

RISE

By Gareth Wood

May 13, 2004

Yet another day in Calgary. Work was its usual tedium. About the only thing I had to look forward to today was the sunshine. It was actually a pretty nice day, even though the average temperature this time of year is usually higher.

This journal is my sisters' idea, her name is Sarah. She thought it might be good for me, and I decided to give it a shot. So I'll be writing this on and off, on my laptop. I probably won't last more than a few weeks though.

So I work for a financial institution doing stock analysis. I'm in my thirties, I go to the gym a few times a week, and I have a great house in Calgary's North West, up by Nose Hill Park. I used to practice judo, I'm single after breaking up with Nancy a few months back, and have a cat named Fuzz whose sole purpose in life seems to be killing my plants. Speaking of which, the damned cat had turned over some plants before I got home, and was rolling in the dirt. Stupid cat. If she wasn't so cute I would have made her into earmuffs by now. It took me a while to clean it up, mostly because I chased the cat out of the house.

The news tonight had some story out of Africa. There was civil unrest in the Central African Republic. It was worse than the Iraq story, that's why it made CNN. Some sort of civil unrest in whatever the capital was, hundreds of casualties, and no one sure who's in charge there now. Why is it that the news just reports tragedies? Couldn't we see something nice once in a while?

I may call my sister to see if she wants to go have dinner, it's been awhile, and I have something for her birthday. Got her tickets to the Aerosmith show, since I know she loves them. It's getting late, so I will write more tomorrow.

May 14

It's cold and blustery out there. I love that word, blustery. It makes me think of rain and wind and shit like that. Which is exactly how it looks like it's going to be outside here in about ten minutes. Better let the cat in.

There's more news out of Africa. Apparently the civil unrest (nobody wants to call it civil war yet) has spread into Chad and Cameroon. Both those nations are saying that refugees from the Republic are flooding into the border villages and causing chaos. The Red Cross is trying to organise a relief mission or something.

I'm going over to see Sarah tomorrow for dinner. Giving her tickets to the Aerosmith concert, she'll be happy. Her condo might be sold too; she said so earlier on the phone. Oh yeah, and the Flames lost

last night. Figures. They always choke when it matters.

May 15

Dinner is in a few hours. I'll stop and pick up some steak at Glenmore Landing, and we'll BBQ it. They have the best steak there. Maybe some Greek salad too, and a few snacks for after.

The crisis in Africa has spread a bit more by today. It looks like the whole area is in chaos now. The World Health Organization is saying that there is a virus or disease or something spreading with the refugees. Hopefully it is not some new variant of Ebola. The US has shut down its embassy in Cameroon this afternoon, and told its people to leave the Republic of Chad as well. The governments there are insisting that the refugees are just that, and that there is no 'civil unrest' or virus. Figures that the governments would try to cover something like this up. I bet that it *was* a new version of Ebola. I even talked to Sarah about it when she called me. She had heard that there was rioting in Egypt, but the story vanished from the website that had posted it before I got there.

May 17

I was so hung over yesterday I decided not to write anything. After dinner with Sarah, I gave her the tickets to Aerosmith and we went out to Cowboys and got plastered. For a five foot six 25 year old, she can out-drink me. It's kind of frightening. So I spent most of the day lounging around the house wishing my head would just burst so I could get

some decent rest. Didn't see much TV, but the Flames lost another one.

Today I caught the news while I was at work. I fired up the CNN site and read about the CDC declaring that western Africa is now a Hot Zone. All of it. Holy shit! The US airlines are not flying to any of the affected countries now, and Canadian air carriers are following suit. Apparently there *is* a virus that surfaced in the Republic that causes its victims to become irrational and violent, and is highly communicable. The World Health Organisation is making a counter-claim that the disease just kills its victims. No mention of making them crazy. Either way, the stock market is down, tourism to Africa is drying up, and South Africa has sealed its borders, as has Egypt.

No one has mentioned yet if there have been any cases of this virus or disease in the US or Canada. I think I need to go shopping now. Bottled water and some canned food might be a good idea, and I am overdue for a good grocery run. These stories of germs and diseases always make me nervous.

May 19, 5:30 a.m.

Things have really gone for shit. I'm leaving town. I went to Superstore right after my last journal entry on the 17th, and it was a zoo. I managed to get out of there with two flats of bottled water (48 bottles total) and three cases of canned soups, plus some other assorted things that'll probably come in handy. The line-ups were insane, and two people actually got into a fight over the last case of bottled water. Store security had to separate them. If people in

Canada are reacting like this to a disease spreading in Africa, maybe there is more going on than I am aware of.

Yesterday I spent most of the time I was at work surfing the CNN and CBC sites seeing what was going on in African countries. I hardly think I did any work at all. Most of western Africa is in chaos now. Egypt tried sealing its borders, but it didn't work. The 'west Africa virus' has spread there now too, and people are catching it. There was a report late yesterday after I got home that said a plane from Cairo had crashed in southern France. No word on size or survivors or anything.

Then it hit Mexico. Not sure how, but a video from Mexico showed a large crowd of rioters approaching an army position in Mexico City, the army shooting at them with little effect, and the camera crew running once the army had been overrun. The video was grainy and cut off pretty quick. The US sealed its borders last night.

I called in sick today, leaving a message at the office since it's early and nobody is there, and I'm taking off. I went to the Safeway at Market Mall last night and bought what water and canned food I could. I filled up one of those big 40 litre water jugs and it's in the back of my Explorer right now. I've got a bag of clothes and things packed and ready to go, as well as some camping supplies and maps and a few books too. My laptop and solar charger are going into the backpack I picked up last summer, the one with all the pockets. I'm going to head up to the cabin by Jasper and wait there until this blows over. I figure I can get a new job once this is done.

If this doesn't blow over then being a stock analyst won't be of much use. I called Sarah and told her she should come too. I'm going to swing by there this morning to get her. She should be off at 6 this morning, and be home from the paramedic station by 6:30.

I just saw on CNN that there are outbreaks of the virus in France and Spain. Definitely time to leave. I really don't want to be here if this virus comes to Calgary somehow. I doubt it will, but what happens if it does? The good news is the weather is great for travel right now. The bad news is this weekend it could snow again. But we'll be in the mountains by then, safe in our cabin.

Friday May 21, about 11 p.m.

I never made it to Jasper. I'm amazed that I am alive. I'll try to piece it together, what happened since I updated this journal last.

The virus, or whatever it is, hit Vancouver and Toronto early Wednesday morning, and within hours it had spread. While I was fighting traffic heading to Sarah's place, the CDC in the States released a report that got airtime on every radio and TV station in the world. I recall it almost word for word, and it went like this; "The unburied dead are returning to a semblance of life and attacking the living. It has been confirmed that the bodies of the recently deceased, when exposed to this agent, will reactivate and act in a homicidal and cannibalistic manner." Even writing it now I find it hard to credit. But it's true. I've already seen it myself.

The disease attacks the brain, the report claimed, altering the cells. The body shuts down within hours, and the victim dies. Then the brain starts up again with its altered cells, and the creature that was once alive gets up and tries to kill any living thing it can reach. The report claimed that virus victims are nearly immune to injury, except for severe cranial trauma. I know what that means; it means you have to destroy the brain. Shit, if only I had a gun!

I got to Sarah's place about ten minutes to 7, in time to hear the last of the report. The virus is spread through the blood or bites and scratches of infected victims. Once contracted, it kills within several hours, and after that, as little as ten minutes after, the dead body gets up and kills.

Sarah's place is a condo in Varsity. As I was getting out of the car I heard a jet plane flying overhead, but it was way too loud, since the airport is in the north east of the city, not near Varsity at all. I looked up and a large passenger jet, coming from the west, flew by so close to the ground that I could see the faces of people in the windows as it passed by. A few seconds later I heard it crash somewhere on the University grounds, and I could see the fireball over the tops of the houses on the street. I just stood there for a few seconds while the ground shook, completely unable to process what I had just seen. Sarah came out at this point and grabbed my shoulders, and I snapped back to reality. I realised I could hear sirens and car horns honking, and probably every car alarm in 5 kilometers was going off as well. We went inside.

Sarah had packed a suitcase and a backpack, and we tossed those in the Explorer as we talked about the news report. She told me that outbreaks of the virus had been reported in Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle, San Francisco, and New York City, and that both Canada and the US had declared states of emergency, and that the States were probably going to declare Martial Law within the hour. She had seen reports on the TV of groups of armed civilians, police, and military personnel in the US going on hunts for the infected, and I remembered something I had seen in a movie, one of those Romero gore-fests, where hillbilly hunters with beer cans and shotguns rounded up zombies, and once again I wished I had a gun.

CNN was on inside, and Sarah and I watched in horror as video from New York showed what looked like a group of people dragging someone from their car on a bridge, and killing him and then eating him. The video cut off right then, and the shocked faces of the anchorman and sports guy were left to talk. They didn't know what to say, so they repeated the CDC report. A military officer came on to assure the American people that the president was safe, and that steps were being taken to ensure the security of that great nation, blah blah blah.

That didn't help us much here...

Sarah and I loaded what we could into the Explorer, and decided to make one last run into the condo for anything useful. We took her digital camera, her stun gun, the baseball bat I leave there for when I play ball with her and her neighbours, canned food,

candles and a lighter and a few more bottles of water that were in the fridge. I think we were both in a kind of shock, but it didn't feel that way at the time. We left her condo locked and set the security, like we'd be back later.

I got us onto Crowchild Trail at 7:43 a.m. northbound, and it was already a parking lot. We crawled for ten more minutes until I realised that there was nobody at all going southbound. There was a concrete divider between the north and southbound lanes though, and even my Explorer wasn't getting over that, but there was one of those big 18-wheeler tow trucks three cars back behind me. I stopped the car, hopped out and walked to the tow truck. It took only a minute to convince the driver to push a few concrete blocks aside, and he started to turn his truck as I walked back to the Explorer. Then I heard the most awful noise I have ever heard in my life. I turned to look back south as I heard this awful groaning wailing moan. From the Shaganappi overpass there came dozens of people on foot, walking, limping, or shuffling like drunks towards the traffic jam. Some of them were injured, I thought at first. The people on foot started attacking the people in the cars, pulling the doors open and mauling the drivers and passengers. I could see a few of the attackers looked like they'd been burned badly, and I remembered the jet. I could still see the smoke from where it had crashed on the University grounds.

The road turned into chaos. People started abandoning the cars and running to get away from the infected (that's what I was sure they were now), and it looked like Mr. Tow Truck Driver was going

to bail as well, but I waved him on and he took the hint. He slid up against a barrier, and shifted down, pushing the concrete out into the southbound lane. Once he had a clear access he took off, roaring away to the north. I hopped back in the Explorer just as the nearest infected were attacking cars about five back from us. I slipped into reverse, rammed backwards into a cheap Toyota that was trying to get into the gap too, and turned into the southbound lanes. It was clear sailing then, and I saw several other cars behind me with the same idea, including the Toyota I had hit. It was really weird driving the wrong way up Crowchild, but with no oncoming traffic I wasn't worried.

My plan at this point was to just get us to the city limit. I guess I figured that by then traffic would clear up. It didn't. Up around Arbour Lake, a few kilometers from where we had turned into them, I was still in the southbound lanes, but traffic was at a standstill there too. I checked to make sure Sarah was still buckled in and went cross country there, right into the ditch. The Explorer handled that pretty well, and I got us around as many of the cars as I could. About that time I ran over something in the ditch, a bottle or can or something, and blew my passenger front tire. The Explorer swerved, and the airbags deployed as we came to a sudden jarring halt, nose first into the ditch. The Explorers engine was stalled, so I started it again and tried to back us away from the ditch. Once we were up on the shoulder I straightened us out and stopped. We had to fix that tire. We couldn't get far without it. Fortunately I carry a spare in the back, so I jumped out and grabbed the baseball bat. I could hear sirens, and I paused for a second to look at the city.

Smoke from several fires was visible to the south. I could see downtown in the distance, and there was more smoke there, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from. Crowchild at this point was chaos. Many cars and trucks were all trying to get out of the city here, and the road was crowded, but it appeared the cars were at least moving steadily. I opened the back and started moving supplies aside to get at the spare, and within a few minutes I had it and the jack out and started to change the tire. It was raining a little at this point.

How had this happened so quickly? Was the virus already here before the plane crashed? Were the reanimated dead already walking about in Calgary when I got up this morning? I had the feeling I might have left things a little too late.

