't mean I can't contribute to daily tasks, and keeping a watch at the front gate is an important, mission-critical task. It affords me the opportunity to write as well, and record the details and particulars of the fallen post-virus world.

In addition to the travels I have recorded here in my journal, my most major abroad experience was four years in China. Some day, some time, I hope to capture the totality of the People's Republic--China is a universe unto itself--but that is not for here or now. Suffice to say that the emblem of the country is the concept of an illiterate peasant carrying live chickens aboard a supermodern maglev train.

23 February 2027

240000/240000 metal 100.00% complete

197301/240000 cloth 82.21% complete

58764/75000 food 78.35% complete

136792/210000 ammo 65.14% complete

Some snow falls, turning the world into a peaceful place. Meanwhile, I am scavenging in hopes of finding a lucky medallion--these apparently available to those who kill five hundred zombies with melee weapons this anniversary week. I find myself also unable to complete yesterday's entry. China: a universe unto itself. That is the crazy mad totality of a billion people massing about, united into a single Han state, unyielding, unified, and centrally-planned. What could I write about four years in the country except that it was exceptional. There are other venues and places for me to attempt this impossible task.

After completing the melee challenge, my next task is to finish the infected bonuses based on raiding particular neighborhoods of Unity City. The luck of the draw is that particularly easy neighborhoods were chosen for my senior compound. This has no bearing on the quality of the bonus box I will receive--actually, it's entirely possible the bonus box will reward handsomely even though the getting was fairly simple. And of course the opposite situation also exists--a relatively weak haul for a long challenge at the roughest regions of Unity. Who to say why or how.

25 February 2027

100%. The alliance has completed its war tasks for the round. My final numbers:

10810 metal 252.21% complete

11591 cloth 241.48% complete

1611 food 107.40% complete

7632 ammo 181.71% complete

During this time when the alliance has activated a loot bonus (10%), I've picked up a unique pistol with good stats as well as a decent vest. I can't prove it's because of the loot bonus, but it certainly doesn't hurt to pick up these items.

Spent much of yesterday cleaning. Early pre-spring cleaning. The balance of the day went to scavenging at the most elite fringes of the city. Also picked up Ernest Cline's Ready Player One and re-read it.

26 February 2027

A quiet day yesterday, although I fell asleep early and woke up in the middle of the night awaiting my compound mates on a self-led mission. They picked up only mediocre loot, but I had to take advantage of the 10% loot bonus while it lasted. According to data banks, next war round is the "mega boost" round, with a 25% bonus to finding quality items. Looks like some heavy scavenging will begin.

Ready Player One works because it's about a utopia--the OASIS--set in a dystopian real world. But I live in a dystopia with only memories of the pre-fall universe, which was kinda a mess already. School shootings, global warming, racism and sexism--who would have thought later that by comparison, we had it pretty good? I live amongst the zombies but feel little fear. With mass firepower I can hold off the zombie rushes that come cyclically, and likewise, scavenging missions are pretty safe with the sole exception of coming across an elite zed--this happens rarely if regularly, and at least of third of the time, requires a tactical withdrawal--a retreat in other words. But other than this, unless I go looking after trouble--attacking human compounds or taking on the Terror Dome--there's little danger to my actual survival in the Dead Zone. A haze hangs over the city, but hope flickers like a flame. Pretty soon another bonus season will arrive, and new weapons and gear will be available. Meanwhile, I await merely the start of next war round--in 22 hours--and the numerical percentage gains to scavenging my alliance will

set up. It's okay to be part of an alliance. The munitions are straightforward to acquire at my high level, and even my junior compound is showing signs of over-production. However, I will hold off, for now, having them join an alliance too. It's just a little too much responsibility to take on.

27 February 2027

I dreamt--last night--of HURK--Heimat Umwelt Risk Kontrol--the German/American agency responsible, ostensibly, for containing the Z plague but widely believed to be behind it in the first place. People who promulgate theories of HURK responsibility are known as "Truthers"--they came into existence after 9/11 but only became mainstream after the onset of the global plague that upended human society. According to truthers, the Z plague is a secret government project to divide and conquer the human race and legitimize broad emergency powers to control human society, or what remains of it after the zombie flu. There's not much actual evidence of a HURK conspiracy--but that doesn't bother truthers too much. It's an attempt to make order of a disordered world, a framework in a universe gone mad.

I am not a truther.

That said, I remember HURK involvement in my life from a very young age. It was HURK that insinuated itself in my existence, HURK that played out my life like a novel, ran elaborate masques that commented on my condition, and otherwise, if secretly, involved itself with me such that I am the person I am today.

I am not a paranoid, either.

28 February 2027

Operation Hurkules, the secret German-American program to release a zombie virus in the population, is said to be the reason HURK maintains a presence in Unity City and studies the political economy of the hybrid city-state. There is scant incontrovertible evidence of such deliberate action, only rumors and whispered explications while the zombies continue to grow in number and begin constructing a society of their own.

I am a member of The New World Republic, currently #1 in the alliance wars, and nearing completion of the wood scavenging task thanks to some heavyweight alliance

members and my own above-average numbers. A prize of 5000 fuel, to be divided among the top-10 members of the alliance, awaits the victorious alliance of each war round. Meanwhile I scavenge military bases and security sites for ammo and find a unique backpack for my troubles. Mega bonus round means 36 minute return times for leader-led missions, and so the city in this sense awaits my plunder. In a way, it's actually too much of a good thing. Finding items approaches the limitless.

I wrote "HURK" insinuated itself in my life. By this, I mean it determined such things as my first lover, what I would major in in college, and the terms and conditions of my first forays into overseas countries. To this degree, it was not a negative force per se, but its involvement is nevertheless a form of interference. Do I despise HURK? No, in a word--I merely note that all the wildest conspiracy theories could not imagine this much of a private-public interference in a person's existence. That said, I don't believe the Truthers' claim that HURK deliberately introduced the plague. That would involve the conspiracy of far too many people and involve the coincidence of too many separate interests. HURK is just another force to contend with in a dystopic world, and they have considerable assets at their disposal. Rumor has it that conflict with HURK will increase in the near future, and I'm setting myself up into a position of safety in the meantime. Who can rescue me but myself? And to what end? I act deliberately, at all possible speed, with an eye towards consequences and relationships in the broad spectrum of the world. Zombie attack.

1 March 2027

Spring arrives, with the onset of a rainy day that lasts 24 hours but no more. I am still struggling to define what it was exactly that HURK did, because they move in subtle ways and because their activities are the subject of much secrecy. A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. The Heimat Umwelt Risk Kontrol is the object of much fascinating study, from the outside, and credited with far more than they actually do, although when they do move, their movement is total and final. To make an entire person: that is the object of a massive coordination of people and resources. Yet they thrive on simplicity and the tried and true. Human nature does not change, and so human beings can be played like puppets to achieve goals decades in advance. Perhaps the best metaphor for their activities is that of orchid growing: many seeds are planted, and years later, some bloom in the hoped for direction. Meanwhile, conspiracy theorists see their activities behind every closed door and every newsworthy item. The very capability of human beings to believe in the secret and unknown is their best ally, for they benefit from absurd theories of their manipulation of populaces and politics. HURK cannot be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. They did not benefit from

9/11 nor the zombie plague, and we cannot hold them to account for these occurrences in our history.

49307/52500 food 93.92% complete

44170/52500 food 84.13% complete

124328/147000 ammo 84.58% complete

168000/168000 metal 100.00% complete

With the mega bonus round in full play, I go to the maximum difficulty scavenging zones of the city and pick up as much errant loot as possible.

2 March 2027

The holiday season closes with one final day off for the Zeds, and bonus mega-round continues for the alliance, with heavy scavenging continuing to result in backpacks and the like. Was able to talk to a senior member of the alliance, who sold me research notes for two premium keys. I also passed along bandages and masks to Ar4ai, the touchy young trader from before.

My numbers this round:

2928 food 195.20% complete

2468 food 164.53% complete

9174 ammo 218.43% complete

5593 cloth 116.52% complete

I exceed quotas, in other words, and rank in the top 8 in all categories.

5 March 2027

Spent the balance of yesterday's unseasonable day ordering missions to meet a survivor request for infected kills and finishing an infected bounty for my junior compound. Not much to report, aside from some conversations with alliance leadership. Picked up a copy of Sudhir Venkatesh's "Gang Leader for a Day," an interesting read about inner-city life before the Fall. These were people who saw each day as something to survive--something like us today. Yet despite the difficulties, I don't want to live behind high walls in the Science City, for example. I prefer the Flow of leadership, like a ship cutting through oceans on a dark night, invisible, unknowable.

13 March 2027

Another round of war came and went. I contributed about 150% of quota and ranked #1 on scavenging weapons and gear.

Rumor is that HURK will take the offense this summer. Loyalties will divide among the clans, which will support them and which oppose. As the saying goes, "in politics, the most unstable formation is the tripod." HURK-Science City-the Alliances--how will the war unfold? I don't know at present, but my first bias is to do what's good for my survivors.

Read Tiger Trap by David Wise. Only an average read--no real thrills like Bourne Identity or the like. As for espionage, it isn't as important in a zombie infected world as one might think. Information about each alliance's score is public knowledge, so nobody wastes time trying to put agents in rival organizations' structure. The New World Republic won last war round and is set to win the current. Ruthless culling of under-performers and promotion of good raiders the key to a successful alliance. I won't really progress, I know, for I do not raid human players. Still, I enjoy the round bonuses and carry out the tasks and then some.

The balance of the day--the morning and early afternoon--I spend at Science City including a stint manning the front gate. With time weighing heavily on my hands, I write these words and await my return to the compounds and the excitement of scavenging missions and infected bounties. Some sociologist studying the situation would want to know more clearly who is paying these bounties and to what end, but I care not, mindlessly collecting the bonuses and hoping for unique weapons and gear to enable my survivors more firepower and survivability.

The only problem is the increasing presence of beggars--people who wait outside Science City's gate and look for handouts. One persistent one knows me by face and constantly pesters me. Luckily, he is fended off with relatively little each day.

14 March 2027

Spent the balance of the day yesterday clearing the infected bounties and fulfilling alliance tasks. A full spring day has arrived, with highs of 70 degrees F today. Management at the Science City questioned me about the begging problem. Apparently, a net total of many tiny micro-begs adds up to a real problem. I don't know how much will be resolved.

Science City is having a conference tomorrow and the day after. According to my liaison, a Japanese contingent will attend. It has been many months since I've been there, so my language skills are probably rusty--but we'll see.

19 March 2027

Sad news arrived yesterday. J.H., an old friend and mentor of mine, passed away--early onset Alzheimer's. She was just 49, in the prime of her life. I am saddened and bereft.

Not much to report about the conference. It was composed of speeches and such and a banquet. J. contingent included Y.S., a young woman. Weather was cool but not cold, and the guesthouse we stayed at had two dogs running around. They were not infected, of course. Most street dogs are, but they are as susceptible to bullets as any human Zed.

Carried out tasking and infected bountying. Did not really chart this war turn, but completed the quotas and a little more. No comment from alliance leadership, who presumably are happy to let things lie as they are.

20 March 2027

Mourning for J.H. continues, even as another war round begins and I'm off to a good start, reaching the front page of contributors and getting my recycler working to produce metal and cloth. Donations of food and ammo round out this rotation.

21 March 2027

I'm still in mourning for J.H., who was a guide to me in my early life. To die so young--a bright flare that has been extinguished.

Snow falls, and winter returns briefly. Spring snow.

26 March 2027

J.H. is buried yesterday, Los Angeles time, today Unity City time, and the period of mourning comes to an end. The lineaments of my grief: she was a friend and mentor, and I valued our relationship above and beyond the too-few words we exchanged. Her death came too soon. I wake to a grayer world, and zombie-like proceed through my tasking, achieving top-10 results or about 150% of quotas, which isn't front page, but isn't altogether shabby either. It's alliance members with upgraded cars that can contribute far more. Next round, mega-bonus, however, will shorten the gap.

27 March 2027

I've been flooded with free or low-cost unique weapons, slightly above my current level in my junior compound, but still filling my inventory with a sea of orange. Received help from two users--stellripper and lehane--who took only minor payment for their welcome support in the battle against the zed menace.

I'm appreciative--that goes without saying. But in some strange larger sense, I feel indebted. It's so simple, with a casual flick of the fingers, my entire inventory is magnified. At least, however, some generous souls exist. Most people are sharp traders, and pick up more than one keycard for six weapons.

Time still passes...slowly...at Science City in the early afternoon, as I stare out to a passive city. It's 2:45pm as I write this, and in a short while, I'll be back in command at my compound. Mega-round means mega-tasking.

3 April 2027

Warm weather arrived today--in excess of 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Mega-round came and went, and I contributed approximately 150% of quota, except for munitions, because of elite zombies. Ran into a little trouble as well deep in Unity City, where the zed are stronger. I'm going to have to run a strong team of 5 and a weak one to be able to take on the infected bonuses.

Picked up a DVD of Ready Player One and Pacific Rim: Uprising. The first was okay.

5 April 2027

Ready Player One constructed a brilliant utopia (online) set in sharp relief against a dystopian reality. In a strange sort of way, it mirrors my own life, the few brilliant hours of leadership against the long hours of Science City. The taste of combat--and survival against the zed horde--is intoxicating. I especially enjoy the junior, secondary compound--which shows every sign of one day exceeding the senior one. I already have my survivors there dressed in Wehrmacht jacket and a pair of Wasteland Wings. Next step is to acquire top-quality weaponry.

6 April 2027

Spent yesterday deep in Unity City, as a light rain fell. Constant travel a morale-boosting activity. Completed tasking and made significant progress/completed infected bonuses. Also came across a unique assault rifle in my scavenging.

I find myself able to read and reread Ready Player One. It's an adventure story set in a believable future. The action is unrelenting, and hence, the plot grips one. Deserving of its super-seller status.

Cherry trees in blossom. A pretty harbinger of spring.

9 April 2027

Spent the balance of the last few days tasking, completing infected bonuses, and fulfilling survivor requests. Uneventful except passing along six weapons to a weaker compound.

I picked up a copy of Annihilation, the film, starring Natalie Portman. Good example of weird fantastic. This led to datalink search, directing me to Doki Doki Literature Club.

10 April 2027

DDLC was the first work of art to distract me from command responsibilities. To that degree, it is great art. A seeming light-hearted dating sim that suddenly veers into psychological horror, DDLC excites the senses and breaks the fourth wall. Had me captivated.

To transport a reader out of the ordinary world into a fictional universe--that is the power of art and the raison d'etre of powerful pieces. Aristotle was right--true tragedy evokes pity and terror.

11 April 2027

Neglected my command responsibilities whilst I remain immersed in the DDLC world. Fandom can go far. Meanwhile, I release my survivors to go scavenging on their own.

12 April 2027

Immersed in the DDLC world. I slightly miss my tasking quotas, and let my fuel generator run dry at my junior compound. Monika. Monika. Monika.

17 April 2027

The alliance spent some tokens yesterday to start a mini bonus round. Otherwise, not much to report except I scavenged a complete set of Lost DVDs, six seasons. I watched part 1 of the pilot at an accelerated speed. I have already watched the first four seasons a long time ago, remembering a quality show but one that benefitted from high-speed playback.

19 April 2027

Worked overtime at the Science City, leaving me no choice but to delegate missioning to the compound mates. Had a meeting with the Science City staff about the begging problem. Otherwise a quiet couple of days. Don't know when the war with HURK will begin.

Little known fact: the pilot episode of Lost was so expensive, the executive who authorized its production was fired. \$14 million for two forty-minute episodes. Most of the cost involved transporting a derelict airplane and simulating a crash site. But the particular feeling elicited, one of confusion and loss, captured something about the post 9-11 America and resulted in a large audience.

Then, there's Shusaku Endo's theories on life-affirming and death-affirming art...

23 April 2027

Watched the first half of Lost's episode 2, Tabula Rasa, as well as the movie Blade Runner 2049. Both are above average works which successfully world build. That is the key criterion for a good immersive work, the ability to create an entire universe and populate it with believable characters. I envy the fiction writers who seem to make it effortless.

I live in a universe of zombies which attack on a regular basis and complicate our efforts to scavenge food, water, and gear in an entire city declared as a dead zone. Amidst the

constant threat of the undead, I band together with other human survivors and live day-to-day.

24 April 2027

Watched another chunk of Blade Runner 2049 and scavenged a copy of Lost in Translation. The latter is one of my favorite movies, and I haven't watched it in years. Otherwise, did some basic missioning.

27 April 2027

Finished Blade Runner 2049 and moderately missed scavenging quotas. Why does horror work as a genre? It immerses one in a world scarier than the usual, giving one a sense of relief at the ending. But that's not entirely it--we experience pleasure throughout the work, not just at the end. Horror activates our fight or flight reflexes in a controlled, contained manner. Thus, I lose myself in the well-crafted supernatural work.

Perhaps too much--I'm toeing the line with regard to quotas.

4 May 2027

Clan leadership had no comment to make on the missed quotas. This round, in any case, I've already exceeded the minimums. Meanwhile, I confess to some estrangement from my duties. I do the minimum, and otherwise indulge in some escapism--Lost in Translation was a thoroughly immersive work, despite it taking place largely in a hotel. I also play Frontline Tactics--a computer game. Resetting the game allows me the pleasure of going through the leveling process all over again.

10 May 2027

Been immersed the last few days in Frontline Tactics. The game scales up the difficulty of the enemy soldiers as you level up your men. It's a tactical puzzle game.

Meanwhile, have been committing the minimum of effort to zombie-hunting duties.

11 May 2027

What make a work immersive? How do artists world-build? A question for me, as I seek escapist adventures whether computer, literary, or cinematic. My world is awash with zombies, the Science City, the delayed HURK offensive...

1 June 2027

It's been a long time since I've updated; much has happened. Most importantly, my junior compound joined an alliance--Heidi's Renegades. It did so just in time to witness a social implosion. One of the leaders kicked an alliance member on charges of "misogyny and racism." His friend with him, and then, all of a sudden, there was a general exodus including the leader herself, Dee. But, right after the departures, a good tasker finished the food donation task almost single-handedly, and confidence returned to the alliance. I was promoted from recruit to captain, and I remain, now, a leader of the highly officered Heidi's Renegades.

2 June 2027

In the intervening weeks, the Science City also took a trip out to the countryside east of the city. I went, and the two days passed quickly. Further, I have been busy with the alliance tasks and my situation at my senior compound remains the same vis-a-vis The New World Republic. I neither excel noticeably nor fall behind in my quotas. I am stuck as a "Popular," the lowest normal ranking member without permission to even address the alliance body as a whole.

The weather has turned quite warm. 88 degrees Fahrenheit predicted for tomorrow.

Reading "Fire" by Sebastian Junger and "I am Legend" by Richard Matheson.

5 June 2027

The city is awash with ex-prisoner zombies, some of whom are blisteringly fast and armed with shivs and some of whom are fat and sturdy. Meanwhile, the rumor of HURK bunkers appearing is repeated.

Heidi's Renegades suffers another blow with the departure of insaner, the key tasker of last round.

11 June 2027

Watched the series finale for Sense8 on the 19th anniversary of its release. Senior leadership of Heidi's Renegades remains absent, now running 11 days since they have been seen. I am offered an opportunity to join up with another clan, but have turned it down for now.

12 June 2027

I've left Heidi's Renegades. Too much time has passed with the senior leadership AWOL. My new clan, Indomitable Spirits, has me ranked slightly lower, at lieutenant level, but presumably I'm better off with an active clan.

Caught sight of Homeworld and Alpha Centauri during a scavenging mission. Will pick them up later today.

13 June 2027

Immersed in Alpha Centauri and Fallen London.

15 June 2027

I'm playing the Nautilus Pirates faction in Alpha Centauri: Alien Crossfire, and giving a good fight to the Usurpers and Cha Dawn. A two front war has me busy, but the faction advantages to the Pirates are pretty over-powered.

17 June 2027

Immersed in Alpha Centauri. The war with the Usurpers prolongs itself. Was able to destroy their planet buster when the AI put it in weakly defended sea base. Immense waves of AAA-tracking land units keep my air force at bay. Meanwhile, the Free Drones faction led by Foreman Domai thrives and actually surpasses me by the game's reckoning.

To collect the war fuel bonuses, my junior compound goes off the White Flag, opening itself to survivor vs. survivor raids. Surprisingly, the Free Republic may be unable to complete the tasks; we are too raider heavy.

(after a few hours)

Did it. The Usurpers are no more.

2 July 2027

Played a bit more Alpha Centauri, enough for the Free Drones to rise to power and then attack me. They're a formidable bunch and they build like mad. It's going to be hard to find an answer to the stream of conventional missiles coming out of Tachyon-field protected bases. Actually it's enough that I've lost interest in the game for now.

Neither the New World Republic or Indomitable Spirits is doing particularly well. They have suffered defections of good raiders resulting in also-ran status in the alliance wars. Not being 1st, 2nd or 3rd place means no fuel bonuses to share among the members. But there are still group bonuses to be purchased, and for now, I'm settled in where I am.

Weather has turned fully summer hot. Took a trip with the Science City out to the eastern coast.

28 July 2027

I played 43.5 hours of Alpha Centauri in total, enough to finally crack that walnut, the Free Drones, through superior tactical play. I disassembled their empire one heavily-defended city after another, and emerged the dominant player of the game. Then I researched all the way up the tech tree to the transcendent victory. Admittedly, the game turned into a grind, but the satisfaction of a full completion made it all worth it. Mostly.

Science City is on summer holiday. I cooked lunch for two visitors at my compound, preparing a nice steak with plenty of appetizers. Meanwhile, I switched from the New World Republic to the Hustlers, a mafia-esque alliance. Hungry for the fuel bonuses, I left the now moribund NWR to its purely zombie-focused self, and look forward to collecting valuable fuel from my new alliance.

29 July 2027

Heat wave continues, temperatures rising to 95 degrees Fahrenheit plus. I keep up with more than my share of contributions to war tasks. Found a 50% range LR with my junior compound, but the crowd says it's worth only 2-3 keys. I keep myself occupied with Alpha Centauri, where my faction the Data Angels under Sinder Rose survives but does not thrive. I'm right next to the overpowered Conqueror Marr, so he forces technologies out of me under threat of war. I also play Fallen London, where my character grinds his way up to the top. Many levels of play, however, lay ahead.

Entertainment: the name of the game. How do I meet the endlessness of the hours except with droll amusements. In life, you have to either struggle to survive or deal with boredom, the great enemy. But I toss and turn, and find little activities to fill my hours, and that is the material of the day.

30 July 2027

More heat wave. It's hard to stay hydrated in the intense humid heat. I can barely rouse the survivors to meet the challenges of the zombie hunting day. In more bad news, Dem60, the one man army of the Hustlers has left for whatever reason. We probably won't crack the top 3 next challenge round.