Once the flat tire was in the back and we were down off the jack I reloaded the supplies and got back in the drivers seat. We started going again and I turned on the radio to see if I could get a signal, and I did easily. Several stations were playing music! One station had an announcer on who was trying to explain that it was best if citizens returned to their homes and locked the doors and allowed the police to deal with the emergency. Yeah, right. I kept scanning, and found a station where the Dj, one of the morning show regulars, was telling people what the situation was. He didn't know much, but he did know that the plane that crashed at the University was from Vancouver, and apparently had a bunch of infected on board. Many of them were killed when it crashed, but enough got out to attack rescuers, students, and workers at a new construction site on campus. He claimed that many of those attacked

and killed were now zombies, attacking the living and making more of the living dead. He was the first one I heard use the term 'zombie'.

We finally made it out of the city at about 10:15 that morning. Traffic was heavy but moving, I guess a lot of people had the idea to bug out. We headed northwest on the highway until we found a turn-off towards the Trans-Canada, and I tried that. Heading towards the mountains sounded good at the time. We drove south until the Trans-Canada Highway sign said to turn west, and I followed that into steady traffic. There must have been tens of thousands of people fleeing the city now.

After a while we made it to Canmore, just inside the mountains on the way to Banff national Park. The town looked alright, it was quiet, but there wasn't a gas station open. I guess the staff decided not to show up that day. We pulled into a gas station just off the highway, since Sarah had to use a bathroom and I needed some air and a walk around to let the adrenalin clear out of my system. Plenty of cars were heading through town so I wasn't worried. Sarah walked towards the back of the station, and I got out and walked around. I was looking at the line of cars pass when I heard Sarah scream. I ran towards the bathroom, and Sarah came out followed by a bloody woman. The other woman was about thirty, I guess, wearing jeans and a black tank top, and covered head to toe in gore. She had a huge gash in her neck, and her hands were cut and I could see bone through the skin in places. She had a bite mark on her arm, and a fair bit of tissue was missing. She was nearly on top of Sarah when I tackled her. We landed hard on the service station

concrete. She immediately tried to bite me, but I managed to get my hand under her chin and push her head to the side, a wrestling move I remembered from judo class a few years ago. Her skin was cold! She wasn't any stronger than a normal person, for which I am thankful. I managed to pin her arms, but she was still trying to bite me, and it was a struggle for several seconds to keep my neck away from her teeth until Sarah came back with the bat I had forgotten to take from the Explorer. Sarah's not a petite woman; she works out and she plays softball, and she works as a paramedic. One swing of the bat broke the woman's neck and threw her away from me. I got up and was shocked to see that the woman was still trying to move. Sarah and I approached cautiously, once it was clear the dead woman couldn't reach us. Her broken neck took care of that, but her head was still trying to snap at us. I remembered what the radio announcer had said about destroying the brain to kill the infected persons, but neither Sarah nor I could do it. We just got back in the Explorer and drove off. We left the town behind and within a few kilometers we passed the park gates for Banff National Park without stopping. There were no staff there anyways, and we cruised on with the many other cars and trucks. We passed a few vehicles on the highway that had run out of gas or had mechanical problems. The drivers and passengers were trying to flag down help, but no one stopped.

Now we're in a rest stop about 40 km past Banff. I wanted to look at the tire, see if it could be fixed. It could be, if we could get to a shop. The temperature is alright for now, but it won't stay this warm forever. We stopped here for lunch and

decided to stay until morning; it's off the road and can't be seen from the highway. There are several other cars here, a few families and a road crew, about 14 people including us. No one has a weapon other than a few baseball bats, some knives, and a fire-axe the road crew carried in their truck. We're hoping to last the night without being found, and then carry on in the morning. The line of cars on the highway continues, endlessly.

May 23

We made it to Jasper, but the town had been over-run by the living dead. We stopped on the highway just short of town and took a good look. There were three other cars and a truck with us. We could see a large group of the dead in front of a store, trying to force their way in. There were about fifty of them, bloody and horrible looking. How did this virus get here ahead of us? We could only assume there were living survivors inside the store. A few of the dead noticed us and turned towards us, gurgling and moaning. They started to almost run down the road, a sort of limping shuffling jog, so we got back in the Explorer and backed away. The other vehicles fled ahead of us, passing still more cars coming north from Calgary or Canmore, and I turned around and drove us back to an exit road I had seen earlier, and took it. We ended up here, at this house about 6 km from the highway, well back in the woods. There's no one here, but the door was open when we drove up. It's a 2-storey cabin-

May 24, about noon

I was interrupted yesterday while updating this file. What I can only assume was the original owner of the house we are now in returned and broke the window on the front door while I was typing on my laptop. He looked about 50, fit and wearing a light coat over a sweater and expensive pants. His stomach was opened up and his internal organs were mostly missing. A huge amount of blood had washed his legs, and he was definitely dead. The smell alone was so bad I gagged and nearly heaved my dinner all over the floor. I grabbed the bat and ran towards him while Sarah grabbed a knife from the kitchen. His dead arms flailed towards me, and I watched in nauseous horror as he fell over the broken glass from the window. He started to get up immediately, and with Sarah yelling at me I smacked him hard on the back of the head with the bat. He went down, and then tried to get up again. I swung again, harder this time, and heard a wet smack. The side of his head caved in, and a little blood splattered about. He didn't move again after that. I stepped over the body and looked outside, but I didn't see any more walking dead. We dragged the corpse outside and dumped him in the back of the garage.

I have repaired the window as well as I can. Found some tools and a few nails in the garage, as well as some plywood. But the big find was a rifle and some bullets. It's a .22, I think, and there are about 100 bullets for it. Lever action. Must have been the old guy's hunting rifle or for scaring off cats or something. Both Sarah and I feel better now that we found it.

May 26

We spent the last while watching TV. The electricity is still on, amazingly, and there are a few satellite channels running. There's a CNN feed from Baltimore. A local station in Calgary is showing live camera shots from around the city with a live voice-over from a couple of reporters, saying they'll hold on as long as they can and keep reporting the situation. Mostly they just give commentary on what's shown on the camera. I swear at one point Steve Tyler from Aerosmith walked by the camera, dead as the several hundred other zombies on the screen. This shot was from 8th Avenue Mall, which was home now to wreckage and dead things. Another view is from a street level camera in a window, I think in Kensington. The dead shuffle by there too, but a police car is parked outside on the street right in front of the camera, and I can see a shotgun in the car. It might as well be on the moon.

The CNN feed I mentioned earlier is a source of good information. Apparently the CDC has identified the virus and is trying to produce an immunization program. Most of the major cities in the US and Canada have suffered major outbreaks, with the notable exception of Boulder. Apparently they had a small outbreak there, but it was contained quickly. There have been no transmissions from Seattle, Vancouver, Los Angeles, or New York in the last 24 hours. No phone or cell calls, no internet, nothing. CNN reports that President Bush is alive in an undisclosed location and is trying to get things in order. No word about our Prime Minister. The last thing we watched before we shut it off for a while was footage from Toronto, showing about a hundred zombies straining to get into a pet store.

There were about a dozen survivors inside and they had barricaded the entrance with anything they could find. The video was uploaded to CNN a few minutes before they thought the barrier was about to fail. All the survivors, including a few children, the teenage-looking staff, and a few adults, were arming themselves with whatever they could find. Sarah asked me to shut it off then. I happily did.

Taking stock here, we have discovered several weeks' worth of food, mostly frozen or canned. A generator is in the garage, and looks in good repair. There is no sign of further weapons, other than a fire-axe I found by the woodpile outside. There is no car either. I searched the body of the old man and found car keys. But there was no car outside, which is curious. We also set about reinforcing the windows and doors with plywood. We might be here a while, and if we get any more undead visitors I want to be prepared.

May 31, on the road

I haven't had a chance to update until now, mainly because I didn't think it was safe to until we reached somewhere secure. There are three of us now. Darren is 15, a smart blonde kid who showed up at the cabin we were in at about 4 a.m. on the 27th. He was driving a totally thrashed Honda Civic, and he stopped right outside the front door and tried to get in. We had heard him coming (Sarah has been a real light sleeper since this started) and when he stepped up on the front porch I opened the door and pointed the gun at him. He just about shit his pants when he saw the gun barrel pointing at him, and started babbling about not shooting him and that *they* were

right behind him. I lowered the gun and grabbed his arm and dragged him inside. Once I had the door secure again we killed the lights and I looked out the windows into the darkness. Sarah took the kid into the kitchen, shushing him several times, while I tried to get my eyes readjusted to the darkness.

At first I didn't see anything, but after about ten minutes I finally saw something. Sure enough, the kid had somehow led a small group of shambling dead things right to us. I wasn't totally sure in the dark, but it looked like about 5 or 6 of them. They were back by the main road that led to the cabin, and were walking unsteadily towards us.

I had no idea what to do. Sarah and I had talked about it, and decided that if it came to it, we would try not to use the gun for fear that the noise would attract other undead. There had been a report on CNN that they were attracted to the sight and sound of living humans. So we went up the stairs and stayed quiet.

Darren told us his story. He had been traveling with his family when the dead had risen, and they had hidden in a hotel in Edmonton while the chaos took that city as well. Finally they had realised that they were going to be trapped if they stayed, and took their car and tried to flee. Only Darren made it out, his parents and brother were killed by those things a day before he showed up with us. He's in a kind of shock, Sarah says, and she's doing her best to look after him.

We got no sleep that night, and by morning there were ten of them outside, walking back and forth, thumping on the walls, or investigating the garage. One of them spotted me looking through a crack in the plywood and got *really* excited, trying to pull the plywood down. His expression didn't change, but his activity level went way up. We had a few scary minutes, but the plywood held, and the dead dumbass went back to stalking the porch.

We could smell them too. The stench of decay was strong and made us choke.

By the evening there were 15, and we started to get the idea that bugging out would be a great idea. I came up with a plan, but we waited until morning again to implement it. We slept in shifts, with either myself or Sarah always awake and holding the gun. We packed all the food and water we could, plus some flares, extra clothes, and things like knives and the fire-axe, into some backpacks and set them by the front door. Then I went upstairs to the back porch, a good ten feet above the ground there, and opened the door and started hollering. Sure enough, those dumb dead things came around to see what the problem was. As soon as they saw me they all let up this god-awful noise. And the smell! I gagged, and had to retreat inside for a moment. When I went back out they were all still moaning and waving arms at me, but I was safe well above them. Sarah called saying that they were all away from the cars out front now. I counted seventeen of them.

I ran back down, and as soon as they heard me coming, Sarah and Darren opened the door and

grabbed gear. We all three headed out to the Explorer, and got in, throwing the packs in back. By the time the undead realised we were outside I had the engine going and was backing away down the drive. As I turned around in the yard one of them came around the corner of the house and started to half-run after us. It was the fastest I had seen one move so far, but it was nowhere near quick enough to catch us. We drove back to the main highway.

We headed south again, away from Jasper. My plan was to make it to the Trans-Canada Highway and go farther into the mountains. We didn't see anything but the odd abandoned car and some mountain goats for a while. It was eerie, but we made good time. The endless parade of vehicles seemed to have vanished. When we got to the Lake Louise turnoff there was a convoy of half a dozen cars and trucks about to head the way we had just come from. We stopped and talked to them, and they offered to trade news. They had come from Calgary, and were the last living things to leave the city, as far as they knew. The place was littered with the walking dead now, they said. We told them about Jasper being over-run. Sarah, Darren, and I talked it over, and we decided we would continue with our plan. We left the convoy still talking about what they were going to do, and headed for the Trans Canada. We stopped by another Explorer, abandoned on the road, and I siphoned the tank out into ours, and got more than half a tank worth that way. Sarah didn't even blink at the long rubber hose I kept in the back of the truck.

We got to Field BC, and stopped at a rest stop. We're still there now. We pulled off road a bit and

parked the car behind a garage. The whole town is empty. We haven't seen or heard anything moving around since we got here, and we haven't been brave enough to go exploring. Darren is creeped out, and Sarah wants to raid the clinics here before we leave. It's amazing how something as simple as the dead returning to life can completely turn a normally law abiding paramedic such as her into a B&E artist! Enough for now, we have to decide what to do.

June 3, Field BC

We broke into a doctor's office yesterday, and Sarah pointed out the important things to take. We stocked up on bandages, suture kits, and a few insulin shots (just in case), plus plenty of things that I just had no idea what they were for. All three of us were quiet and spooked, and we all agreed it felt like we were being watched, though we still haven't seen anyone around town. We also went over to a grocery store, and pretty much cleaned out as much in the way of canned goods as we could find. It wasn't much. The place was nearly empty when we went in.

We've decided to leave Field as soon as I am done this entry. We find it just too creepy here, and want to move on.