In Alpha Centauri, the Data Angels negotiates a blood truce with Conqueror Marr long enough to set up a Supply Carrier army. Hostilities have then resumed, but this time things will not go well for the Usurpers. We can count on the AI-controlled forces being sufficiently inefficient that their bases will fall like dominoes. Separately, the Consciousness under Prime Function Aki-Zeta had a brief but losing war against Foreman Domai of the Free Drones. The Consciousness remains top human faction, but their limitations were revealed. The Caretakers have control of their entire continent and the game lead.

31 July 2027

It's hot outside. I lay about the compound keeping my feet in a bin of water and fan myself with a paper fan. Outside the commerce and activity of the zeds goes on, but there's talk even some are overcome. As predicted, my faction in Alpha Centauri wiped out the Usurpers, but are meanwhile far behind the technologically advanced Consciousness. And in the alliance wars, I'm accepted back to the New World Republic without much ado, following the rainmaker Dem60 back to the old clan.

I have DVDs of Star Wars: Rogue One and X-men: Days of Future Past, but I'm in no hurry to watch them. Mentally immersed in Alpha Centauri and the challenges imposed when the AI-controlled factions have a 30% reduction in production costs. It's easy for one or another faction to runaway with victory, especially if their technological prowess permits them to monopolize the Secret Projects. That's the situation facing me with the friendly Consciousness whose sale of Fusion Power was the tipping point for my war against the Usurpers. But they're still far ahead and might power themselves to a Transcendent Victory whether I try to war on them or not. It's your friends you have to worry about, that's the lesson of A.C.

(a little later in the day)

The Consciousness has declared vendetta against me! Their huge technological edge plus their possession of the Hunter-Seeker Algorithm means they will be trouble. I don't know what will happen after the first few sea bases are traded. Because Aki Zeta-5 is pacifist, she might be quick to offer Blood Truce. No idea. But it is well coded A.I. that leads her to battle when peacetime means my building enough Supply Crawlers to make my bases powerhouses. I control an entire continent, but it's going to be tough working

against an opponent whose bases I can't mess around with, with my probe teams. Let's see what happens...

(a little more later)

I conquered a small Consciousness outpost in my territory and it was enough to get a Truce from that dangerous enemy. However, in the meantime, Aki Zeta-5 had joined forces with Foreman Domai of the Free Drones, and I found myself in Vendetta with them as well. They did not respond to the loss of a small base with a offer for peace. Instead, I'm at war with them and the Caretakers, and all this speaks to how the diplomatic functions are coded in A.C. Not a formidable enemy, though--the Drones lack the Hunter Seeker Algorithm and will fall prey to my probe teams and shard-equipped air corps.

(and a little bit more)

One more Drone base fell, and then they sued for peace. How delicately balanced the world is! I'm still at war with the Caretakers, however.

1 August 2027

In the game Alpha Centauri, I've achieved a Blood Truce with the Consciousness and briefly took one of the Caretaker's bases, before he mind-controlled it out of my hands with a probe team. I'm used to having the Hunter-Seeker Algorithm, but in any case, my foothold on the Caretaker's continent is gone, and I'm back to where I started. Most of the A.I. factions are "Seething," meaning they're looking to pick a fight. I had to surrender two technologies to the Nautilus Pirates to avoid war with them. However, according to the charts, I'm pulling away and ahead, even despite the lack of Secret Projects. It's enough that I have the Cloning Vats and the project that lowers your support costs by 2. Population being cloned plus satellites pouring down food resources equals population boom. My cities are getting quite large.

The temperature is said to feel as high as 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It does feel like a sauna out of doors, and I'm sure keeping cool is on everybody's mind.

(some time later)

The Cybernetic Consciousness has fully researched all technologies, but they remain satisfied not proceeding with the Voice of Planet. I'm not entirely sure why; perhaps the video game designers wanted the end game to be a shooting spree. With their offensive weapons at 24, they will truly have the edge in faction-to-faction combat. But I'm dealing right now with a sudden and brazen attack by the Nautilus Pirates and the Free Drones. I took a Pirates' base, and they sued for peace and even friendship. The Drones have a landing party on my continent and a large air force stacked nearby. Their technological development is also on par with mine, so a good fight lies ahead. If the Cybernetic Consciousness jumps in, that might be an extremely tough puzzle to unravel.

2 August 2027

I won the game. The Cybernetic Consciousness behaved like the other factions and sued for peace as soon as they lost a base. But I had prepositioned units for just such a conflict, and nearly managed to grab two before they asked for Blood Truce. In the end, I waited until the CC researched the final technologies and built the Voice of Planet, and then, with my dozens of Supply Crawlers, I sped up the Ascent to Transcendence. My final score was only about 252% compared to ~290% with the Nautilus Pirates. Possibly the game assigned more points for technological progress and so forth.

Today is supposed to crack 100 degrees Fahrenheit. I could go out; or I could stay in and play the Cybernetic Consciousness. They seem a fun faction to play, zipping around in grav ships while other factions are using primitive chaos guns.

(a little later)

I did it. I started a third playthrough of Alpha Centauri. My Cybernetic Consciousness is all by itself on a large continent, so this should be a relatively straightforward playthrough. I'm surrounded by the naval bases of the Nautilus Pirates, but they'll find it hard to start a land war, just as I would find it hard to start a sea battle. Unmolested by

aggressive factions, I can cook up research faster than the other factions and grab secret projects ahead of the rest.

(a little later)

Spoke too soon. Although I control an entire continent by myself, I'm not quite generating the research output the Free Drones are, and they're starting to pick up the Secret Projects. This, and they still bully me for energy-cash. Unfortunately, the game also developed a glitch and I have to see what save file works. Pain in the ass.

Because it's getting later in the day, the heat has just partly broken, and I'm off to a cool tub of water. Just getting around and moving is healthy, as is leading some scavenging missions.

(after the soak)

I booted up Alpha Centauri again, but the glitch occurs even with a back-up save file. So it's time to give up the little adventure with the Consciousness. What a shame. I was looking forward to the showdown with the Drones.

3 August 2027

Fired up A.C. again, this time using a save file from a couple years ago. I didn't built Supply Crawlers like crazy, and instead had most of my bases stockpiling energy. But the game lasted only a few more turns before my entire empire was wiped out in some kind of strange bug.

I don't know what to think. The game is troublesome. I might think about restarting, because I am interested in the capabilities of the Cybernetic Consciousness--it's just that I'm wary of investing tens of hours into a game that develops significant mid-game wipe outs.

4 August 2027

I restarted as the CC, but bad initial landing placement put me swiftly at the disposal of the Usurpers. My empire remained feeble. Then I loaded up a game using the huge map of Planet, this time with my favored Pirates, and I'm thriving. Still wary of the bugs in the game, because who will fix them, but I can't have too many complaints about a game written in 1999--in other words, 28 years ago.

Now I'm off to scavenge in the city. Will cut my hair, and look for clothes that fits me. Compound survivors' morale remains steady. Nothing much to report vis-a-vis the confrontation with the zombies shambling around.

(a little later that day)

Visited the dentist. Guess I'm masochistic--twenty minutes of pain and a mouth that bleeds. I will have to improve my brushing to avoid gum disease. I got my hair cut, and scavenged a pleasant blue shirt out in zombie-land. One should look nice, that is a principle of leadership.

In Alpha Centauri, my faction rises but not as fast as the Drones, who have a huge continent to themselves, or Datajack Roze, who leads the game. I have a huge armada of foil supply crawlers. This means I can quickly build a Secret Project once I get the necessary technology. But it takes 11 turns for my researchers to find a tech, and the other factions have an edge on me. All the game bonuses given to A.I. factions keeps the game tough. I'm thinking at the back of my mind that I only wish there to be no glitches in this runthrough. But I'll have to accept whatever happens, come what may.

Day remains hot. Survivors rest and/or scavenge the relatively simple Security-type buildings for advanced weaponry.

(a little later)

My faction in A.C. is falling behind technologically. I think the bonuses given to the A.I. factions in Transcend mode are strong. It makes for a mid-game where you're number 3 or 4 in the rankings--and it means every unit, battle, and decision has a consequence throughout the entire game play.

5 August 2027

Awoke a little early to monitor my survivors' condition. Also played A.C., where the Caretakers are folding before my airpower. More importantly, however, I'm off to the northern reaches of the city to meet a friend. Will update at the end of this day.

(end of the day)

Spent the balance of the day in far northern reaches of Unity City. All is well. Had a good time hanging out with A.P., who sports a nasal ring now. In A.C., I've conquered the shore cities linking together two subcontinental land masses, but have yet to get the offer for a Blood Truce without demands for technology transfer. We'll see what happens after a couple more cities fall.

The day was quite hot. Personally supervised a number of missions in support of infected bounties. And next war round, I'm back in the TNR winners' club for a fuel bonus. Have also received word that some of my writings have been downloaded more than usual last few days. Is something starting?

6 August 2027

A few more cities fall, and the Caretakers under Lular H'minee sue for peace. I've taken as much of their territory as I care to digest at the moment, and meanwhile, I can return my focus on building up bases with appropriate technologies unlocking the base facilities that will give an edge. Also managed to get the Manifold Caretakers to sign Blood Truce with the Cybernetic Consciousness, so the war for them is over, at least for now. My Chaos-gun Drop units never saw battle. That's fine with me--wars are expensive. I only continue to worry that the game will crash under the size of so many units.

Had a fair day at the Science City, the first after two weeks of summer break. It went slowly, but I went to the bank, I guarded the front desk, I participated in cleaning. All in all six hours or so a day isn't really a hardship by pre-fall standards. It's only that in the evenings I have to direct my survivors to fight and scavenge in a huge uncaring city populated by shambling zombies. Why do they walk in that strange way anyway...

Dem60, the rainmaker whose raiding prowess leads alliances to the top switched back to the Hustlers' alliance. How awkward. Now I have to try to finesse my way to their group, since they will raid more than TNR. Also busy taking care of infected bounties and making sure I have the resources to complete war tasks when the next round of battle opens in 12 hours' time. Metal, cloth, food, and ammo: these will all have to be donated in large amounts to complete the alliance tasks that provide for survivor performance bonuses. That's the name of the game called life, or would it be, after life since we live in the age of the dead. I dunno. I didn't make the rules, they happened to me.

I traded two grade 5 unique upgrade tokens for a pair of Replica Wasteland Wings at my main compound. TheWhopperTinger, who I traded with, practically made a speech about the whole deal. But, in the end, we sealed the deal and went our separate ways. TNR has no raiders the next round, and I'll not be getting any fuel bonuses for the war. Oh well, at least the alliance is credit rich and can afford survivor performance bonuses for the foreseeable future.

Played a little more A.C. Stole research files on Fusion Power and Orbital Spaceflight from the Usurpers. I'm still way behind Datajack Roze in research, however. That, plus her large share of a continent makes her the number ranked faction at present. Sooner or later, also, she'll probably launch an attack on me. So I have attack jets stationed around my empire, and can activate these units when the time comes... if the time comes. There are so many variables, and it's just as possible the Free Drones under Domai will overtake Roze.

7 August 2027 (early morning)

The war round has begun. Was able to contact Dem60 who says he switched alliances because TNR is boring. Fair enough. But now I'm stuck in an alliance without raiders, and have to just watch as fuel bonuses get wasted.