While we were here we turned on a TV in the clinic, and caught the last CNN transmission out of New York. A reporter there had retreated to the roof of one of the buildings with a camera, and was aiming it around the city. Smoke was visible from several places, and a fire was burning at street level right below the tower she was in. She then reported that

the CDC had sent a report about how fast the infection had spread. In two weeks it was worldwide. It also worked quickly. A person contracting the virus could expect to die within 24 hours, following a series of flu and stroke-like symptoms. Within 20 minutes the body re-animates, and the new zombie immediately attempts to kill and devour the first living human it sees. The zombies are pretty stupid, exhibiting no problem solving ability, and appear to have bad balance, poor sense of smell, and the IQ of a drowned cat. The reporter then told the audience she herself had been bitten, showed us the wound on her arm (it looked terrible. Bits of flesh were missing), and reported that her symptoms were about on par with a very bad cold. She announced her intention to jump off the building, hoping that her fall would kill her and that her body would not reanimate due to sufficient injury from the impact with the ground. We watched in horrified fascination as she set the camera down aiming at the street below, where thousands of the walking dead were milling about. The camera stayed that way for a few minutes while the reporter said her goodbyes, then it went black. A CNN logo screen came on, and we shut the TV off.

Time to go. We have fuelled up the Explorer, but I noticed it has a small oil leak. We may have to get a new car eventually. We are going to head towards Golden BC

June 6

Golden was weird, but not because of the undead. To get there on the Trans-Canada Highway you have to drive down a long wandering road that loses

hundreds of feet of elevation. To the north is a sheer cliff face, and to the south a precipitous drop, with the road clinging to the narrow space between. All the way down there are signs warning of falling rocks, and plenty of evidence that rocks indeed do fall on a regular basis, cleared away by highway crews before they become a problem. The liberal amount of smallish rocks scattered along the road all the way down told the story of how much importance this task had these days. We drove slowly, and came to the bottom of the slope, and there lay the town ahead of us. When we arrived a barricade had been placed across the highway, and about a dozen armed police and civilians stopped us. We were asked who we were, where we were going, and if any of us was infected. They were polite, asked if anyone needed medical attention, and then escorted us under guard past the barricade. We were taken to a rest stop/gas station where we were further questioned about what we had seen on the Trans Canada recently. After that we were all escorted back to the Explorer, through town to the other end of the highway, and out the barricade on the far side. They told us that while Golden was not unfriendly, it was closed. Nobody who didn't already live there was going to be allowed in unless they were injured. And if they were infected they'd be shot on sight.

After that we drove several more kilometers and then pulled over. On the empty stretch of highway we talked about where we'd go. The Explorer is a gas hog, so we know that won't last forever. We have limited food and water. Our ammunition is low, and we only have one weapon with any kind of range. After talking about it, none of us really had

any ideas, but we all agreed we were not going to just give up.

We stopped for the night on a logging road. We ate cold canned soups, and took turns staying awake to keep a watch. I went first, Sarah took middle, and Darren took last. While I was up, I walked around the area the Explorer was in, listening and watching the road. I didn't hear a single other car, or see any lights. No aircraft went over. I saw a moving light way overhead, but I figure it was a satellite. I wonder how long they will last. I seem to remember the Space Station had crew in it. I wonder if they are still up there, watching.

In the morning we had a cold breakfast and talked some more about what to do. In the end we decided to make for Glacier National Park, and then Revelstoke, and see what conditions there were like. Hopefully we could find another vehicle to siphon the gas from soon.

About 20 km down the road we came upon a multi-vehicle accident. Six cars had managed to collide, and we couldn't tell where it had started. A silver Miata was upside down in the median, and looked like it had rolled a few times. Behind that was a red Ford Focus with a destroyed front end and four flat tires. The door was open, and glass was everywhere. Behind that were four more cars in similar condition. One, a blue Mustang, had been torn right in half, and another had burned. We could still see smoke coming from the wreckage.

Right on the ground in front of the Focus was a body, but it was so covered in blood that we

couldn't tell if it was man or woman. The body was bent oddly, legs sticking out at a strange angle, and Sarah said it looked like the spine was probably shattered. I stopped the Explorer back about 20 meters from the first car, and we just looked for a long time. Nothing moved, so we decided to check it out. I told Darren to get in the drivers seat and come get us if anything happened. I took the rifle, made sure it was loaded, and led the way, Sarah following with the axe.

We cautiously came up to the first car, and I bent down to look inside. It was occupied, and the corpse in the driver's seat was looking right at me and struggling to get out of its seatbelt. I backed away quickly, and moved over to where Sarah was looking at the corpse on the street with the broken spine. Her face was pale, and she told me that this body had been partially eaten. She warned me not to look. I did though, and spent the next few minutes leaving my breakfast in the road. I have never seen anything like that, and I pray to God I never will again. I don't think he's listening though.

We moved on, and found that none of the other cars were occupied. One was an RCMP cruiser, but no officer was to be seen. There were bloody footprints leading away from a few of them, and near the back of the pileup we found another corpse, this one even worse than the partially eaten one we'd just seen. I think it was a woman, but I just couldn't be sure. There wasn't much beyond some bones, skin, and clothes left, and a huge swath of gore across the pavement. Tracks left the site, going away down the road in the direction we were going.

About then, Darren started honking the horn. I could have left my own skin behind when I looked back and saw one of those things walking towards us, arms outstretched and a hungry look in its eye. It only had one, the other was an empty socket, and blood and goop had leaked down onto his cheek. He looked about 22 or so, with those stupid baggy pants and a black punk rock t-shirt. The pants were caught on his feet now and were slowing him down. I called for Sarah to get behind me and I whipped the rifle up and shot at him when he was about twenty feet away. Missed completely, but the shot sure sounded loud out here. I fired again, and missed again. Adrenalin was doing wacky things to my responses. I took a breath, levered another shell into the chamber, and took aim. Dead guy was about ten feet away. I aimed right between his eyes and shot. He fell with a surprised look on his face. His head hit the pavement when he fell backwards, and he stopped moving. The smell hit us then, the awful rotting meat smell these things exude, and I nearly barfed again. Sarah turned around and told me that there were more behind us, and when I looked, they were there, six more about 250 feet away, just coming around the corner in the road. I guess they must have wandered away from the feast here, and heard us arrive and were coming to investigate. I saw that they lurched along, shambled, but they were moving faster than I liked. One was in an RCMP uniform, so I guess that's what happened to the cop. I noticed he had a gun in a holster at his side. We retreated to the Explorer, and I handed Sarah the rifle. We quickly decided we wanted that gun, but weren't sure how risky it would be to try to shoot all these things. When they were just starting to wander though the wreckage on

the highway we backed up another 250 feet down the road. I saw that they were not all staying together. The former officer was in fact leading the way, hardly shuffling at all, but in no way as coordinated as he had been in life. Once he had gotten far enough ahead, about 50 feet ahead of the following corpse, I drove towards him slowly, and stopped when we were about 25 feet from him. Sarah steadied the rifle and shot him in the face. I saw the bullet go in, making a wet slapping sound, but he didn't drop! He staggered a bit, but kept coming. She shot again, this time a little too high, and missed. And again, this time the bullet passed into the skull, and he dropped like a sack of rocks. I jumped out while Sarah covered me, and ran to the body. With Sarah yelling to hurry up, I grabbed the gun out of the holster, grabbed an extra clip that I saw on his belt, and sprinted back to the Explorer about 10 feet ahead of the next of those things. We reversed another 200 feet or so, and I stopped to hand Sarah the handgun. She passed the rifle to Darren. After that I drove forward again, and wove between the walking dead. One of them got too close, and we knocked him down under the passenger side. Then we were home free, around the pile-up, and off down the road. The gas tank was on a third of a tank, but I wasn't stopping to siphon a tank there, no way in hell.

June 10

We have spent the last few days at a campground a few kilometers from the pass. We decided to stop when we went through the pass, and saw a gas truck at the service station by the tourism center. We checked the place out and found nobody was there,

despite there were a few cars outside. The front doors were unlocked and there were lights on inside, so I went in and had a look around. I took the police officer's handgun instead of the rifle this time. Sarah and Darren stayed in the Explorer, and when I waved, they moved the vehicle up to the pumps and I went back out to help pump fuel. We ended up with a full tank, and then found a few empty gas cans in a car nearby, so we filled them too and put them in the back. Then it was time for a shopping trip. I'd seen lots of things inside that I think we could use, so Darren and I went inside while Sarah kept the rifle outside in case we had to run quickly.

We loaded up some bags with all the canned goods we could find, and grabbed bottled water and fruit juice as well out of the coolers. I spotted a portable gas camping stove and grabbed that too. We loaded all this into the back of the Explorer (getting crowded back there now) and then decided to look inside the tourist trap gift store next door.

It started raining, which was odd, since the sun was shining. We had passed a sign that said the weather could change suddenly up high in the mountains, and I guess that was true. So while it was raining we walked over to the store, Sarah keeping pace with us in the Explorer. Inside (again the door was unlocked) we found the place in chaos. Shelves tipped over, tacky tourist shirts and books scattered all across the floor, and a bloody handprint on the cashiers' desk. As we stood there looking at the destruction someone came out of the back. *Something*, rather. This creature had once been a gas station staff member, and its reek preceded it,

making both of us gag in the close quarters. It looked terrible, smelled worse, and came at us with a low moan and bared teeth. Darren yelled and back pedaled outside, and I followed him. The walking corpse was on me before I could get another three steps. It was faster than I suspected it would be. It grappled me and tried to bite me, but all it managed was a mouthful of my denim shirt, and I used a judo technique to sweep its legs out from beneath it. I had lost the gun somewhere; I don't even know when I dropped it, probably the adrenaline acting on me. Dead guy fell down, but was turned over in a second and getting up again. He lunged at me as I backed off, and I let him grab my sleeve. A martial arts teacher I had years ago had once told me that if an opponent grabbed your arm or your sleeve, you had him. He'd committed his energy, and you could do whatever you wanted at that point. I found this to be true in practice, and now I found it to be true in reality. I twisted his wrist back, caught it with my other hand, straightened his arm as I slid behind him, and broke his arm at the elbow with a sharp thrust as I passed. Then I found out that the undead don't feel pain. A blow like this would normally have incapacitated a normal human, but this dead guy just ignored it. He was off balance, and one arm was useless now, but he still wanted to bite me. He snarled silently and tried to grab me, and I had to dodge out of the way. I slipped in a puddle and went down, skinning my palms as I broke my fall. I expected nearly two hundred pounds of undead carnivore to land on my back, but instead I heard a gunshot. Not the .22, Darren had picked up the cop's gun, and shot the dead guy in the temple. He toppled and twitched once, and then bloody gore leaked out of his head exit wound. Sarah was there

right away checking me over, but other than skinned palms I was fine. We looked around carefully, but nothing else came to try and eat us. We packed up what we had and drove away.

After a few kilometers we found this campground. There was trailer abandoned here, and we stayed the night in it. It was cramped and the beds were small, but it made us feel safer to have metal walls around us. No one else was around, though several of the campsites had signs that people were there recently.

Last night at about 2 in the morning I was out on watch, looking at the glorious sky full of stars, when a few cars went by on the highway. We had the lights off, and the campsite was set back a ways from the road, so I doubt they know we were there. I counted four cars, and they drove by slowly, about 40 kph maybe. They were going west, the same way we were going. They passed and the night got quiet again. Why they were traveling at night I have no idea. I thought that maybe that would attract any undead nearby to the noise and light.

I have also been thinking about how this happened so fast. It seems like within two weeks the whole world just fell apart. Sarah had the thought that maybe the virus was widespread before this started, and something triggered it. She said that some viruses mutate and change when certain conditions happen, and maybe this one was a mutated version of a more common virus. I don't know. I can't imagine what the cities are like now. I think heading into the mountains was the best and luckiest thing we could have done. We have seen a few zombies, some people trying to survive, but nothing on the

scale of what we saw in TV feeds from New York or Toronto. It still seems unreal. I think about friends and family, and I have no idea what happened to them. Both Sarah and I lost our cell phones or forgot them when this all started, and we haven't found a working phone so far. And who would I call? Anyways, it's near dinner time now. Its overcast, about 7 pm, and the sun will set pretty soon here. We have been using the propane stove in the trailer to heat food, and Darren is making something that smells wonderful. The kid has hidden talents. I'll try to update more later.

June 13

It's the 13th... a month since this all started. It's amazing how fast the world fell apart.

It's raining lightly, and has been on and off for a few days. We've stayed at the campground, and after the first night I went down to the entrance road and shut the barricade. It won't keep anyone or anything out, but it'll make noise if it's moved, and give us some warning.

A plane went over earlier today. We all heard a jet go by at about 10 this morning. After the quiet we have been used to it was quite loud, but we couldn't see it at all due to the clouds.

Our food and water situation is growing dire. We have enough food to get through about a week and a half, or even two weeks if we stretch it a little. Water is so far not too much of an issue, though we all wish there was enough hot water for a shower. I haven't shaved in days, and Sarah is looking for a

way to wash our clothes. We refilled all our empty water bottles from a stream, and boiled all the water on the propane stove to purify it. Provided the propane lasts, we'll use the purified water first, and save the unopened bottles.

We haven't seen anyone on the road since the convoy went past the other night. The radio doesn't receive anything this high up in the mountains. We've been considering our options, and we think we are going to keep moving in a few days, heading for Kelowna eventually, or maybe we'll go north towards the Yukon. Either way, we'll have to get supplies and a better vehicle.

June 17th

It's our last night here in the campground. We've decided it is time to move on. The rain and cold weather at night have chilled us, and we're out of propane now. We have taken to huddling together in the camper even during the daytime to stay warm. Even in June the temperature this high up can get fairly cold.

We haven't seen anyone pass this way since my last entry. A bear wandered through here two days ago around dawn, but he left us alone. He looked healthy and well fed, and probably outweighed all three of us together. He only got about 100 feet away from us at the closest. As soon as he smelled us he took off.

We are planning to head into Revelstoke and see if anyone has survived. From there we are going to try

to find a better vehicle, better on gas than the Explorer, and head north towards Prince George.

I am on first watch again. Darren thinks it is stupid keeping a watch here, but I disagree. All it would take is one of those things to find us all asleep, and that would be it, we'd all be dead. I'd better get to it; it is starting to get dark now, and colder. If I walk around and wear layers I can keep warm, though without the propane we can't make coffee, and I won't risk a fire that can be seen or smelled for miles. More in the morning when we're on the road. I'll make Sarah drive.

June 21, 5:45 a.m.

We drove towards Revelstoke, leaving the camper behind. In the event someone else comes this way and needs some shelter, we left the key in the door, and a few blankets and a note inside telling who we are and where we went.

So we drove towards Revelstoke, passing the odd car or truck on the road, but otherwise seeing nothing and no one. There were a few deer out on the roads, but they ran off as soon as we appeared. We stopped to siphon fuel a few times, each time being careful to keep a watch while I ran the tubing into the other car. I picked up a magazine from one car, a Newsweek dated four days before I left Calgary. It didn't contain anything useful.

We reached Revelstoke without any trouble, but found some when we got there. The town wasn't exactly *crawling* with the undead, but there were enough out in the streets to convince me the place

was overrun. The sight of houses and stores with smashed windows and doors, a car nose first into a traffic light pole, and a few skeletal remains in a store parking lot, not to mention the trash blowing along the sidewalks, was more than enough to make me think this was a dead town. We drove past a few shambling dead things, easily avoiding them, and were thinking of just driving straight through when we heard a gunshot. It was easy to tell what it was, but we couldn't tell where it came from! The undead seemed to know however, as they all turned in a northern direction and started shambling off that way. We quickly decided that if there were other survivors we had better go help.

We drove into the area the undead were searching and heard another shot. After that we had an idea where it was coming from, and then it was only a matter of time. We found a house with a pile of corpses in front of it. There must have been twenty or so, and the walking dead were converging on this place. In the second floor bay window I could see someone moving, and then there was another shot, and a nearby zombie died as its head was destroyed by a bullet. The person in the window started waving, and I drove right up to the house, and then turned the Explorer around. Darren leaned out the window with the rifle from the back seat and shot an approaching undead, and Sarah stepped out with the pistol and covered the front of the vehicle. I saw the windows open on the second floor, and a rope was thrown out. The main floor doors and windows were all boarded up and sealed with bars, so I guess whoever was in there was coming out the window. A backpack got tossed out just as I was stepping out of the Explorer with the baseball bat, and I heard

Sarah shoot twice at something. Darren shot at another one that was about 50 feet away. I ran over to grab the pack just as a young woman with a rifle and a child of about four clinging to her back stepped out of the window and down the rope in one smooth motion. We just stood and stared at each other for a second, and then I grabbed her pack and told her to come on. We all piled in to the Explorer, and I stepped on the gas as everyone was getting squared away in the back.

She introduced herself as I wove the vehicle around and through the walking corpses that were clutching for us. Her name was Jessica, and her son was named Michael. She busied herself getting him belted into the middle seat, and then asked if we had any food or water. She explained that the electricity and water had cut off a week ago, and she was out of food for two days now and nearly out of bottled water as well. Darren reached back and gave her two water bottles and a can of fruit salad and some canned soup, and after he found a can opener in his pack she opened them and fed her child. Little Michael was so happy to see the fruit salad especially that he cried as he was eating.

By this time we had gotten back to the main road safely, and in a matter of minutes we had left Revelstoke behind. I checked the gas; we had over two thirds of a tank still, so I wasn't too worried.

Jess told us her story as we drove. She was so relieved to see other people that she just about broke down a few times, but was still able to tell us an amazing tale. When the dead rose, they didn't come near Revelstoke for a few days, and nobody in

the town really believed what was going on, but the failing communications and lack of road traffic alarmed everyone. Then one night an 18-wheeler rig had crashed into the gas station on the west end of the town, and apparently the driver had died. When the local police opened up the trailer to see what he was hauling they found several partially devoured corpses, and about a dozen of the undead, who immediately attacked them. The police were killed in just a few minutes, and the undead spread into the early morning town and attacked homes and people. Jessica's boyfriend Ken had gone off when the attack started to see if he could help, and never came back. They had boarded up the doors and windows a few days earlier, and Jess had the forethought to fill every container she could with water. She then moved herself and her son upstairs in their house, and took a chainsaw to the staircase. She left enough for herself to climb down in an emergency, and sat and waited while her neighbours left town or were killed by the walking dead. She had her rifle with her, and when the undead came too close to her house she shot them. It took a few tries to figure out that the brain was the right spot to aim for, but after that she didn't let any undead within 40 feet of her house while she was awake.

The rifle was hers, she said, not Ken's, and she said she's a competition sharpshooter. She told us she has about 500 rounds left in her pack as well as gun cleaning kit and personal stuff. She saw us drive by on the main road, and figured that we might be her last chance, since she was out of water and food and she wanted her son to have a chance. So she started shooting to get our attention. It worked. By the time she was done Michael had finished his meal and

was asleep. We drove in silence for a while, until I found a minivan on the mountain road that looked abandoned. I stopped and explained we were going to try to siphon whatever gas was in the tank to top up our fuel. Jess got out with us, and held her rifle ready as we scanned the surroundings. Trees, rocks, and pavement, with a side of abandoned van. No undead in sight, so I moved over to the van and popped the gas cap. We got about 20 liters out of the van, enough that the Explorer needle showed somewhat less under full.

We drove until we reached a sign that said "Sicamous 2.5 km", and stopped at the roadside turnout there. We had a spectacular view of the mountains there, and I could see a train tunnel in the mountain opposite.

9:20 p.m.

The next morning we all had a pleasant breakfast. Darren seemed a little amused when Michael went and sat on his lap and took some of his food. We all chatted and shared our experiences, but the telling didn't get us down like I expected. It seemed to be a bit of a relief to get it all out.

Jessica is an interesting woman. She's practical, level headed, and way better with a gun than any of us are. She's offered to show us all how to shoot properly, and we are going to take her up on it.

We have decided we need another vehicle. The Explorer has a serious oil leak now, and I worry about the gas it uses. So we are going to try to find some vehicles with a lower gas mileage, preferably

two so we can carry anyone else we might meet as well.

So we rolled into Sicamous, and rolled to a stop. The town was a nightmare. From where we sat in the Explorer we could see nearly a hundred of the undead, several burned vehicles and buildings, trash all over the streets, and what appeared to be at least a dozen corpses, the really dead kind, scattered about the area. And that's just what we could see *from right there*. The scattered zombies were walking or stumbling towards us, and the smell preceded them. There was no way in hell I was going in there, so I backed away and turned around. We drove back until we found a logging road we had passed, and pulled in there.

We had a look at a map of the various towns in the area that we had taken from the gift shop in the pass. There was only one road over the Shuswap Lake, the Trans-Canada. But there were several ways to get to the bridge, so we decided that we'd take one of those. By this time the undead were sure to be thick on the road into town, so we decided to be stealthy. To a point. We returned with grim determination to get through to the bridge, and right before the long downhill slope into the main town, I took a left turn along a residential road. The population of undead was much lower here, and we were able to drive around them quite easily. Not a shot was fired, though Sarah, Darren, and Jess were all ready to if needed. We made it several blocks, turning towards the lake often, following the map. The town we passed through was desolate, completely overrun, and in ruins. None of us spoke as we drove. We were focused only on getting

through. We found the last turn before the bridge, and turned onto it, but it seemed our luck was dipping a little low now. The end of the street was completely blocked by an overturned semi trailer and a huge tank of fuel or milk or something, and there was clearly no way through. As I slowed to a stop there were three undead near enough to reach the vehicle, a male with a Grateful Dead t-shirt on and missing his entire left arm, and two females, one in a sundress with lots of little holes torn in it like she'd climbed through barbwire, and another who was older, white haired, and nearly intact. All three of them managed to get to the vehicle before I reversed, and the look of frustration and confusion on their faces as we moved away from them was almost comical. I backed over another one that had gotten behind us, and we turned onto the street again. There were more of them closing on us now, probably about ten or so. I accelerated away, turning between a few of them and then around a burned out car. Ahead I could see the water of the lake, and the end of the road. I hastily pulled a U-turn and sped back the way we had come, but instead of turning back down the blocked street I took the alleyway. This led us straight to the end of the street, and we could see the embankment for the bridge ahead of us. Three more walking dead blocked our way and lurched forward. I gunned the motor, and we hit them. One bounced away and went under my tires; another actually went over the hood, windshield, and roof, leaving greasy red smears on the glass. The third bounced back and hit a fence, then fell forward and I think hit his head rather solidly on the side of the Explorer. We turned and got up the embankment, and turned again to go over the bridge. The bridge itself was abandoned,

no corpses were walking there, but there were more than fifteen cars and trucks scattered about. We passed one that had a zombie strapped into the seatbelt in the passenger side. It looked at us and waved its arms as we drove by. After that, we passed through the rest of the town without a hitch.

Dusk found us at a rest stop near Salmon Arm. We stopped to check out a Honda Civic that was parked there, and finding nobody around we broke into it and popped the gas tank. It was only half full, so we didn't get that much. The view here is spectacular, and we were planning to stay a day to rest but decided to move on in case the hordes of former Sicamous citizens were still after us. We drove on into the night.

June 24

Salmon Arm was as bad as Revelstoke and Sicamous. We went around it rather than through. The only worries are that we are low on gas, and running out of food. We are going to raid the next grocery store we see, if it can be done safely. We haven't been traveling very fast, just cruising along at about 50 kph or so. Every town we approach is a new source of danger. Plus we take plenty of rest stops when we think it's safe, since Michael can't take being strapped into a seat for the 12 hours a day we often drive.

We are near Kamloops, but we are afraid that we'll find it in even worse condition than the other towns. I remember from a previous trip that there is a gas station/grocery about 20 minutes outside the city. We plan to stop there tomorrow and see what we

can grab. Tonight, and for the last several nights, we are staying at a rundown campground, mercifully off the main highway that has lots of firewood, a nearby creek, and seclusion. We found an abandoned Toyota Rav4, with a third of a tank in it, and the keys! We have taken this to be our second car, and Sarah is driving it, with Darren along with her to ride shotgun, so to speak. It is getting darker. I need to recharge the laptop batteries tomorrow, so I had better remember to plug in the solar charger in the morning.

July 2, 2004

We smelled smoke earlier yesterday. We had been having a lunch of canned fruit, instant coffee we had heated over a small single burner propane stove, and some canned oysters and crackers. All the perishables in the grocery store we raided a few days ago were spoiled, so we left them and took whatever canned or packaged goods we could. Several bags of pasta, some sauces, and a large bag of powdered milk were our chief discoveries, and the instant coffee and tea bags were very welcome too. So we were eating, and all of us smelled wood smoke. We saw that the haze, somewhat more orange than usual today, was worse, and the smoke was definitely thick now. It seems there was a nearby forest fire burning, and it had started to blow this way.

We hadn't gone near Kamloops yet, just into a few houses and a grocery store. We had seen a few undead, and avoided them easily, except for one that was locked inside the freezer at the grocery store. That one we had to kill. We had managed to

load up the vehicles with gas, oil, and a tire repair kit, as well as some food and water.