(evening)

The Planet Cult has surprise attacked me. Then, in the same game turn, my Pact Sister Prime Function Aki-Zeta has asked me to join in her war against the Free Drones. So I'm simultaneously at war with three factions including the Usurpers, whose air force picked apart my Supply Crawler operations on a northern island. I'm going to have to mobilize all my dispersed forces, and force the Cult to a Truce before I take on the much greater

difficulty of doing the same against the more technologically (compared to me) Free Drones and/or the Usurpers. War on all sides. My Shard Needlejets will be pressed to the limits.

(a little while later)

I did it. I knocked out Planet Cult from one of their cities, one with a Secret Project to boot, and they sued for peace. Now it's time to concentrate on the Free Drones.

(real life, not the game)

After finishing this little interlude, I led a mission to a military base in the city and scavenged lots of ammo for my junior compound.

8 August 2027

In Alpha Centauri, I took over the Drones' foothold on my main continent, and then they sued for peace. After further discussion, they also reached peace and even a trade friendship with the Cybernetic Consciousness.

(later that day)

The peace didn't last very long. The Cult has declared Vendetta against me, and then the Drones did as well. Planet is full of war. I think the A.I. realized I was protecting the Consciousness's cities so that explains the Cult, but only, perhaps, a sophisticated A.I. realized it was a good time for the Drones to jump in. It's going to be a handful to manage the two factions, partly because the Cult is now mostly their cities in the freshwater sea, a large lake on Planet and also the Drones are far away across a large ocean themselves. I don't know how long the war will last, or what the outcome will be. Probably an extended stalemate while we try to climb the technology tree faster than the other.

In day-to-day scavenging my compounds are busy in the alliance task wars. It feels somewhat repetitive to lead the missions personally, but you get better results leading by yourself than leaving it to the survivors' own disposition. I keep my recycler busy churning through heavy fabric to eventually contribute to the alliance. I also keep an eye out for good weaponry to pick up, but that's always a rare and welcome event.

At Science City today I was mostly bored and took up my post with a realization only of its necessity. Next week the group is going somewhere, but I got out because of the heatwave.

(Actually, after closer inspection of the documents, it's next month rather than next week. But same difference.)

(slightly later)

Chatted with fellow human survivors on the radio nets. Gave a newbie 300 rounds of ammunition in exchange for 39 treated wood and a rare gear crafting kit. With close out the day with some survivor-led missions to the fringes of city territory, and wake up early to meet the night-crawlers returning from their missions.

Don't really feel like playing A.C. Too or rather two many wars at the same time. Also have reached a plateau in Fallen London. Everything is just a grind.

9 August 2027

Woke up and played Alpha Centauri. Overcame all but one of the Planetary Cult's bases, and they surrendered. Otherwise, only busy taking care of some tasks. Today's the half day of the week at Science City, so I'll return early and guide both compounds to success in their missions.

Have some jock itch, for which I'm using a spray.

(later that day)

Datajack Roze attacked. (!) She's close by so this is going to be a bloody war. She already used a probe team to capture one of my cities. But I can't switch of my society orientation towards Knowledge because it powers my technology. All I can do is make sure each of my bases/cities are well covered with my own probe teams.

I have air defense traveling the way to the front. Once I get a city to fall, another one will follow, like dominoes. In the end, I'll have conquered her continent and will be the dominant faction of the game. But it's going to be a while, and there's plenty of micromanagement along the way.

In the real world, I've led my teams to scavenge and collect infected bounties. Ideally a mission includes (1) infected bounty, (2) survivor request, (3) your own experience gained from scavenging, and (4) your alliance task requirements. One mission should ideally fulfill four goals, and you're humming nicely along without real danger to you in zombieland. But sometimes the management is tiresome and you just lead your troops to the scavenge site and then just let them shoot at will.

(and a little later...)

I took one of Roze's cities, but she still demands energy currency for an armistice. We shall see what happens in following turns as the cities fall. But in the meantime, I've switched my social values to Power rather than Knowledge, and instituted Thought Control as future society goal. I'm going to power myself through this war against a powerful foe, even while remaining officially at war with the #2 power, Domai, and the Conquerors under Marr.

(a few more turns)

One of the battleground cities changed hands twice, and I'm aggressively hunting down Datajack forces in the Garland Crater. The war will be long, but I have a large air force, and more drop troops coming in to theater. I'm confident of doing well, but it will still take plenty of time and energy.

10 August 2027

Heavy fighting in the Garland Crater continues, with the Data Angels putting up a fierce resistance. I have to accept losses in order to pry each city from the Data Angels' control, and they are beginning to field air units as well, including tactical air-to-air fighter jets. When all this is over, however, I'll be firmly entrenched in two continents and easily the foremost faction. It's good, tight, well-written A.I. that provides a satisfying early, mid, and late game.

(later this day)

I went to Science City this morning, and checked in with my fellow survivors at both compounds in the afternoon. I'm going to try to find a number of special titles at the libraries in Unity City, works which I have a special connection to or otherwise know (or knew) the author. But for the immediate now, I'm looking to acquire unique weapons and gear in the dead zone, and this takes time and effort.

(late in the evening)

I've prised Garland Crater from Data Angels' control, and my forces, accompanied by probe teams, are ready to strike out to the northwest, the heart of the D.A. empire. It's bloody fighting all the way, and the enemy gives no quarter. They have at least a trio of tactical air-to-air jets, and plenty of ground troops. Meanwhile, heavy sunspot activity prevents communication, but from the sounds of their earlier encounters, they would simply continue to ask for energy credits in return for a ceasefire. I'm not considering that option: I want this war to end with the surrender of all D.A. forces, with Sinder Roze reporting directly to me.

11 August 2027

Woke up early to play Alpha Centauri, leading my forces deeper into Datajack territory. I've pushed northwest from Garland Crater leaving the periphery of bases untouched. I've even launched an amphibious assault from the far north, but that will probably be lost to a probe team since I failed to bring along my own probes. In any case, the homeland of the Datajacks is being disassembled. They put up a tough resistance with

multiple units in each city, and for the moment, my advance has to halt as I figure out how to produce more land/infantry units to accompany my air force.

(later the same day)

Applet Way, a major Datajack city, fell under infantry assault. Making mag tubes is a two-way sword: it allows you to move units freely around your territory, but once invaded, it speeds up how quickly enemy infantry can get close to your bases. Now all that remains is to take the Datajack headquarters, and then I'll have every city of theirs I want. Hopefully they'll surrender, but if not, I may have to eviscerate more of their empire, and then my dominance in the game will be truly complete.

(a little later)

It happened! I conquered the Datajack headquarters, and with communications restored after sunspot activity had cut off all transmissions, we had a final conversation where Roze tried to go for a ceasefire or even pay me for the same. In the end, she was stuck in the corner, and she saved herself only by submitting to me. With a number of bases, she isn't the weakest faction member, but she is a shell of what used to be a powerful empire.

Guardian H'minee of the Caretakers declared Vendetta on me after demanding an advanced technology (Orbital Spaceflight). So I'm at war with Domai, Marr, and H'minee, but they're all sort of far away. I'm even contemplating changing my societal values to Knowledge, but that will only gain me one turn quicker in research and I'm doing quite well with massive policing, Telepathic Matrix or not.

The game turns into defense mode now, with myself trying to protect far-flung reaches of my empire, while climbing the tech tree to Transcendence.

I have a cup of coffee, and ponder the role of entertainment in a post-apocalyptic world. Time to go see the survivors off on their missions. Infected bounties begin soon. And I'm curious what the radio nets are saying even when we're not trading per se.

(and towards the evening)

I soaked in a tub of cold water to beat the heat. Normal day-to-day business of scavenging combined with chit-chat on the radio to hear what is what. In the A.C. game, I've switched to defensive mode and am stockpiling supply gravships. Soon the tech tree will be complete, and I'll be first to ascend to Transcendence.

12 August 2027

Woke up early again, both to lead scavenging missions and to play a few rounds of Alpha Centauri. I beat it. As I predicted, after expanding through the Datajack's territory, I was largely in control of two continents and my research sped through the tree at a fast clip. In the end, I had just about enough Gravship Supply Crawlers to build the Ascent to Transcendence, and I won the game with a final rating of about 304%. Even the Free Drones' territory was under attack by my gravship fleet towards the end, and not even the last ditch efforts of the other faction A.I.s could stop me from winning the game. So now I'm satisfied, after 110 hours of play (including the first playthrough). I'll turn my attention back to juggling tasks in zombieland and perhaps reading a copy of Ernest Cline's Armada I scavenged from a decrepit bookstore.

I spent quite a few hours immersed in this game. I'm not entirely sure what will catch my attention now, but there are always unfinished tasks around. I'd also like to go soak again in a tub of cool water to deal with the heat that feels like a hundred degrees Fahrenheit.

(a little later)

The tub worked. It made enduring the heat a lot easier. But now I'm left with a sense of anomie, having immersed myself in a computer game for 100+ hours, I now have to face reality all over again. I think, on some level, if I seek to entertain, I am myself entertained. To that end, I create this diary for selfish reasons, to receive some sort of rapport with the unknown readers, but ultimately to satisfy myself. In fact, I'm almost tempted to start one more round of Alpha Centauri to write it up in novelistic form. But another voice in my head says, enough! I've spent quite a few hours of my time immersed in the 24th century. Time to seek out other forms of entertainment.

(evening before I sleep)

I scavenged two Max Hastings books. This will help fill the hours today and tomorrow.

13 August 2027

The day is filled with a sort of emptiness now that I've ceased playing Alpha Centauri. The simulation is immersive: that of a twenty-fourth century expedition leader who runs cities and military bases on a faraway alien planet. The hot temperatures keep the zombies quiescent, yet there's no rest there, either, as infected bonuses must be met, and the next war round begins tomorrow early morning.

I don't have any ready or easy answers for this thing called anomie. Whether you have it as some East Coast disaffected suburban youth or the California variant in Ca. sunshine, there's no telling where things are going except probably they won't end up in a castle somewhere. Life just gets harder and harder, and youth departs from you one day at a time. There's a sense of futility to life, and only the easy hedonistic excesses of 21st century consumer culture are the only anodyne to that blankness.

14 August 2027

The war round has begun, and the survivors at my senior compound have alliance-based boosts, allowing effortless access across Unity City. Meanwhile, we continue to smolder in the heat, and I listlessly scavenge a few DVDs, a bag of chips, and dinner tonight. Tomorrow Science City is on break, and I will be traveling the day after. Perhaps something will occur: call it a feeling.

I'm avoiding Alpha Centauri. Too immersive and addictive. Probably soon I will fall prey to its charms again, but for another day or two I can take a break. I'm interested in playing it with all the aggressive/militant factions and plenty of native animal life. Would be an interesting game, with all the advantages of the Nautilus Pirates.

Chatted on the radio nets this evening, and ignored the Max Hastings book I scavenged earlier. Made a trade of some old supply cache for 48 Treated Wood. Soon it will be time to send out the survivors at my junior compound. Looking for food and water, ammo and wood, and plenty of them. Brings back memories of walking the streets of Shibuya

not knowing what the next moment will bring. Also plan to watch a DVD tomorrow morning in between all the work. Then will go south, a direction I don't usually travel to.

15 August 2027

My premonition proved correct. Had a brief encounter with a lone survivor deep in the south, with green eyes and brown hair wearing a green army jacket. There was something furtive in our coupling--but she left afterwards without a backwards glance, and that is the nature of things in the post-apocalyptic world. I regained contact with my team shortly thereafter and oversaw the foraging of massive amounts of supplies. We lead the league tables in task completion for our alliance tasks, and all this without any special vehicle or fuel expenditure.