Now we smelled smoke. We had a look outside the house we had commandeered, and I could see smoke in the trees and a glimmer of fire in the brush down the hill. We grabbed what we could, which was easy, as we left the vehicles stocked and ready, and took off down the hill. By the time we got down to the highway we could see thick smoke and flames marching slowly down the mountainside. We got out of there just in time. The entire mountainside from the tree line down to the house we just left was burning. For once we were afraid of something in nature more than the undead hordes. Smoke and fire could kill us far more easily than we might be able to imagine.

So we were about 6 km from Kamloops running from the fire when the Explorer suddenly lost power. The electronics shut off, the power steering went away, and the engine just stopped. As I was trying to steer us to a stop I spotted three of the walking dead a few hundred yards away. They were just noticing us, and starting towards us. Around us it was the highway, low mountains, and a few abandoned cars.

Jess stepped out of the vehicle, brought her rifle around, and leaned across the hood of the Explorer to take aim. Three quick shots later and the three walking dead had joined the really dead. The sound of the shots was very loud, and I could hear it echoing like thunder. Sarah pulled up in the Rav4, and we quickly transferred Michael and as much food and supplies as we could. Jess and I climbed

in, and I looked back as we left the Explorer behind. As I was looking at it, I saw movement behind it and out of the brush came an even dozen of the undead. As we drove away they started pursuing, some of them tripping in the ditch, others lurching along at a steady pace. They couldn't catch us, and we left them far behind quickly. Just a few minutes after that we saw the sign for Kamloops, and kept going. We saw many vehicles on the road here, and several corpses lying about, and in a nearby field we saw a few of the walkers, who like their fellows behind us started towards the vehicle as we passed.

We passed a strip mall on the left, many houses, and a gas station or two, but nothing we saw made us want to stop. The Trans-Canada here was fairly clear, and we only had to divert around a few vehicles here and there. As we drove up the hill to the area where the Coquihalla split from the Trans-Canada more wrecked or abandoned vehicles dotted the roadway. I spotted a few undead in some of them, still strapped in by seatbelts, or trapped by closed windows. I wondered how long they would last that way. Some of them looked pretty ripe by now too.

The city itself looked bad. There were enormous sections that had burned, and there was still smoke rising in a few places. It would only get worse when the forest fire we had run from arrived.

We drove through without seeing any survivors, just a few more of those things. They would pursue us for a while, then stop or wander off when we were too far away. We pulled off the road into a huge gas/diner/store complex at the west edge of

Kamloops right before the toll highway began. There were at least 20 vehicles parked in the lot, so we thought we'd have a good chance at getting a vehicle there. In the parking lot there were also several bodies, or body parts, lying near the front doors of the store. None moved or moaned as we approached. The stench was overpowering for a few moments as we opened the doors. Darren and I pulled our shirts up over our noses, and cautiously approached the storefront, covered by Sarah and Jess with the rifles. I had the Glock, and Darren had my baseball bat. The doors didn't open at our approach, the power being off for weeks by now. We pried them open after taking a look inside, and forced our way in. Inside was chaos... it looked like several survivors had holed up here for a while, and then abandoned the place. We could see barricades that were neatly set aside and also several corpses with massive head wounds in front of the nearest barricade. I called out, just in case there was anyone else here, but there was no answer. The place had also been picked clean of food and water, but there were several month-old magazines, newspapers (headline from Vancouver Sun: *The Dead Walk*), and many books left here, as well as cheap novelty toys, and some clothes, the souvenir sweaters common in Banff or Jasper or here. I took several of those for Jess, and Michael when I spotted a kids size.

Next we moved outside to examine the cars. Darren and I walked the lines of cars looking for a decent vehicle that wasn't trashed or rusted out. Darren called to me, and I went over to a blue Honda Odyssey that had keys left in the door with what looked like a note. Darren looked at it, and then

handed it to me. It said; *"Gas tank full. Water and food for 3 in back. We left this in case more survivors showed up. On our way to Prince George. Good luck. Rodney Grant + 3, June 17/04"*

I was amazed. We used the keys to open the back, and sure enough there was canned food and a few cases of bottled water, three blankets, and a Gerry can. I went up to the drivers side and climbed in, and grinned when the engine turned over. Full tank of gas too. Thanks to Mr. Grant we now had more than enough room for all of us and our supplies. I was about to move the van to the front door by where the ladies were waiting when I heard a shot. I looked up and saw a zombie fall over not 15 meters from Darren, who was standing just outside my door. Jess waved for us to hurry. Darren climbed in the passenger seat, and as we drove out of there I spotted another five of the undead approaching. Jess shot the lead one of that group as well, and then we drove both vehicles away from there. The van was larger and more comfortable than I was used to. It had seating for at least seven, and ample room for storage. It felt different than the Explorer, but it was a nice ride. We drove until we got back on the Trans-Canada heading west, then took the turn off for Prince George. Trees and scrub lined the low hills here, and sandy patches of ground were visible as well. I remembered there was a desert here, between the mountain ranges. Ninety minutes later we stopped at a small motel (the kind with single bungalows instead of a large building), and after checking it all out completely (Darren and Sarah and I checking rooms, Jess covering us from a distance) we decided it was safe enough for a few nights and stopped there.

July 3... Under siege, 3 p.m.

This is what we get for letting our guard down. The undead found us around midnight last night. I was on watch, we were all sleeping in the same room, the curtains were drawn and lights were out. I was sitting quietly in a chair out front with the Glock in hand, watching the stars, when I heard a moan. I looked along the path to the road and saw a shambling silhouette approaching. I thought I could see more shapes behind that. My guess was it was the owners of this place, come for a deposit. I quietly retreated back inside and woke the others. I locked the door, and we all sat quietly in the dark, waiting. For a while nothing happened. Then a footstep could be heard outside, and then the door shook as something banged into it. I heard Jess loading her rifle, and I chambered a round into the Glock. The door banged again as whatever it was tried to push it open, and then the moaning began. They knew we were in here, dammit. I heard at least four separate voices moaning, and we all stayed away from the windows. We weren't worried about them getting in that way, as there were good security bars on all the windows. We stayed the night there, with four or more undead banging at the walls and door. They kept it up right through the night and into morning. Needless to say we didn't get a lot of sleep last night.

Now... well, now there are six of them. I counted them through the bars. They can tell we are here, and are almost frantic to get in here and feed. I am not sure what we are going to do. Sarah said she has a plan, so we'll listen to her and see.

July 5th

It was a close thing, but we all got out. For the remainder of the 3rd and all of the 4th we stayed inside, away from the windows. Around dawn today, when we had all eaten breakfast and finished the last of the water we got on with the plan. Opening the bathroom window at the back of the building, I leaned out and yelled loudly for the dead things. They wasted no time in coming around to the back where I yelled at them through the small barred window. All but one, that is. A seventh walker had shown up late last night, and was missing his lower jaw and both ears, possibly from a badly aimed shotgun blast. I guess he couldn't hear the noise I was making, so stayed put out front while his brother and sister undead wandered to the back.

The vehicles were nearby, and had only been investigated a little bit by the creatures, since they were mainly interested in us. So while I kept them busy out back the others got ready to make a break out the front. We didn't want to waste ammo, as the noise might draw more undead from where ever these had come from. So Sarah took the baseball bat and opened the front door. While Jess and Darren both covered her, and I watched the bathroom window closely to make sure they didn't tear the wall down, Sarah stepped outside and stood where the jawless, earless monstrosity could see her. It immediately approached, arms raised and clutching, and Sarah swung at its head with a lot of oomph. She's no slouch, my sister. With a horrible wet smack she connected, and the zombie dropped like a rock. It twitched and rolled when it hit the ground,

but didn't get back up. We all grabbed our things and ran past it, Sarah reaching the van first, then Darren , followed by Jess holding little Michael, and myself bringing up the rear. We all started to pile in the vehicles when I saw the crowd of corpses come back around the building toward us. One in particular was moving fast enough that she could catch us as we got in, so I turned and raised the Glock. My first shot missed her head and shattered a window in the motel cabin, but the second hit right above the left eye, and she went down. Sarah was yelling for me to get in the Rav4, and she started to drive away. I jumped in, passed Darren the Glock, and pushed the pedal down. The five remaining undead were close behind, and I was able to see the expressions in their faces as we left them behind. They had no expressions, not in the true human sense. This was more like looking at animals, though even my cat had more life and intelligence in its eyes than this bunch.

We spent most of today slowly driving up the highway. We stopped to drain the tanks on a few vehicles, but kept going. As I type this we are still driving, ever north, but slowly. We stop often to stretch, but we are very careful. We pass houses often, but the dead seem to congregate at them, so we don't stop. Abandoned vehicles, sometimes with telltale bloodstains, get a more thorough look. We have managed to keep the tanks on both vehicles above half. I don't know where we are going to stop tonight.

July 7th, near Quesnel

Sarah and I had a long private talk yesterday about our family. We went off a little ways from the others and sat pitching stones into a river from a bridge right by where we had stopped for some lunch. We both realise that our parents are surely dead, along with the uncles and aunts, cousins, and assorted others back east. Luckily we have no other siblings. Sarah had been considering going to look for Mom and Dad, but thought going east again would be suicide, since the number of undead on the prairies would be a lot higher than here in the mountains. So we are going to stick with the plan of getting up past Prince George and see where we can find a safe place to stop.

I have been wondering how we are going to survive this coming winter. It's tempting to maybe head through the mountains all the way to the coast and find a small island to grow food on. That should be safe enough, a landmass surrounded by ocean. Maybe there are islands with survivors on them. Certainly the coast temperatures will be more moderate than here in the mountains. The only trouble will be surviving the trip.

July 10th, near Prince George

It was worse than Kamloops. It had been raining for a day and a half when we got to the outskirts of the city, and the roads were in bad shape. Water everywhere, and with no maintenance crews ever again I can't imagine the roads will survive the coming winter very well. The closer we got to Pr. George the more cars we found wrecked or abandoned. One section of highway was almost clogged with a large accident scene. A truck had

jackknifed on a bridge, and several cars were crushed and pinned. There were still people in the cars where they had died, but they were not still moving, and there was nothing we could do for them, so we kept going. We have managed to siphon enough gas to have both tanks full and the spare gas cans full as well. The city had about 72,000 people before all this started, so I cannot even imagine what kind of hell it is now.

We approached from the south along Highway 97. Low mountains and hills were all around, but the road was generally pretty flat. With the rain visibility was low. I was leading in the Rav4; Sarah was driving the Odyssey behind me. This time Jess and Michael were in the Rav4 with me, and Darren was in the van. We switch around. We passed a turnoff for Pineview, and turned a bit more northwest, and it was a bit farther on that we stopped and looked down onto what remained of Prince George. We parked on a ridge, and below is we could see the Fraser River that runs all through BC to the sea at Vancouver. From here we could see that a lot of Prince George had burned too. More than Kamloops. There were a lot of burned buildings, and across the river was a huge burned swath of destruction. With no living fire crews, this must have raged unchecked for a long time. Darren spotted movement on the road below the ridge, and we looked down to see someone walking along the roadway. Jessica looked down with her rifle scope, and reported that it was a walking corpse of a man, badly decomposed. We spotted more of them after that, mostly alone, but some in groups. I had found a pair of binoculars in a truck a day ago, and used those to look at the city, hoping to see sign of

survivors or if the road through the city was clear enough to use. I didn't see any way through on the roads I could see. Most were blocked either by large accidents, fallen buildings, or large walking clusters of undead.

We regrouped at the vehicles, and with all of us having an eye out for straggling zombies we discussed what to do. Sarah and Darren both had no interest of going into that wasteland of a city, and suggested we find a way around it. Jess said we needed food pretty soon, and suggested we go back and take the turn to Pineview and see if we could find some supplies there. My suggestion, which I finally aired after thinking about it for days and days now, was that we resupply and take the road to the coast, find an island, and wait this all out. We decided to return to the turnoff for Pineview after some debate.

July 11

Darren has food poisoning. Yesterday we stopped at a house we saw through the trees, just off the road to Pineview, a two-storey farmhouse with a few trucks parked in the driveway, a fenced area for horses or cattle, and a barn behind the house. We all got out of the vehicles, except Michael, and quietly listened for a good five minutes before we approached the house. We saw no zombies anywhere in sight, but that means nothing. There could have been a dozen inside the barn or house for all we know. Jessica stayed near the van with her rifle, and Darren and Sarah and I slowly approached. I had the Glock, Sarah had the .22, and Darren had the baseball bat. The trucks were

locked, and looked like they hadn't moved in a while from the thick dust on them. They looked like well used farm trucks, both Fords. I glanced inside one on the way past, and saw a few CD's on the dash, a pair of leather gloves on the seat, but nothing else.