16 August 2027

Woke up early to make a far trip to the north part of the city. Picked up unique gear, and read *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945* by Max Hastings. I'll put up a formal review on datalinks tomorrow at Science City. Suffice to say now that it was a work of genius. Hastings writes sentences well, then they make up good paragraphs, which turn into good pages, and chapters, and finally a tightly-written book. Found myself captivated.

17 August 2027

Woke up early and have been sleeping less last few days. Sent survivors on scavenging missions and continue to lead the league tables. Unsure what the next few weeks will bring: probably more of the insufferable heat.

18 August 2027

Heat actually broke yesterday, reaching only 92 degrees Fahrenheit, which by comparison to recent weather felt practically cool. It is mega bonus round for the

alliances, and survivor return times from missions is a minimal 35 minutes. This means the Infected Bonuses are carried out with relative ease.

Woke up early today to do some compound cleaning and support work. Felt very little desire to return to Alpha Centauri, where using a randomly generated maps makes for a less interesting series of alliances/battles. May restart with the Map of Planet.

Did some scavenging runs. Bonus round=fast turnaround.

19 August 2027

I wake up, poised before the demands of my survivors and that odd force called sexuality pulling me south to find again the green-eyed girl. Am I up early because of dietary changes or because my subconscious drives me death-like towards sexual release. I don't know. A sense of unease fills me, just as a feeling of sickness has plagued me for the last few days. I'm ready for cheap entertainment, scavenged DVDs, maybe that final round of Alpha Centauri. Meanwhile, HURK awaits and there has been no progress on the rumored reconquest of Unity City by HURK forces. I read Max Hastings' Catastrophe 1914: Europe Goes to War. What a find.

23 August 2027

Minimally completed alliance requirements or rather missed by a bit for TNR, and still in the middle of resource collections at my junior compound. Feeling of sickness has passed, but a storm (real, not metaphorical) is upon us the size of a hurricane. High winds predicted for tomorrow.

24 August 2027

The supposed hurricane did not arrive. Rather, just some wet weather and 10mph winds, i.e. something short of a big storm. It did get a bit cooler, but we're not out of the woods yet. Still to come, more days of summer.

Used datalinks to research new books to read. Also: I watched Mission Impossible: Fallout, the sixth installment of that franchise. A good flick.

25 August 2027

Worked on a "bug-out" location, i.e. a safe place to retreat to should things head south. So, spent the morning hammering and sawing away, had boiled beef for lunch, and spent the balance of the day on tasking and reading Max Hastings. Chatted on the radio a bit, as well; fellow bibliophiles offering comment and/or appreciation on my broadcasts.

26 August 2027

Heat did break, down to 68 degrees right now at the end of the day. Spent the morning at the bug-out compound, tasked the rest of the day, and rested a lot. Got recommendations for various books from datalinks and the radio net. Rain fell, and I searched for ways to escape reality.

27 August 2027

Light rain and cool temperatures. Went all the way to the northern perimeter of the city, accompanied by a Science City officer. There, we scavenged meds, and I started reading "Angel Fall" by Susan Ee. Gripping.

More chit-chat on the radio net and Datalinks.

28 August 2027

An uneventful day. Went to Science City; manned the gates, got caught in a heavy downpour, and played around with Fallen London at spare moments. Boring hours gave

way to the joy of survival deep in Unity City. Now I'm off to soak again, but I imagine it won't be for too long; temperatures are too low.

29 August 2027

My brother has sent word he is arriving in Unity City today. It's been months since I've seen him. Other than that, there is nothing special about the day. Any feelings of illness have passed; no nausea, no lightheadedness. I scavenged some especially well-kept canned food today and enjoyed a delicious dinner. By comparison, the food Science City has is not especially good.

31 August 2027

My brother has arrived. As usual, full of talk about young females. I carried out tasking, played some more Fallen London, and scavenged books for later reading.

1 September 2027

September has arrived! It's warm but not hot, and I continue to use a pool of cool water as a way to ice down myself. My senior compound has entered raider mode, and earned 6 points for completing a mission--all that's necessary to qualify for the bonus fuel for placing 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in the alliance wars.

I finished Ray Hecht's *This Modern Love*.

2 September 2027

Drowsed myself through the morning. Added to Datalinks regarding Hecht's novel.

3 September 2027

A day of rest. Rain fell.

4 September 2027

Skipped a day at Science City to celebrate the birthday of one of my compound-mates. We went to the north of the city and scavenged a delicious feast. Returned home to find a survivor request for more metal.

Paid in fuel for the books 2 and 3 of Susan Ee's Penryn & the End of Days series.

5 September 2027

Sunny and warm but not unbearably hot. Fulfilled the survivors' request for metal, and completed, in large part, the alliance tasks. The senior compound may be in position to grab 200 fuel for coming in third place during this round of the alliance wars.

Rereading Angelfall before I dive into its sequels.

Paid more fuel for Age of Wonders and its sequel.

6 September 2027

Spent overtime at the Science City as some sort of VIP delegation arrived and were greeted with drinks and snacks. Weather warm, but not insufferably hot.

7 September 2027

Felt a little ill yesterday, and slept early. Completed tasks, and will be switching back to human-to-human stance shortly. Ate a delicious chicken and rice dish I scavenged up, and will look for similar tomorrow. (Had a canned spaghetti and meatballs today.)

8 September 2027

Completed tasking work for the alliances and then went for the supply of chicken meat in that one niche location near the air force base. Tasty. Then I played Age of Wonders and rested. Reading World After, the sequel to Angelfall. Will probably enter my opinion on Datalinks.

9 September 2027

Progressed a bit in the Age of Wonders (AoW) campaign, reaching the third scenario.

11 September 2027

Busy with tasking and Age of Wonders. Autumnal temperatures.

12 September 2027

Tasking, hosted a delegation at the Science City, had cream pasta for dinner.

13 September 2027

Scavenged up a Thai meal for my brother and me to share; spent the morning at Science City; played Age of Wonders following the Lizardman route.

Two days ago, of course, was the anniversary.

15 September 2027

Had a lunch with a cousin and brother in the north of the city. Finished World After (by Susan Ee) and put up a review on Datalinks. More AoW. More bathing.

16 September 2027

AoW, bathing, going on scavenging missions to find good quality goods.

17 September 2027

Had an abdominal reaction to some UHT milk we've been sourcing. AoW. Cool temperatures.

21 September 2027

Feeling better now that I've stopped drinking that UHT milk. More AoW. Rainy.

22 September 2027

AoW and then Aow 2. Spent the morning at Science City observing local festivities.

24 September 2027

Cool weather. Kept at tasking, played a little AoW 2, currently planning on going for a soak.

25 September 2027

Mildly interested in AoW 2, which gives way to a lunch with brother, compound mates.

26 September 2027

Cool temperatures; still soaked. Abandoned AoW 2 for now due to difficulty of game. Kept busy at tasking.

Brother tends to repeat his anecdotes.

27 September 2027

Went to the Science City in the morning; tasked the afternoon. Have a small sore on my left index finger's knuckle. Returned to AoW 2 for lack of anything else to do.

28 September 2027

Spent the day at Science City, then more AoW 2.

29 September 2027

AoW 2. Soaking in the tub. A warmish day.

30 September 2027

Cool day. AoW 2, the Serpent River mission. Have generously contributed to all tasks, senior and junior compound.

1 October 2027

The sore on the knuckle is bigger, about the size of a dime. Other than this, I keep busy in scavenging and going to the Science City.

2 October 2027

Coolish day. The medic at my compound says he needs to consult on the blister. In the meantime, I continued scavenging.

3 October 2027

In the midst of a war round, I scavenge and go on missions to target specific zones of the city that are overrun by zombies. The medic we consulted says my blister is a fungal infection, and was able to come up with tubes of terbinafine from before the fall. That and terbinafine pills complete the recommended treatment, and I am left wondering if I'm going to have odd dreams or whatever, as the side effects are listed on Datalinks. We'll see.

Brother spent a few hours at compound, more repetitive anecdotes.

6 October 2027

Was accidentally kicked from my secondary compound's alliance, and the error was fixed, but not in time to save my participation in this round's battle. Weather has been rainy, and I abide my time although the terbinafine pills blur my near-sighted vision. I also feel the pull of the warm tub of water, despite the sanitary concerns involved. (It's possible the ringworm came from the tub.)

Also had to deal with constipation occurring as a result of the pills. Tant pis.

8 October 2027

Resolved to enter the fray at my senior compound. No more White Flag of pacifism. But in other news, my vision is still blurred from the terbinafine. I'll ask a medic if we can cut out the oral dosage and remain with the topical ointment.

15 October 2027

Been busy as all hell. Finished more than 200 scavenging raids in one week in order to gain fuel supplies for the alliance and a bonus scavenged cargo box for myself. Turned out to only include fuel, so after the mileage put on our vehicle, I did come out ahead, although not completely so.

My alliance (for the senior compound) rewarded my tasking efforts and total war accomplishments by promoting me to the next higher rank. I can now send messages to the entire alliance.

16 October 2027

(continuing...)

I also saw a dentist. It was addictive being so busy 100% of the day. Immersed in the world of tasking for my group, time flew by and I forgot, for a moment, about my reduced circumstances in an unfriendly world. Other than this, I kept busy as much as possible and prepared some paperwork for Science City and other accrediting agencies.

Who would have thought: paperwork in the post-apocalypse?

21 October 2027

Been busy with tasking. My promotion to "Legatus" in the New World Republic clan instills in me a sense of obligation. So I spend time searching every nook and cranny for goods that count towards the alliance war point total.

1 November 2027

Been too busy to update. Heavy tasking, and the sun sets early. Colder weather, and I soak in the tub. Have some fungal infections on the hand and corner of my lips.

3 November 2027

Taking care of alliance tasks takes up much of my time. I am also given a brief respite from my brother, as he occupies himself with his own business.

4 November 2027

The angular cheilitis continues, my primary concern of the days and ways. I occupy myself with tasking and eat some food at a neighboring compound. (Wings; the ribs are available too much later for me to stick around.)

Weather unseasonably warmish.

How do I fill these hours?

7 November 2027

One week out of every four: a mega week, when the alliances strive for top control over the zombie population. I am busy with tasking, and soaking, and finding a tube of hydrocortisone ointment for the rash on my lips.

11 November 2027

The mega week draws to a close, and we end up second from the top in the alliance tables. Meanwhile, a feeling of ennui fills me, a sense of anomie. What do I do to fill the light of days.

(a little later the same day)

Drink coffee of course. And record here that my brother departed yesterday for his home to the east.

The only solution to boredom is to try to alleviate that of others. So I record these notes, this Nov. 11th of the 2027th year of Christ, shortly after All Hallow's Eve, and shortly before winter's bite will arrive. Breathing the same air as you do, seeing with my own eyes the same sunsets, I occupy myself with attempting to help out the group, and the individual becomes submerged into the Flow, becoming one with work, and finding one's ikigai.

13 November 2027

How slowly the hours pass by at the Science City, staring as I do out the window at the sunshine outside. Some nimble cats play on the street, and are fed some kittles and milk by the SC staff. I watch the advance of the day somewhat overcome by the blithe boredom of it all. Paint the walls of my prison: I'm not going anywhere, and really fast.

14 November 2027

The lips continue to heal, as I expend the tube of ointment. I don't know if the problem will be chronic, or if once healed, the situation is over. I also confess to losing things lately--a drug related memory loss problem, or just an ill coincidence ? Time will tell.

15 November 2027

The compound leader Chris Hitchens of Shadowplay keeps raiding my compound. Most recently, he waited until my chatter on the radio nets died down before using this knowledge to time his attack (I would obviously go off the radio nets after striking out to a distant destination). So, I put a bounty on his head, and god knows where the rivalry will go.

17 November 2027

Another attack from C.H. I am going to have to consult with senior members of my alliance. Among other things, he uses high quality HURK armor in his raids. A matter of luck determines how well they are made, and his is at 70% projectile resistance and a good health bonus.

(later the same day)

TheWhopperTinger, from a third party alliance, collected the bounty on C.H. How satisfying. We'll see how things go from here.

18 November 2027

C.H. has enlisted the help of his alliance mate, Crud, and I was raided while gone on one of my scavenging missions. This expands the future cost to me, as I'll have to throw up 10 fuel as a bounty for two possible people, but the actual cost isn't all that much. One can accidentally order one's survivors to speed back from a mission using a lot of fuel, and that costs 15 or more units.

Weather a bit chilly, but not outright cold yet. Minded my own business much of the day, learned that Kingdoms CCG is going down, and ate well. Tomorrow I go north to the heart of the city.

22 November 2027

White flagged (not-participating in raids, defense or offense). I look around for things to eat, and receive some advice that I might consider going to Science City only on a part-time basis. Is this the first sign of change? And what to do with whispers on the datalinks that my property (intellectual) will be seized.

24 November 2027

A dead pigeon? What sign does this signify? Also: the first frost, winter is arriving. It will be cold from here on out.

Sent birthday wishes to Clyde Yent. Promoted to Praetor at my senior alliance. Now I can invite others to join.

25 November 2027

I find myself adrift in an indescribable feeling: the notion that something is going to happen, and like the pigeon, I'll be blindsided. It makes me want to be cautious, to curl up in a ball under the sheets and sleep away the day. But at the same time, there's something to be said for not reading too much into things, dead bird or not. Not even if the dead bird is followed not a few hours later with the sight of a dead mouse by the side of the road.

I scavenged Max Hastings' Vietnam and Haruki Murakami's Killing Commendatore. These are fall backs, if I'm laid up for whatever reason. Perhaps the snow will fall and isolate us from one another. Or maybe on the advice of others, I will leave my compound and join up as a mere survivor with another one, larger and richer in resources. These are all possibilities in a seemingly infinite world of choices.

2 December 2027

Cold weather moves in. I have an appointment to radio chat with the new compound. In the meantime, I drink coffee, finish reading Killing Commendatore, and carry out alliance tasks. For the first time, ventured into a high activity zone, full of extra strong zombies. Found some good material.

(later that day)

Took a soaking in the tub, now hot for cold weather. I don't venture into the cold tub. I think instead, who reads this? Are they imprisoned, metaphorically? Circumstances entrap one...

(before I sleep)

A void is inside me, fulfilled only by cheap entertainments and "immersive" works. I don't know which direction to take, only that I am coasting along, taking the path of least resistance. Things will come to a head, however. An offer will or will not be made, and my entanglement with Science City will either intensify or diminish.

3 December 2027

Science city, preparing foodstuffs, soak in the tub. Preparing for mega-round coming up starting tomorrow.

6 December 2027

Science City is against my joining a compound, one that is too far north for me to visit SC regularly. But there are voices calling out for a challenge of true proportions, set against the very heart of the city and all the fresh pickings available in that more built-up area. I don't know how this situation will resolve itself.

Bonus round keeps me busy. I can hit maybe the first reward level on my senior compound by regular runs to small sized locales.

8 December 2027

Spent the day scavenging delicious foodstuffs, canned and seal-wrapped goodies. Then went tasking in the afternoon--as predicted, will reach the first level of reward fuel for total area scavenged.

9 December 2027

The cold weather continues--but I'm equipped with a large down coat. Went south to scavenge a jacket as per the Science City's request for the 14th. I soaked; I chatted on the radio nets; I cleaned my clothes; I sent a message to the new compound opportunity.

10 December 2027

Going to travel to the north of the city to find a specialized medic for one of my compound mates. Luckily, I have a copy of Max Hastings' Vietnam to bide away the hours. Cold with a light frost on the ground.

11 December 2027

Went up north, accompanying my companion to her meeting with the medic. Vietnam book was a bit of a disappointment--so much on politics, so little on actual battle. Not Hastings' best. But, it will do to pass away the hours.

Missed a birthday celebration at Science City.

12 December 2027

Went with the Science City to a conference/meeting an hour and then some east of Unity City. Understood almost none of it, and we did not chow down on delicious food afterwards.

14 December 2027

Another incomprehensible conference. Something Science City dreamt up as "end of the year seminar" or whatnot. No word yet from the potential opportunity to join a large survivor complex.

16 December 2027

Rumor on the radio nets: the city is going to be leveled in 2030. I have no way to confirm or deny such statements. I just scavenge for good food and take things day by day. Scavenging takes up the better part of the day, then I go soak. Tomorrow I'll get up early to go north in the morning.

(later that day)

It is sometimes tiresome to lead scavenging missions. I take up the challenge of a high activity zone and have nothing to show for it. Meanwhile, the radio nets are chattering with sales and purchases.

17 December 2027

I went solo, north of the city. Then I took a meandering route back south, scavenging tasty tuna and salmon in cans. I miss fish eggs and fatty tuna; some things just aren't available in a post-apocalyptic world.

Changed my alliance at my senior compound to FKU. Gearing up for a battle in two weeks, when Science City is out. That being the case, I'll have plenty of time to run missions deep across the city.

Cold, frost on the ground.

20 December 2027

Miscommunication at my senior compound's alliance means I'm demoted, to Staff Sergeant-level from previous Captain-ship. I don't really mind. I'm thinking about two weeks off from Science City, which gives me all the more time to take my survivors on a thorough scavenging of the city.

Received a friendly message through the radio nets from a survivor who writes. I should support him, I suppose. Still nothing from the previous offer to join up at a different compound.

22 December 2027

Two full weeks of vacation from the Science City starts today. I'm going to go all out in scavenging, and with the combination of the mega round of warfare, there will be gallons of (zombie) blood. It remains to be seen what effect this will have with the rank in my alliance.

Not sure what to do with my compositions and the radio nets. Maybe I should contact RH.

(later this day)

Tasking all day long, to coolish weather. Zombie activity up surrounding the holiday season. Santa's explode in the face, but it's more a fright than truly dangerous. Meanwhile, the senior alliance politics.

In the downtime between missions, I still find myself bored. I'm not going to make the 600-war point marker to receive war bonuses. But I can still add points to the alliance total. And my "protege" Sasaki is just about exceeding me in point output.

23 December 2027

Spent the day scavenging, and carrying out the infected kill bonuses. I have it all mathematically arranged out--how much firepower I need to bring to what zone of Unity City. Have begun trying my hand at the High Activity Zones as well.

Sent out a greeting to RH over the wires. No word from the large compound seeking new members. But received wedding invitations from a friend of mine, AP. This should add variety to my days and ways.

My recruit, Sasaki, has been promoted to my level. This is the power of going after human survivors rather than sticking to purely zombie-hunting. I might be seduced along these lines...it will be a major change.

24 December 2027

It's Z-mas eve. And the zombies are festooned with Zanta Claus outfits. I am in the holiday mood as well, connecting with RH and shortly to accept the invitation to AP's wedding. How can anybody go wrong?

I have the thought that I might enlarge the circle of my acquaintances to 1000. Mathematically it's of course possible. But in terms of how close you are, that number can't really exceed 360. Human brain is just wired that way.

Nothing else to record other than the ennui that exists between missions. Merry Z-mas, everybody!

25 December 2027

Merry Z-mas! I raided a compound for the first time today. Actually, I went after three different targets, losing the first battle, winning the second, and then through some sort of confusion on orders, abandoned the third. But, a milestone has been reached. I have crossed the line and my innocence of survivorship has been forever breached.

I can't say I enjoy it. It is merely what it is. But future targets will be waved in front of me, and I will partake so much as I choose. A week of such activity combined with a little scavenging on the side will make these two weeks memorable.

27 December 2027

I am achieving good statistics, winning so far 9 out of 10 battles against enemy compounds. And I defended my compound once out of three times for further war points in the HERK-controlled battle royale. We're all just playing HERK's game. But that doesn't change the fact that my hand trembles with fear and anxiety as I issue orders with bullets flying. Human enemies are just far scarier than mindless zombie scum.

28 December 2027

Attacking human survivors has now spread to my junior compound as well. I picked up 41 war points (HERK established) and ran two successful missions. (A raid is an attack on a human compound; a mission is scavenging some building deep in Unity City.) But while my survivors were gone, some survivor named Cotonhusung or something attacked and trashed my compound. This is the first time this has happened to me, so I'm annoyed as heck. But all the damage can be repaired with wood, metal, and cloth, so I recycle that from Hardened Metal and Heavy Cloth. What ever motivated this behavior to deliberately provoke a fellow survivor? Who knows? Who writes the scribbles on bathroom stall walls?

(later this day)

It's quite cold. Bitter weather will be with us for the next couple weeks, so perhaps the vacation from Science City is worthwhile. I soak in the hot tub of water; I search for canned salmon to eat, a delicious treat. Freedom means getting to go around where you want and how long as you want. A precious quality when it disappears.

29 December 2027

Bitter cold weather, and I spent the day raiding. A whole new vista opens before me, one of internecine warfare in a dead city. Forget the zombies, who mindlessly attack in hordes or wound but rarely kill. It's a matter of every human for him or herself, and those with the take-no-prisoners mentality thrive in this universe.

I ate Mexican food today with a beer. Then I had instant noodles for dinner. The expiration date on so much of the food is long passed, but there's nothing that can be done about this. We're lucky to be able to eat.

30 December 2027

Continued raiding and counter-raiding (where the targeted compound attacks you back). In cold weather, I utilize long-distance G28 designated marksman rifles to pick off human defenders one by one. My hand shakes from fear but I wear a mask of cool self-control. I defeat the famous Lv_Bunny, worth 80+ war points, but then forget to take the flag on mdpm, a mere 40 or so, after downing all his survivors.

For lunch I had some beef a compound mate dug up. Then for dinner, a de facto hamburger. Was hoping for more Mexican, but you go with what you have, not with what you want, sometimes.

31 December 2027

Happy New Year's Eve. I ate noodles and Chicken-In-A-Can. Today was a rest day before the once monthly intensification of warfare (even more than a weekly around). This "Mega Boost" is when alliances can have their troops return from scavenging

missions in just 35 minutes. Furthermore, there are bonuses to troop strength and the quality of loot. HURK manages all, sees all: we are the pawns it plays with.

1 January 2028

Happy New Year's! Raiding began, and I ascended through the ranks. My senior compound leads, whereas my junior compound merely does well. Different sections of the city; different levels of activity.

Wandering in the cold, I sought Mexican food and found instead canned chicken meat. I remember a disgusting National Geographic special about mice eating birds alive. But that didn't change my appetite, and I had a beer as well.

Saw another dead bird by the side of the road. A bad omen? I'm not superstitious. Just the daily day. And tomorrow will bring more of the same.

2 January 2028

This New Year's seems to be a time of hope. It will be a good year, I think. I spent the day on raiding and missions, and ended up splitting roughly 50/50 of my total spread on each category (i.e., by HURK's rules, I earned 6 points for a mission, and from 20 to 40 for a raid, but I did more of the former than the latter, so it all balanced out.)