The windows on the house were intact except for one which was broken all over the porch. Whatever broke that window did it from the inside. We all stepped up by the door and listened again for a few minutes. Darren then reached out and knocked. After a minute more we tried the door, and it was unlocked. I pushed it open and looked inside. The smell of rot wafted out, and I nearly gagged. I pulled the shirt I was wearing up over my nose and walked in, Sarah right behind me. She told Darren to stay there and watch the area, and he seemed happy to do that. There was a hall ahead of me, a kitchen and dining area to the right, and a stairwell left. I turned right and took a step into the kitchen, and nearly jumped out of my skin when a cat ran up and meowed loudly at me. Sarah was just as surprised as I was, and after we calmed down again we had a chuckle. We ignored the cat and looked around. The cat didn't look underfed, so I assumed it would be okay for a few minutes while we cleared the house. In another five minutes we knew we were alone here. I found the source of the smell in the backdoor porch. There was a dead dog there, locked in between the door to the house and the door outside. A collie by the look of it. It had starved to death, and there were scratch marks on the walls and doors where the poor thing had tried to get out. The cat was well fed, and we found a huge bag of cat food torn open at the base and

spilled all over the floor. There was water in several large buckets, though it was all stale by now. The cat followed us around meowing until Sarah picked it up and stroked it. It had a collar, but no tags.

Upstairs we found some useful things. There was a large gun case in the hall, and we could see two rifles and a shotgun inside. They were locked up, so we'd need to find the keys to the locks before we could use them. Also there were two large bedrooms and a bathroom. I turned a tap, but nothing came out. I called down to Darren to come inside, and we all looked around for food. We found a pantry full of preserves and canned goods just off the kitchen, but the contents of the refrigerator were all bad. Sarah was looking out the back window as we searched, and saw something interesting, an old-fashioned hand water pump. I went back out front to tell Jess what we had found, and I guess it was then that Darren opened a jar of preserved eggs and ate one or two. Anyways I told Jess to drive the van around back by the water pump, and we met the others there. We all looked pretty happy when Darren pumped it, and within a few seconds fresh cold water was spilling out onto the ground. We were all standing there grinning like fools when the zombies came out of the barn. There were three of them, a middle-aged man and woman, and a teenaged girl. The man was missing his left arm and part of his neck, the woman looked like she had at least a dozen bites out of her arms and torso, and the girl was mostly intact, I couldn't see any injuries on her. They were all moaning and advancing on us, and I had the Glock up and aimed really fast. I didn't even get the chance to shoot before I heard a shot, and the male zombie fell with most of the top

of his head missing. I switched targets and shot the woman in the face twice at about ten feet, and she dropped. The girl was a little faster than I expected though, and before Jess or Sarah could take her down she had grabbed onto my arm and was trying to bite me. She was ice cold and clammy, and her skin actually peeled off her hands as she tried to grip tighter. The others backed off and I dropped and rolled backwards. The girl fell on top of me, but wasn't able to maintain a grip as I rolled away. I rolled about three more feet and turned over to aim the Glock when two shots went off, Jess and Sarah both shooting at her. The girl's body flopped for a second then lay still. I got up and grabbed a handful of grass and used it to wipe the girls' skin off my arm as fast as I could, then went over to the pump and pumped some water so I could wash.

Darren said that he thought the shots were really loud, and that any zombie nearby that heard them was now on its way here. We all agreed. Damn it! This had turned from a potential place to stay for a day or so into a smash-and-grab. We all headed inside except Michael and Jess, and we grabbed all the food we could find that wasn't rotten. The cat came to us again, and followed us around while we grabbed pillowcases or bags, whatever we could find, and threw cans and jars into them. Then Sarah remembered the guns upstairs and started looking for keys. She didn't find any, so we just smashed the glass on the case and took the weapons out with the locks still in place. There was ammunition as well, and I grabbed everything I could see. On the way out I stopped in the bathroom and checked what might be useful there. I took a 12-pack of toilet paper, three new bars of soap, a new tube of

toothpaste, and an unopened pack of razors. I know I needed a shave, and the soap would be useful too. We were all filthy.

We all got back in the vehicles and backed out of the yard. We now had food, more ammo and guns, and some other supplies. As we left I saw the cat come out onto the porch and start to follow us. I braked hard, got out and ran back. I ducked inside and grabbed a garbage bag from the pantry, dumped the cat food bag into it, and then grabbed the cat on the way back out. I ran to the Rav4 and tossed the cat into the back with the food, and then drove away. I would be damned if I was going to leave anything alive behind for those things, even a cat! As we got onto the main road Sarah said she could see several walking dead approaching across the field, and several more from another direction. We turned back south and headed for the highway.

Darren apparently started complaining about an upset stomach soon after that. Jess had to stop and let him out to throw up. He got back in and was pale and hot, and when we stopped last night inside a chain link fenced area around a hydro maintenance shack he was still throwing up and feverish. Sarah diagnosed food poisoning, and we stayed put to give him a chance to rest.

We've found out the guns are a 12 Gauge Winchester Defender pump-action with a pistol grip, a 30-.06 lever-action hunting rifle that holds about 5 rounds, and some paramilitary .223 carbine that Jess got really hot and bothered over. There were also 75 shells for the shotgun, 250 for the rifle, but only about 175 rounds for the carbine. None of

these match her own rifle's ammo, but she still has just under 480 rounds left there. The happy thing is that we all have a firearm now, plus spares. And now we are all but Darren going to have a supper of cold canned soup, crackers, and preserved peaches (we threw out the pickled eggs). There is a hint of smoke in the air, so I suppose a forest fire is burning someplace to the west. It's also a little cool, so we have all put on sweaters. Michael wants to call the cat Sparkle because of his collar, and seems really happy to see it. Jess says that had a cat before all this started, but it got out and never came back.

We'll stay here until Darren feels better. We are surrounded by a fence, and trees outside that. The bugs aren't too bad, and the temperature is tolerable. We only need hot water for a shower. We'll have to find some way to heat water so I can shave, as the thought of dry-shaving gives me chills. My watch says it is 3:35 now, and it's quiet here. Almost peaceful. If I didn't know what the world out there was like now, I think I was camping.

July 12

Darren is feeling a little better. He's hydrated, fed, and sleeping. Sarah has been keeping a close eye on him, since we have very limited medical supplies. We haven't moved from this spot by the hydro station, and probably won't until tomorrow. We haven't seen any walking dead here, so we feel pretty good. Can't really even smell them. We are going to try to scavenge for a portable stove so we can heat up food if we can find a propane source, or a camp fuel supply. Burning wood in a fire pit will

create too much light and smoke to be worth the risk.

July 16

We left the hydro station two days ago. Jess had turned on the radio Tuesday evening just to check, not expecting to hear anything, and we got a signal. Someone was broadcasting on the local station, 94Xfm. When we tuned in there was a song playing by the Smashing Pumpkins. We all gathered around in shock and listened. Three more songs played, and then a Dj came on. He sounded tired, but cheerful as he reported the weather (smoky, hot, with a chance of rain), the sports (none to speak of), and the news (the world has been over-run with the walking dead). Throughout he exhibited a sarcastic humour as he related tales of the world as it was now. He paused to play some more music, and we listened again to see if he would come back on. He did, and talked for a while this time. I think he might have thought that nobody was left to hear him, and he rambled and talked about whatever entered his mind. He never mentioned who he was or where he was transmitting from, but we talked about it and decided he must be near a tower. There was a radio tower in Prince George; I remembered seeing it in the distance.

We listened for a few hours, and he finally mentioned his name, saying he was Dj Dave, broadcasting live from the downtown offices of 94Xfm. He said he was the only one left in the building, except for the several dozen undead in the street outside. He then shut off the signal, saying he

was going to bed, and would be back in the morning.

We all thought about it, and decided to listen for another day, then see if we could get to a point where we might be able to signal him somehow. Flashing lights? We didn't have a transmitter, or a working phone. We discussed where he was getting power from, since an FM radio transmitter draws a lot of power. There's a river through here, so maybe hydro power? We hadn't looked at the city at night, so we didn't know if there were street lights on or not.

So we stayed and listened, and heard him come on again at about 9:15. He described his breakfast, his lack of company, and his dreams, then played some music. He went on this rambling way for some time. Finally he reported more weather (hot, overcast, rain looming in the west) and signed off for lunch. When he came back it was with something called "The Dead Report", in which he pretended to interview formerly alive residents of the city, calling them "Mister Reanimated Corpse" or "Miss Walking Dead Girl". All the imaginary zombie replies to questions were groans or gargling. It was actually quite funny until we thought about it too much, and then it was pretty depressing. He stopped it after a while, played some more music, and when he came back on he sounded pretty down.

We had all decided we were going to try to contact him by then, and rescue him if we could. Dj Dave didn't deserve to be left alone to die, and we were determined to try to get him out.

So we moved the vehicles towards Prince George, and stopped where we had been before. We got out after checking the area carefully, and Jess and I went to the edge of the precipice to see what we could see. She set up the scope on her rifle and I scanned the downtown area with the binoculars, hoping to see an intact building with a crowd of undead nearby. In about 10 minutes I found it. It was near the river, about 200 meters from the water, and across the rail tracks. I could see a crowd of about 60 or so zombies milling around, some walking back and forth, some beating fists on the walls of the building. I pointed it out to Jess and she trained the rifle scope on the spot. Her magnification was very much more than mine was, so she could see clearly what I could only guess at. She thought it was more likely about 50 undead, and thought we could probably get to the building easily if we approached from the water.

July 17

After several hours of looking and talking we formulated a plan. We moved the vehicles to a place farther towards the city center, still up the highway from the urban areas, but close enough that we could get a good look at the terrain and the streets. We saw only a few walking dead initially, and they were easy to avoid. We ended up parking both vehicles in empty bays of a service garage on the outskirts, and no undead were within sight. We closed the doors to the bays as quietly as we could and waited for several hours. It started to rain, and the noise of the rain on the roof covered any noise we made inside.

Jess and I changed clothes into dark pants, black shirts, and dark coats and hats. She showed me the carbine we had taken from the farm, and showed me the quickest way to reload it. It had two clips, and we duct-taped them together facing opposite each other, so all I'd have to do if I emptied one would be flip it directly over and place it back in the weapon. I took both clips for the Glock as well. Jess took her rifle and scope, and we spent several hours cleaning them all and going over our plan. Sarah, for the record, doesn't like the idea of us going in to rescue Dj Dave. She thinks it's dangerous and not worth the risk. My argument was that he was alive, and that I was not under any circumstances going to abandon anyone alive to those dead monstrosities.

Finally it was time. We had waited for the sun to go down, and waited to see if the street lights came on. They did in a few areas, but not where we were. That suited me just fine. Jess and I took our weapons, leaving the others to watch the area. Michael was asleep, and I was glad of that. Jess was risking her life for a stranger and with her little boy asleep with Darren and Sarah to watch out for him, she felt a little better about going to get Dj Dave. We had been listening to the radio broadcast quietly, and he had nothing really new to report. He made another "Dead Report" around sundown.

We set out, keeping to the shadows and going slowly. I wished we had radios to keep in touch with my sister, so we could call them if anything went wrong. I made a mental note to keep a lookout for a Radio Shack or a Revy or something. We saw several undead on the way to the river, but the darkness and rain kept us unseen. We were able to

sneak by them quite easily. We reached the river after about an hour and a half.

We had several advantages over the walking dead. Speed, since they walked or limped along, but never quite ran. Brains, since they appeared to all be about as smart as a dumb cockroach. Weapons were also an advantage. They appeared to rely on hands and teeth only, and they didn't appear to be getting any stronger as they decayed. Our disadvantages were numbers and endurance. There were many, many more of them than us at this point, and I remember a news report, one of the last I saw, saying that they didn't tire. They could chase us for days, and while we had to rest, they never needed to.

At the river we took a few moments to rest under a tree. I had brought along a backpack with three water bottles, binoculars, first aid supplies, two flares, some food, and a couple of flashlights. Jess and I ate a bit, drank a mouthful of water, and then kept going. We were soaked but not cold. It was still a warm night. Lightning and thunder started up to the west, and we were able to make good time upstream. Few of the dead seemed to be anywhere near the river. Perhaps some instinct kept them away from running water. We saw only three, and all of them were watching the lightning. We passed them quietly, and kept checking behind us, but they never followed.

Four hours after setting out we stopped. We were near the train tracks opposite the radio station, and it was full dark now. A few blocks away the power was on to the street lights, and we could see into the buildings in a few places. Interior lights revealed a

few of the undead just standing in some buildings, and on the street a large mob of them had formed near the front and back of one building, a three storey brick structure with a fire escape ladder. The top floor lights were all on, but I couldn't see movement inside, even with the binoculars. Jess and I were safe at the location we were at, as we were on the other side of a chain link fence, and no undead were within 200 yards of us here. Well, 'safe' might be too strong a word, but we were not in immediate danger.