Canned fish and improvised fried chicken for lunch. Years' old improvised pizza for dinner. Busy, and therefore cheerful. Got two messages from the radio nets wishing me well, years passed as though they may have.

3 January 2028

The New Year's feeling continues. I can do as I please, which means I spend half of my time scavenging and half of my time raiding human compounds. It's predatory to live off other human beings--that's why the rewards are so high. But as the availability of scavengeable goods decreases, we are forced to turn on each other, cannibal-style, and fight for the amusement of higher powers.

That's how the 1% operate, anyways.

Cream pasta for lunch; Japanese instant noodles for dinner.

4 January 2028

I've discovered a pack of semi-wild dogs living just around the corner. Feeding them a couple days in a row, I've gained some trust. Then I met two girls who had been doing the same thing. They seem nice. Maybe we'll stay in touch. All the chaos associated in my mental state when the subject of women comes up--that's the thing. But you're either a lover or a fighter baby, and my hands are covered in blood.

Ate Mexican and fish in a can (salmon). Spent the day looking for G28 rifles for my senior compound. Our long rifle situation is so desperate, we're using twenty-year old technology against raiders who wield today's LR's. Also I messed up a couple of times in the steep learning curve that is a raider's life. I don't know what will come of tomorrow, but I do think I'll make the bonus level rewards set by HURK and gain fuel and valuable goods. Need those G28s bad.

5 January 2028

Manna from heaven! MattMather, my alliance senior, asked our friend Yaraw to lend me some LR's. So now I have 2 G28s at bonus 37.5% range, and my defenses have stiffened accordingly. Hopefully I now have enough firepower to take on raiding in the end game.

Played with the dogs again, but no girls. Also sat in the tub of hot water. It gets dark so early in winter, I should treasure the daylight more. But there's only one more day of vacation. Dunno what will happen from here.

6 January 2028

Last day of the vacation from Science City. Tomorrow I have to handle some administrative stuff at HURK. All the wonders of the puppet-masters at play. For some

reason my senior compound doesn't get hit as often as my junior. But I guess that was always to be expected.

In the morning, tense and nervous, I spent 9000 fuel at each of my two compounds to upgrade HURK prototype armor. My defenses are stiffening. They will also be of use in raiding, which is going to occupy more of my time in the future, rather than scavenging. (Raiding is attacking a human compound; scavenging is traveling to a zed-controlled area to seize valuables). At the end of the process, I was left with about 9000 fuel in my senior compound and almost none in my junior. But hopefully the investment will be worth it.

7 January 2028

Jenny, one of the girls I met, reached out through datalinks, and then we established one-to-one radio contact. There is a chaos in women that meets an order in a man's head. I don't know what draws a man to a woman, but the two will never meet. I feel sort of quietly agitated about things, a reflection of reflecting back on this young woman's fashion ambitions. She is an artist, I suppose, although a practical one. I don't know where we are going, but I did send back New Year's messages to my older friends abroad, keeping me connected to the social fabric we call humanity.

Today is a rest day between war rounds. I will wake up tomorrow early to get the jump on my competitors. Also, I have been alerted to the existence of a strong HURK base on Unity Island to the east of the city. Those willing to brave its dangers can gain a unique weapon or gear each day. A strong challenge that may be worth it for good returns.

I feel so uncertain now.

8 January 2028

Science City was so...boring after the vacation of full-time raiding. Yet the hours passed, as they must, and then as soon as I returned to my compound, I was greeted by surprising news, Matt Mather and Fields left the alliance, to be followed by a string of bandwagoners. It appears they no longer wish to raid. I did not see this coming at all, and it's disheartening. But possibly I will be able to keep one toe nail on third place. It all depends.

I used Datalinks to research more about the Unity City raid. A lot of effort to get what sometimes is just unique level 51 bow. But there's no other way to guarantee a unique item in a day's work. We shall see how quickly I come to speed in the matter, although my senior compound with its large inventory of weapons should find it easier than my junior grouping. Yet the junior compound, by virtue of its central location, is already more kitted out for raiding than my senior one, by some measures.

9 January 2028

I accompanied a member of my compound to the north of the city for specialist dental care. This took up all the energy of my day, and I had only a little left to do some raiding before darkness fell, as it does so early in the winter. I grow weary of changing the weapon layouts for the survivors. Now that they're switched to anti-human, I don't especially hurry myself to switch back to anti-zombie. More range and suppression; less damage. The combination of the two is what will make the Unity Island raid so difficult.

Word came down that Matt Mather has fled the city. He saw an opening, and took it. Good for him. But it leaves me as the only raider for the alliance. We'll take third place and 200 fuel each, and everyone will go home happy.

10 January 2028

Science City went overtime today as the administrators ran a film against a white screen. "Bohemian Rhapsody," a biopic about Freddy Mercury of Queen. It was halfway decent, but some fellow members fell asleep even during the loud concert sequences.

I returned home to success at the senior compound and defeat at the junior. Had become complacent was the problem, and attacked human settlements too head-on, rather than flanking.

Also sent a message to J (the older sister of the two girls).

12 January 2028

Spent much of the day today at rest, though in the evening I went on a few missions. Scavenged years-old chili, don't know if I can finish it. Also have to find a solution for storing the fuel I have accumulated at the senior compound.

AP's wedding only two weeks away!

13 January 2028

Yesterday I spent mostly at rest; today not quite as much, but didn't get out of bed until twelve. Then I went and ate canned fish and canned chili, returning to my compound to discover somebody had scavenged together a workable pizza and chicken-in-a-can meal.

Cool temperatures but I keep warm in a thick winter coat. No response from the girls. I may have gained a pound or two eating snack food. Empty calories: who knew happiness was so cheap?

I cleaned my clothes and laid it out to dry.

14 January 2028

Today is the rest day between alliance war rounds, but that didn't mean we didn't scavenge and take care of infected bounties. Meanwhile, I'm engrossed in Richard J. Evans' "The Third Reich at War." Something apocalyptic about the scale of that war: compels attention, forces one to disengage from reality.

MattMather reappears, this time heading a new alliance he's started from scratch. I'm recruited; then promoted to second-in-command, able to change others' rank, spend alliance tokens, and hire/fire at will. Interesting. But I may have to return weaponry I have borrowed from TNR. We'll see what Yaraw/Caraw/minla says (three names of one girl).

17 January 2028

We've taken off. We're ("GreatWhiteNorth") in third place by inches. We'll have to keep up the pressure over the weekend, but MattMather says he's going to increase his support over the weekend.

I went north to the city today, spoke with advisors. AP, the friend whose wedding is coming up, has revealed that his bride is three months pregnant. Oh my.

Followed a Shadowplay raider, Blaze1342, back to his compound and captured his flag with his defenses almost completely down (1 defender). 70+ points.

19 January 2028

Mildish weather. I walked about the city, played with dogs, and ate cream pasta and then a Mexican dish. A compound mate has promised to bring in chicken tomorrow: afterwards, I plan to go south and check out another friendly gang of semi-socialized dogs. Got my hair cut today as well, paying in fuel.

We got an edge on TNR, and have to maintain the hunt for third place and 2000 fuel victory. Other than that, it's just the day without comment.

20 January 2028

We remain in third place, whilst I consider leaving the alliance of my junior compound (not enough time). Today I will head south and find the pack of dogs reputed to be there. In the meantime, I'm awaiting the chicken-in-a-can.

(later this day)

I found the pack of dogs living to the south. They were a bit more feral than the ones living close to me. But, it was fun to feed them, and the excursion in that sense was a success. I enjoyed the chicken my compound mate prepared, and I visited the tub of hot water maintained by the local folk.

No progress on the datalinks issue.

22 January 2028

I enjoy spending time with the local pack of dogs. Then, I prepare to go soak in the tub full of hot water. Soon the wedding will arrive. I have to look for good formal clothes.

Dinner ramen prepared with skillet-cooked pork. Science City was boring today. But when I returned home, I found Chris Hitchens raiding my compound. So I waited, and then followed him back to his home and successfully raided his, which was completely unguarded.

Ended the day with a failed raid against a survivor compound headed by "Bill."

23 January 2028

Harassed a bit at Science City by Ms. K. Completed another snapback return, this time against Chris Hitchens' junior compound, "Crud." Now I wait, because we're safely in third, but in no position to hit #2. (I also had another failed raid against Bill. Underestimating the firepower of his survivors, however in-the-open they are).

Ate fish and chicken for dinner, then some cream pasta out of the MRE pouch. Soaked in the hot tub, an antidote to winter's chill. But I must get ready for Saturday's festivities: still have to scavenge up some formal shoes, belt, etc.

24 January 2028

Today I tried the "follow the raiders back home" trick for the third time, but failed, losing to ChrisHitchens' team at his main compound. Tant pis. I spent the balance of the day scavenging my outfit for the upcoming wedding. Ate fish, visited both packs of dogs (the far away one is definitely more feral than the near one), met a professional dog trainer at the nearby pack, bathed, and had some cream pasta.

27 January 2028

The wedding was quite nice. Enjoyed meeting new people, eating delicious food, and getting a bit sloshed the whole way. Took some photos and talked with friends of A.P. Maybe we'll stay in touch.

In the alliance wars we wrap up as third place. With the situation unable to be changed for better or worse, I give my compound mates a rest (mostly) and seek out only the infected bonuses. Naturally did not do much on the wedding day, but other than that, things just went the way they would. I returned the 42.5% ranger G28 to Federated at my junior compound. It's too much work to keep two compounds as raiders. In fact, I'm considering quitting the alliance at my junior compound, even after the little pep talk the leader gave me.

28 January 2028

Today I handled some HURK licensing business, traded some fuel, visited both packs of dogs, ate Mexican and canned fish, and began Haruki Murakami's "Killing Commendatore" again (this after Ian Kershaw's "The End." I also ate some chicken and handled some infected bounties to gain nice fuel bounties.

A bit chilly, even through the winter coat I wore.

29 January 2028

A standard sort of day. I let some raiding opportunities pass by, and TNR establishes itself in third place. Blaze1342 attacked my compound, and now I await the moment to counter-strike.

Had fish, chicken, fried potatoes. Sent a message to EH from the wedding.

30 January 2028

Fell asleep last night and never got to follow Blaze1342 back to his compound and attack him. Woke up anyway to a cool January morning; ate pork for lunch, ramen and chicken

for dinner, and then later, cream pasta. Licensing work with HURK is all complete; I am a certified bounty hunter.

Read more Killing Commendatore.

4 February 2028

Pulled off another "follow and then attack" this time against ChrisHutchins himself. But the last few days have been feeling ill, so not much to report. Played with the local dog pack; ate chicken, fish, finished Killing Commendatore (second read-through), and began 1Q84 (again, the second time).

Was ill enough to miss a holiday celebration at Science City.

5 February 2028

Continuing my Murakami spell, this time with 1Q84, which is worse than Killing Commendatore, but much longer. Spent yesterday finding the rumored large, outdoor dog pack to the south, but it was all small dogs, and they kept mostly indoors. Not really worth another trip. But datalinks says there's another pack nearby.

Without easy access to fish-in-a-can, I ate Indonesian food and found it delicious. Chickey satay, yum.

(later this day)

Spent the day visiting the hot tub, walking Boo-Ja the black labrador retriever at the nearby pack, eating Mexican, and more of 1Q84. Think I will downgrade my recommendation on Datalinks.