We looked around carefully, and finally spotted what we were after. From the ridge earlier we had seen a few rail cars on the tracks near the station, and in the rain they were harder to find than I had thought. We planned to get Jess up on top of one with her rifle, and I would go and create some distraction to draw the dead away from the building for a little while. I already knew what it was I'd do, so Jess climbed up onto a railcar that said Alberta Wheat Board on the side, and I passed her rifle up to her. The rain stopped around then, but the lightning and thunder kept up, and I suspected more rain was coming.

I quietly snuck over to the fence, and walked the length of it upstream since there were fewer undead there. The grass was very overgrown along the fence, and I was looking for a place out of sight of the undead to climb over it. I finally went far enough and slung the rifle over my shoulder. I waited, listening, for a good five minutes before I climbed over. I paused at the top and looked around, but it was hard to see anything in the dark. I jumped down and crouched in the grass again, and

listened for another five minutes. When nothing happened I breathed a sigh of relief and crept towards the road nearby. I had to manoeuvre my way very carefully around some cars and trucks until I was once again downstream of the radio station, about a block away. The crowd of undead was concentrated by that building, so it was fairly clear where I was. One straggler was a little close for comfort, and I held the Glock ready in case he caught sight of me. I managed to get past him, as he was also staring at the lightning with empty eyes. One bonus to the rain, it kept the decayed stench down to tolerable levels.

I had taken a position a block away from the crowd of corpses, around a corner. I could see from the streetlights in the area that they were all near that building, so I carried on with the plan. I walked along the street until I found a newer model car, big and expensive. Just my luck, it had a broken window. I unlocked it and opened the driver's side door. I reached down and popped the release for the gas tank cover, then turned the wheel and pushed. The car slowly started moving out into the street, and I pushed some more until I got it clear of the curb. I stopped and looked around again. Never can be too careful. I grabbed a flare from the backpack and closed the drivers' door quietly, then took the inner cap off the gas tank. I got behind the car and pushed until it was heading towards the street where the undead were gathered. I let it go on its own momentum, popped the flare, and stuffed it into the gas tank. I then turned and ran, hoping to be well away before the tank exploded. I made it three steps.

The gas tank went up with a quiet 'poof', and I found myself face-down on the street kissing pavement. I got up, ignored the sudden twinge in my back, and ran for the alleyway nearby. The car was now on fire, and was sure to draw some attention. I walked as quietly as I could down the alleyway, cut around the side block into some serious shadows, and crouched behind a truck. I stuck my head around to see most of the undead wandering towards the burning car. They all had their attention on the fire, and at least 45 of them were walking towards the wreckage. The others were all looking the other way, so I crossed the street behind them and ducked into the alleyway behind the radio station. As I walked towards the back of the building I saw that the large cluster of zombies there had dispersed and were all walking towards the burning car. I waited until they were all out of sight, then went over to a garbage can and lifted it up. I carried it over to the fire escape and turned it over, then climbed up on top and grabbed the bottom rung of the ladder. With a little effort I pulled myself up a few rungs until I was able to get my feet on a rung. Then I just climbed up until I was at the fire door by the back of the building. I knocked.

After a minute I knocked again, this time a little harder. I was beginning to think that I had the wrong building when I heard something inside. A sound of furniture being moved, and a voice that said "Hello?" I said, "Open the door" to him, and a few seconds later the door opened, and a man was standing there staring at me in amazement. He was heavy-set, maybe in his late forties, and looked very tired. His eyes were red and puffy, and he was

wearing a filthy track suit. I said hello and stepped inside. I asked him if he was Dave, and he nodded, and then he was hugging me and crying and saying how happy he was that I was there. He thought he was dreaming when he heard me knocking, and then was convinced that it was a zombie that had somehow climbed the ladder. I broke away from him and shut the door behind me, sure that Jess had seen me go in. She was watching for us to leave now, and would be our insurance. I introduced myself to Dave and asked if he was alright, could he travel? Still crying in relief he told me he was fine, but all his colleagues were dead. He told me the power was still on in parts of the city, and that the water had run until five days ago. He showed me where he slept and lived in the studio. He had no weapons, but had boarded up the stairs, using desks and conference tables. He asked where I came from, so I told him how we had heard his broadcast, and had decided to rescue him. He was eager to get going, so we spent a few minutes gathering what he'd need, like some food (he had raided a cafeteria on the first floor), extra clothes, and a knife he'd found. I had him change into his darkest clothing, and put all his things into my pack. I asked him if he knew how to use a gun, and when he nodded I handed him the Glock. We then went into the studio where he stopped the record that was playing and announced he was being rescued and that 94Xfm was going off the air now. He wished good luck to any listeners, and shut it down.

Thus it was that 24 minutes after entering the building, we went out the way I came in. I checked and the undead were all still pre-occupied with the fire, so we climbed down the fire escape and

dropped to the ground. I took out my flashlight and flashed it towards where Jess was waiting, our signal to her that I was coming back. She flashed it back once, and we set off directly towards her. We ran. Stealth was not an option now, just getting to the river. We made it halfway when I saw a muzzle flash as Jess fired a shot. Behind me a walking dead had just joined the truly dead, but that also alerted the others to our presence, and they gave chase. We were far faster than they were, so made it to the fence and started climbing just as Jess was taking a fourth shot. Dave climbed over first. He was out of shape from sitting in his booth for so long, but adrenaline got him over the top. I followed, and we got over to the train car just as Jess was dropping down. She said she had shot five of them as they started to pursue, and I quickly introduced her to Dave. He started to hug her too, but she said we had no time, and we got moving. We made it about a hundred yards when we ran into the three we had seen earlier staring at the sky. It was so dark I nearly didn't see them in time, but I guess they were attracted to the gunshots earlier. They suddenly loomed out at us, and I raised the carbine and shot at them. One fell right away, and the other two kept coming. I shot again, and then Dave shot too, and the other two fell. We ran past them a good hundred yards before we slowed and went into stealth mode again. We carried on like this for a long time, slowly creeping towards the garage, and hiding and resting as often as we could. Dawn came, and we found ourselves a good kilometer from Sarah and the others. Enough undead were about on the streets that we decided to hole up in a house until night again, then make it back to the garage. We went down a back alley until we found a house in decent

shape, and approached it. Just as we got to the back door a zombie appeared around the corner and lurched at us. Not wanting to fire our guns, I turned the carbine around and clubbed the creature in the skull as it was reaching for me. Three blows and it went down, and I kept on clubbing it until it stopped moving.

By then Jess had the door open and we went in. We checked the house carefully and found the front door open and a corpse rotting in the hallway, blood everywhere, and bits of tissue scattered around. No undead though, so we closed the front door, grabbed a sheet and dragged the corpse out back. We shut ourselves in just as it started to rain again, and spent the next hour searching for anything useful and barricading the various entry points. We had warned Sarah and Darren that we might have to spend the day in the city, so not to worry about us unless we didn't return by midnight the next day.

We spent the rest of that day trading stories with Dave, and trying to find something to carry the various treasures we had found in the house. Toiletries, mostly, but also some clothes, a few canned soups and a pocket multi-tool. We eventually got a blue pack from the upstairs bedroom, and I tossed in a few of the paperback books I found on a bookshelf. Jess was rummaging in the basement when she found a camping stove that backpackers use, and a full container of fuel. There was also a set of camping pots, and we took that as well. The prospect of hot food made us all drool. We resisted the urge while we were in the house, though, since we had no idea if the undead would be able to detect the cooking food.

At nightfall, after a careful scan of the streets and alleys, we moved out. Dave was feeling a lot better due to some real rest, and we had taken turns sleeping during the day. Amazing what a few hours in a real bed can do for you. We left out the back, and soon we were making good time away from the house and towards the garage. We had to avoid a small group of zombies who were aimlessly wandering about, and that took some time. The rain kept coming, and all three of us were wet and chilled by the time we reached the garage. We got to the side of the garage, and I peeked inside. There was Sarah, sitting in a chair, fast asleep, and Darren was walking around holding his gun. I knocked quietly, and Sarah jumped up and ran to the door. She opened it and we all piled in. There were introductions and hugs all around, and then we had a look at the little extra loot we had secured. Darren told me that there had been no trouble at all. A few undead had walked past earlier in the day, but showed no interest in the garage. We all celebrated by heating up some instant coffee, the first we had had in a long time. Jess went to see Michael, and I went to check on her to see if she wanted some coffee, and found the two of them asleep on the cot we had found in the front office. I left them alone and went back to the quiet party. That was last night. Now we have left the city outskirts again and are driving along a utility road that goes northwest of the city. We plan to head for the coast now. We'll find a place up ahead to stop.

July 19, 2004, the Swarm

Just northwest of Prince George there is, or rather *was* a brand new mall complex with theaters, a

Revy, a large grocery store, and a few restaurants. And *two thousand* zombies. We saw the roof of the complex over the treetops, and in typical stupid fashion, the road led right to it. We had seen almost none of the undead since we got onto this road, just three in a field, and one staring at us from a bucket truck that we passed. We were actually wondering where all the Prince George undead had gone when we turned the corner and found out. About a hundred yards ahead the road dipped down towards the mall complex. A torn down sign showed the picture of the place as it was supposed to appear. It was far from that ideal now. I slammed on the brakes as fast as I could, and Jess, driving the Odyssey behind me, came to a stop as well. Sarah and Darren and I just stared at the sight before us. Less than a hundred and fifty yards from our vehicles was a vast swarm of the undead. Hundreds and hundreds of them, all shuffling about in front of the grocery store, those closest to us just starting to turn around and look at the foolish living meals that had just appeared. Right up to the doors and windows were parked several large vans and trucks, including two armoured trucks. They were park end to end and sealed the glass off from the walking dead quite effectively. I heard Darren whisper, "Jesus fucking Christ," and then I snapped out of it. I slammed the Rav4 in reverse, and started backing up to turn around. I looked in the rear view and saw that Jess was already about a hundred feet away turning around. I looked back out front and saw that a few hundred of the dead were walking, shuffling, or in a few cases actually moving at a limping jog towards us. Behind them, *several hundred more* were starting to turn our way!

With the Rav4 in reverse, I backed away while Darren and Sarah brought up guns. I hoped we wouldn't have to fire them inside the vehicle; it would leave us all deaf. Just as I was turning around a dozen or more of the walking corpses emerged from the trees around us. We could hear them moaning and gasping through the glass, and one smashed its fist onto the glass on Darren's side, leaving a moist brown and red smear, but not even cracking the glass. Darren yelled anyways, and was lifting the gun he had to point at the zombie when Sarah yelled at him not to fire, and I gunned it. We were all pinned to our seats as I accelerated. Ahead I could see the tail lights of the van, a few hundred feet away already, and between us and them were at least two dozen undead. They all appeared to have come onto the road from the trees, and the side nearest the shops at that. My guess at this point was that somebody inside the shopping center was doing a "*Dawn of the Dead*" thing, and from the activity of the corpses, they must still be alive. That mattered a whole lot less to me than the fact that we'd all be dead really soon if we didn't get far away from here very quickly. The road ahead was cluttered with the walking dead, and I tried, I really tried, but I could not avoid them all. At least four went under the tires, seven more (I was counting) bounced off the bumper, and one actually grabbed onto the hood for several seconds before my mad swerving shook her off.

Far ahead, I saw the van pull up and wait a few seconds to see if we were coming. That was stupid, and something we'd all have to talk about if we got out of this. She should have just left us; we don't know how many more of these things are in the

woods here. It could be over ten thousand. Prince George was a pretty big city. She started going again when it was clear that we were not going to get stopped by the undead on the road. She stayed well ahead of us, and I could actually see a few of the creatures come onto the road behind the van as we drove. Darren said that a huge number of them were on the pavement behind us, looked like hundreds. I looked, and he was right. Several hundred at least. I hoped this would take the pressure off the people in the grocery store, whoever they were, for a little time at least. Maybe they could even make a break for it.

About two kilometers down the road the tire pressure light started blinking. I could feel the car pulling to one side, and I knew with a sinking feeling of dread that we had a flat tire. I told Sarah and Darren that we had to stop. At least we had nearly caught up to Jess and Dj Dave and Michael. When I pulled over I hopped out and told Sarah and Darren to guard me. I ran to the back, popped the tailgate, and started hauling gear and food and things out of the back to get at the spare tire kit. The tire itself was on the back of the vehicle. I took the jack and started lifting the vehicle, and I took a look at the tire as soon as I could. I could hear the hiss, and see gore and bits of flesh and a chunk of bone embedded in the tire. With Darren guarding my back with a 12-gauge shotgun I felt a whole lot better about this, but I still wanted to get it changed in under five minutes. Sarah brought me the spare as I took the nuts off the flat. I rolled the flat to the back and lifted it onto the carrier, then loaded the spare on and tightened the nuts as fast as I could. To hell with balancing, I just span them on fast.