Also found my fourth pack of dogs, this one not more than a hop, skip and jump away. Passed it all the time and never noticed it. But they were chained up in darkness, and I did not approach.

6 February 2028

Woke up at 10:30am in the morning, and visited the local dogs, said hello to its trainer, then went to eat fish and chicken at the nearby stockpile. A quiet day of scavenging; then I had a hamburger MRE for dinner. Visited the hot tub. Read more of 1Q84.

Very shortly, I'm am planning on running a retaliatory raid on Crud, which is the name Chris Hitchens goes by when he's running (one of) his junior compounds.

(shortly afterwards)

Victory. I downed all the defenders at Crud's compound and lost only Henrietta, seriously wounded. By HURK's rules, I gain over 100 battle points and I am now #1 in my alliance with 468 points total: 396 in raiding, 72 in scavenging.

7 February 2028

Did some basic raiding (a/k/a "farming") of weaker compounds. Played with the dogs, went to the hot tub, ate Turkish chicken.

9 February 2028

Quiet couple of days, did some scavenging, received a gift of winter gloves from a compound mate, and white flagged my junior compound (a while ago). Returned the long-range G28 to Federated. Ate hamburg steak straight out of the MRE wrapper. Played with the local pack of dogs. Read over Datalinks. Downloaded reading material for future use.

10 February 2028

Coolish day. Woke up late, went to the hot tub, visited the pack of dogs and drank overly sweet lemonade, fried up some potatoes, scavenged, received a message from the two girls, looked for unique weapons.

11 February 2028

Bingo! My junior compound landed a 50% ranged G28! It's (almost) enough to get me raiding again. But for now, only my senior compound will raid.

Ate hamburg steak and drank cola. Other than that, an uneventful day.

12 February 2028

Bought a 37.5% ranged G28 for my senior compound, awaiting the day when MattMatthers will want his guns back. He left, after being demoted; the alliance wall news was subsequently deleted.

I ate fish and two kinds of chicken. Soaked in the hot tub. A boring day at Science City and the rapidly approaching end of the space available in this notebook. Were this a monomyth, I would have to descend into the underworld. Since it's a diary, everything is just slice of life.

Datalinks says my entries are being read more rapidly. I have developed an audience.

13 February 2028

Another cold winter day with gray weather. We are set to come in #3 again at my senior compound whereas my junior alliance, Feared, has suffered a social implosion and lost half its strength. As a result, we're not going to exceed #4. Unlike Heidi's Rangers in the past, there was no specific cause or crisis; it's entirely mysterious why we went from enthusiastic #1 to indifferent #4.

14 February 2028

Went north for a consultation and on the way back, stopped to do dentistry and eat canned fish (in that order). Quietly scavenging and preparing for the day when I have to return 3 G28 rifles to MattMathers. Happy Valentine's Day.

15 February 2028

Cold weather, and I await spring. A calm day at Science City, and then time for scavenging. Could not pull the "follow the attackers home and ambush" tactic for Chris and his alternate, Crud, because they stood watch for the entire two hours for their survivors to return home and thus prevented an attack. In other news MattMathers unboxed a 4/4 G28 with 50% range: meaning attacks per second, damage, suppression and range are all boosted.

Reading "Armada" by Ernest Cline. Could have gone out for fish or Turkish chicken, or to see the pack of dogs, but the snow lightly fell and came down like mist rain.

16 February 2028

Pulled off another "follow and then raid" attack, against Chris Hitchens, earning 90+ points and a pile of loot. Today was coolish, and I visited the dogs, ate canned fish and Turkish chicken, sat in the hot tub, and purchased a 50% ranger G28 for my junior compound (10 premium keys plus 4 Grade 5 unique tokens). When I return to raiding with that compound, they will now have 2 elite rifles supplementing a stockpile of 32.5% and 37.5% G28s.

17 February 2028

Drowsed myself awake at noon, and took off for canned salmon and a side of canned chicken (oil-stored). Then I visited the dogs. Soon I'll go to the hot tub, and polish off a few more HURK bounties.

(later)

The hot tub was refreshing. I then turn my attention back to the infected bounties, killing zombies, killing zombies all day long.

18 February 2028

Today was similar to any other day, under leaden February skies. Cold, I went to Science City, carried out tasks like an automaton, then returned to my base where preparation for next war round tomorrow begins. Pragmatic_Guru suggests I may have overpaid for the second G28 at my junior compound. We'll see.

I had chicken and a make-shift slice of pizza for dinner. Then I went to the hot tub.

19 February 2028

Snow. The temperature hung just around freezing so it became at times sleet, closer to rain. Visited the hospital where an elderly member of Science City is being treated. I got raiding off to a good start at my senior compound, although politics has once again intruded and MattMather has stormed off, taking with him our chances of being ranked #2 this war round (or so it appears). No real explanation, but apparently there's bad blood between him and Dem60 and Blaze1342. I don't know what to think, but I agree with minla/waldena/yaraw/caraw that ultimately we suffer from the divisiveness.

20 February 2028

The ground is covered here and there with frozen patches, and the day is cold. I participated in clean-up in the morning, helped cook lunch (hayashi rice), then returned to my compound to chat with the leadership and accept yet another rifle from waldena. Meanwhile, a person named misologie hawked a 50% ranger G28 with no aps on the radio nets for 16 premium keys. I also came into radio contact with that old friend of mine, John_Nutcase. It seems he has returned the last few weeks.

21 February 2028

A shortened day at Science City, and more rumors on the datalinks that HURK will level Unity City next year, 2029. Ate noodles with a side can of salmon, then off to the hot tub. Nothing much on the radio nets except the suggestion that I hadn't overpaid after all for that 50% ranger G28.

Drama continues on the Matt and Waldena front. Angry words on the radio nets and foul language. Still don't know what brought it all on.

22 February 2028

Surprise: I joined a new alliance at my junior compound, 101st Airborne Rangers, and they have a datalinks chat-room. Will wonders never cease. Also, stood by as poor communication prevented me from helping defend my senior compound as Crud waltzed in, took the flag and various resources, and scampered off. Maybe I could have launched a counter-attack, but my instincts were that he was on to me and would have at least some defenders protecting his compound from the counter-attack.

23 February 2028

Today the weather broke into the low 50s, and I abandoned my really heavy khaki overcoat for the trim black one. I carried out some infected bounty work, ate that addictive canned salmon, then a hamburger steak MRE. Nothing much occurred in terms of diplomatic relations, but I can confirm my stature is improving in the radio net world as my handle earns respect from strangers near and far.

Unfortunately, due to some radio connection issues, I "lost" two scavenging missions. But, it's a rough-edged world. Medical treatment awaits the downed survivors.

I visited the dogs nearby briefly.

24 February 2028

What can summarize the day? A roast chicken scurried up by one of my compound mates, followed by instant noodles in pork broth, a visit to the dogs, a soak in the tub, and battles with the zed. I confused two trading offers and ended up paying 6 premium's worth of upgrade tokens for a rifle that was originally offered at 3 ordinary level 3 keys. But ah well, life goes on, and there will be more guns in the future and more key-cards to pay for them.

With the coming of slightly warmer weather, I reckon our medium-term prospects are okay: we have survived another winter of frozen water and sleet. But the rumors for some kind of action against HURK keep coming up: they have a base on City Island to the east, and allegedly one can obtain unique weaponry by raiding this, the headquarters of HURK in Unity City. Still, I'm not absolutely convinced our combat ability is up to par. I hesitate. Yet I have hesitated before in the past, and not discovered that things can be learned. Maybe everything can.

And to you, reader, are you imprisoned in some way? I am a double prisoner, a survivor in a zombie city and a human forced to live amidst the undead by the very organization that studies and punishes us. I don't have an unlimited amount of space remaining in this notebook in which I write, but I know that in terms written by others greater than I, "who knows but that on lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

I ate a dish of hamburg steak prepared with some field mushrooms. Maybe it's a risk.

25 February 2028

More noodles, more canned salmon. Spent the day at Science City and then turned towards infected bounty hunting. Nothing much happened, although I should have mentioned last entry that a new hunter "Alex" had showed up and tried to take down my compound with only one attacker. He was downed relatively quickly.

Anger in the air at my senior compound, but nothing I care to comment upon.

Went to the hot tub. Did not visit the dogs. A little chicken after dinner because I don't find Science City's vegan cafeteria so palatable.

Re-reading Kurt Vonnegut's "Mother Night."

26 February 2028

A little let up in the cold. "Mother Night" was decent. I exist on the razor's edge of predator and prey at the battle-royale of the junior compound. "ZH" attacked me, and just when I was seconds away from retaliating (a two-hour snap-back), somebody else launched an attack and this led to HURK issuing a writ of protection. We're all just playing HURK's game, but this coincidence ticks me off because of how little difference existed between sweet victory and sour defeat. That said, I had luck on my side at my senior compound and collected flags from donaters and defenders alike. The points add up, and I may be able to coast on scavenging and flag donaters. We'll see.

Ate Turkish chicken and rice for dinner. Lunch unpalatable again.

28 February 2028

Got caught up in the action of mega round, and so did not compose an entry yesterday. Had I did, it would just have been about the hot tub, the coolish temperatures, and whatever it was I had for dinner. As for today, I hit up the location nearby where I stockpile canned salmon and freeze-dried instant noodles, and had myself a dinner. Lots of scavenging also derives a small amount of war points each, but which adds up to a lot. Sir Terry, the head of my new alliance for my junior compound, seems to play full-time. He's a man of a certain age, but it is a fun idea to use Datalinks to coordinate our team action.

I'm running out of space in this notebook so tomorrow will be the last entry for a while. Congratulations to Unity City in its independence day... but ironic, we are now overrun by an infestation of the infected, and humanity continues on, gradually declining, and reduced to scavenging the products of its once vital economy.

I note I have not followed up on rumors of the HURK base on City Island to the east. I can't quite articulate the chaos inside my own compound as well, except to say "things fall apart, the center cannot hold."

"Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."

Post-Script

IN THE YEAR OF HARMONIZATION+646

In the seven weeks since the 'Mead Notebook' has been discovered within the ruins of Unity City, there have been no less than seventeen emergency meetings between senior priests of the High Church of St. Ignatia and the heresies implied in what is already being termed 'the Black Book.' Consensus, however, generally is being maintained that the outrageous claims and lies contained within the somehow mysteriously preserved Mead Notebook, dipped into thermoplastic and surviving nearly some seven centuries, contains the actual truth of that outrageous yet persistent story that we human beings are somehow descendants of that violent, strange, restless, ruthless simian species that superficially resembled us according to archeological records but seems to share absolutely no psychological characteristics at all.

As per the general orders of the High Priest Council, we find it impossible to believe that St. Ignatia of the Rapture, our founding goddess and the source of all Harmonization, was an actual member of that chimpanzee-race that inhabited the world before us and carried out such atrocities and monstrosities that would outrage even the more hardened individual. Childhood storytales, bedroom stories that parents tell their children in order to keep them well-behaved probably have more truth in them than this outrageous heresy and it is by complete and universal agreement by the priesthood that the Mead Notebook is forever sealed in the Index of Forbidden Titles and will thankfully never trouble humanity again.

Author's Note

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"Harajuku Sunday"

Ritchie Ufuo, recent graduate of a Pennsylvania university, moves to Tokyo where he runs into the champagne-and-cocaine Soren Soutern. The louche, high-spending, high-octane group of Japan expats introduce a new world to him, but at what cost and to what outcome? Japan around the turn of the century, with ecstasy and cocaine flowing, and the future apparently limitless...