Once that was done we got back in and drove away. Behind us in the mirror I could see the swarm getting closer, and we were all happy to leave them behind. Ten kilometers north we pulled over so we could talk with Jess and Dave, and we all agreed that this had been too close a call. Nobody got hurt, but it was still too close. I mentioned my thoughts about survivors in the center, and Dave certainly agreed it was possible, but none of us thought we could do much to help them. Tricking a few of them into walking the wrong way was one thing, but dealing with a thousand or more? That was suicide.

We also all agreed we wanted a few hundred kilometers between us and them as soon as possible. It looked like north it was, then.

July 20, 2004

The laptop is acting up. I may have to reformat the drive, but I want to burn a copy of this file before I do that. I don't want to lose this file; it's an important record for me as well as anyone who finds it after I am gone, whenever that might be.

We haven't gone far. I have been having feelings of guilt about leaving the possible survivors back there in the grocery store. So has Sarah, and Dave mentioned it to me too. Darren seems to be willing to go along with whatever we decide, and Jess says she wants to protect Michael but other live people are important too. The only trouble is we don't have any effective way of dealing with over a thousand walking corpses. We don't have the ammo, the numbers of live people, or a plan, really. But what we are going to do, now that the shock and panic is

over, is see if we can use our best weapons to formulate a plan for getting the survivors out.

Our first thing we need to do is get information. If there are survivors in that complex, we need to know how many and in what condition they are in. We need a way to communicate. Dave tells us that he had, or maybe still has, a good set of two-way radios, good for up to five km range, in his apartment in Prince George. Going to get them is out of the question, but if we can find something similar in a house or car nearby, we can maybe get in a position to fling one onto the shopping center roof or something.

Right now, we are about 15 km north of the city, on a back road that leads to a few houses. It's early evening, and we are cooking hot soup, tea with powdered milk and cubes of sugar, with some canned mandarin oranges for a nice desert. We checked the area earlier, and nothing was moving around here except some deer in the field nearby. If there were undead near, I doubt they'd stay around, so we feel pretty safe. Still, Jess and Michael are playing in the middle of the road, under the watchful eye of Darren (trying not to be involved in the chasing and tickling of Michael, but failing), and Sarah and Dave are talking while walking a circle around us, both armed and ready, just in case. My own guns, the Glock and the carbine, are nearby, and I hardly go anywhere without them. Three or four months ago, before this all began, I was very much anti-gun. The thought of a weapon in the hands of a sixteen year old like Darren would have infuriated me, but now... well, now I think Darren would be a very good man to have at my

back. We are all getting to be careful and good shots. Jess makes us practice and learn as much as we can about the guns, and clean them regularly (which reminds me, I need to clean the carbine after this entry). She and I have been spending a fair bit of 'off time' together. It's nothing serious, yet, maybe just two people bonding through a traumatic event, but I like her, and Michael is a good kid. It's alarming to think he'll never grow up the way we all did. He'll never know of a world in which the dead had not come back from the grave. Jess thinks he's doing alright, and I hope so. I know I've been a little twitchy from time to time. We all have, with all the chaos and death and undeath going on.

After dinner we are going to go and clear one of the houses down the road here. We want to do this before dark so we have somewhere reasonably secure to sleep tonight. In the morning, we'll start looking for radios and start preparing to do something for the people left inside the shopping complex.

July 21, 2004

The house, when we approached, was a ranch-style with a three car garage. There were three horses running loose in a field nearby, but they took off almost as soon as they saw us, running for the trees. Two cars and a truck were in the driveway, and one of the cars had the front driver's door open. We could see an unmoving body in the driver's seat as we pulled up. The house itself was shut, and all the windows we could see looked intact. We stopped about 50 meters back from the first car, and quietly sat and looked around without getting out. After

about ten minutes, we cautiously got out, all but Jess, who stayed with Michael in the van. She turned the van around on the driveway, ready to take off if needed. The rest of us spread out and approached the cars slowly, and we stopped again when we were fifteen feet from the open door to look and listen again. Another several minutes went by, but nobody was impatient. We have all learned patience and caution are going to keep us alive. That and having Jess around with that sniper rifle of hers.

Dave and Sarah went to the left of the car, and Darren and I to the right. The mess in the car didn't move at all, and it seemed as though he was truly dead. Almost skeletal, with large pieces missing. The body smelled terrible, but it was a smell we were all getting used to, God help us. We approached the house, and Darren hung back with the shotgun while the rest of us stepped up to the front door. I reached out and tried the handle. Locked. I knocked hard several times, and instantly heard groans and thumps from inside. We backed away, and the thumping continued as whatever was inside kept trying to bash the door down from the inside. We went around back, carefully looking into the windows we passed, and found ourselves in a cleared area behind the house. There was a kids wading pool, a BBQ on a section of paving stones, and several toys and lawn chairs scattered about. I was suddenly glad Michael and Jessica were in the van, and didn't have to see this. I was afraid we were going to find something terrible inside.

The back door, when we got there, was unlocked, and the small glass panel was shattered. There was a

smeared bloody handprint on the white door, and remnants of blood on the handle. According to our plan, hastily constructed while having dinner earlier, I walked up to the door, keeping the Glock trained on the window. I knocked with my foot, three times. The thumping at the front of the house stopped, and the footsteps approached the back door now. A bloody pair of hands appeared, reaching for me, and I quickly stepped back out of range as a face to go with the arms appeared at the window. The mangled face was that of a woman, possibly mid thirties. She was snarling and grasping at air trying to reach me. Her long black hair was full of bits of paper, blood and dirt, and what looked like dried shampoo. I stepped one step left so I was in line with the door, took aim, and shot her once in the head. She fell back and vanished. I took a few breaths, then moved back as Dave approached, carbine in hand. He knelt down and grabbed the door handle while Sarah and Darren and I covered the area. He pushed the door open and jumped back. Problem was, the corpse of the woman inside was now blocking the doorway. We all waited, and waited. After another ten minutes I went to wave at Jess, the sign that we were going inside. No other zombies had appeared.

Dave and I managed to push the door open, and we went in with guns out. What we found was nasty. Worse than I could have ever imagined only a few months ago, but now it was an all too common thing, I'm sure. We found the kids in the family room, and it was bad. They were very, very truly dead. Darren and Dave both ran outside to throw up. I nearly joined them. The woman was naked, and covered in bites. She must have been in the

shower when she was attacked, and Sarah says her wounds were probably fatal within a few minutes. How she managed to kill her attacker I cannot imagine, but we found another corpse with its head caved in just outside the bathroom. There was an iron lying there too, and a whole lot of blood. From the way it looked she must have crawled to the family room, where her kids were, and died there, then reanimated. The carnage we found is what must have happened when she reanimated.

All four of us were in agreement that under no circumstances were we staying here. Jess and Michael were not coming inside. They did not need to see this.

I went back out with Darren to the van, and told Jess when she asked that it was bad, and we weren't staying. She wanted to go look, but I told her no, and I think the look in my eyes must have convinced her. I stayed with her outside while the others searched the house for whatever we could find. We drained the tanks on the cars, topping up our own to full again. There was a large selection of food in the pantry inside, most of it still good, and out back there was a garden. We got some fresh carrots and a cabbage, but it looked like wildlife had eaten most of the veggies already. In the garage was a case of motor oil, and we made notes to do oil changes on the vehicles ASAP. The other emerged from the house with blankets, a case of beer, a good amount of food (possibly three weeks worth if we were careful), some more toiletries, and Darren had grabbed a few CD's. A few other things like batteries, a flashlight, and some first aid supplies went into the big kit we keep in the van.

We left just as it was starting to get dusky, and stopped on the road a few kilometers away. Today we made plans, sorted our gear out and stored it all properly, and refilled a bunch of water bottles from a stream. Sarah insisted we purify the water, so we boiled it for 10 minutes over a wood fire Dave built (it was smokeless! Damn this guy is handy to have around) and added a drop of bleach to each large bottle before sorting it into the smaller containers we have. I also got to shave, and I feel like a new man now. The scratchy beard is gone, and I think I will not be letting it get so out of hand again. Since we had fresh veggies and a fire, for dinner we added some cabbage to a beef stew, but the carrots we ate raw. We chased it down with some beer we found at the house (yes, even Darren, look at us making a minor delinquent), some canned peaches, and fresh clear water. After that we all sat around talking about our plans. We hadn't seen any undead at all today, and were happy to keep it that way.

7:35 pm

A plane went over a ways south just a few minutes ago. It was pretty high up, and we could see contrails in the air. I grabbed the binoculars, Jess looked through her scope, and we saw a military jet. It was reflecting sun off its hull, and looked to me like a cargo plane, a big Galaxy or Hercules, maybe. It was traveling west and south, and after some pondering we thought maybe it was coming from CFB Cold Lake, and heading for Vancouver Island. We could be totally off about this, but it was a relief to see that there was still functioning aircraft in the world. And crew to fly them. Good luck to you, whoever you are.

July 22, 2004

One of the paperbacks I grabbed the other day turned out to be really useful. It's the Collins Gem edition of the SAS Survival Guide. I have been reading it today while Jess drives the van and Dave drives the Rav4. It's full of all kinds of useful information, and this could make things easier for us in the long run.

The laptop hard drive got itself reformatted and reinstalled earlier, and I got rid of all the utilities I no longer need, like all the Norton things, all the Internet stuff and games, and just re-installed Word so I can update this. I reloaded this file from the cd-r I made the other day, and it worked fine. No other Office programs made the cut.

We cleared another house out earlier today. I am happy to report that there were no undead inhabitants, no dead bodies, and no aliens waiting to abduct us. We managed to secure the place fairly well, and we'll spend the night here, but we are not staying long. Right now Dave and Sarah and I are taking the Rav4 out to check another house we can see for radios, ammo, or whatever we can find. Darren is staying with Jess and Michael, as much to hold the fort as to help with dinner preparations. Jess found a wood burning stove in the kitchen of this new house, and has promised us a good hot meal of something not soup from a can for once. We'll be back there in a few hours at most. No sign of any walking dead today, but we are not letting our guard down.

July 23, 2004

Hot today. The thermometer says it's 30 degrees C out there. It started foggy and cool, but now the clouds are gone, the faint smell of decay is all over the place, and the sun is burning down out of a clear blue sky. We had a great dinner last night. Jess found some wine to go along with a tuna casserole she made out of canned tuna, pasta, olive oil, and a few vegetables we had left over. None of us got drunk, just a glass each, and water after that, but it was nice to get back to a semblance of normality.

We didn't find any radios last night while out searching, but we did think that maybe we should check some trucks or 18-wheelers for CB's. It would be easy enough to remove and install them in our own vehicles. We'll keep an eye out, and I remember seeing at least six trucks in driveways recently, just in this area.

After dinner, Jessica put Michael to sleep on the fold-out couch in the living room here. He sleeps pretty good most nights, but still sometimes wakes up and seeks mom out for comfort. After he was asleep she and I sat in the kitchen in the dark and talked quietly for an hour or so, about our plans, our possible future, and how this could all have happened. When she got up to go to sleep she kissed me on the cheek, and told me thank you. I asked her what for, and she said it was for rescuing her and Michael. She said she had never thanked me, and thought it was about time she did.

Today we are going over plans. Some ideas we rejected right away, like Molotov cocktails. They would involve too much risk of burning the buildings we are trying to rescue people from.

Likewise driving in and shooting the place up is out, since the sheer numbers of the dead far outnumber our ammunition. Dave had an idea that has some merit. He suggested that we try going underground. There should be storm sewers that run under the complex. These should connect to various points along the river, and we might be able to navigate them. Since the complex is new the amount of debris should be minimal, and the routes there and back clear. We just need to find out the route.

The mall complex was built by Can-Pro Constructs Ltd., and Dave says he knows where the office is in Prince George, as he had them build an extension on his house a few years ago. The sewer prints should be on file there. I looked around here earlier and found a map of the city, and a Yellow pages book, and looked up Can-Pro. Head office is in the industrial park, so it should be sparsely populated with undead there. With caution we should be able to get in and out completely undetected.

Once we get under the complex it'll take some work to find the right ladder, but it should bring us up inside the complex someplace, hopefully somewhere clear of undead. Then we can contact the survivors, if any, and get them out of there. We need a fallback position, somewhere to run to once we leave. We'll have to think carefully about that, and see what the maps tell us. The more we talk about it the more we think this can be done.

11:02 p.m.

Three more planes went over earlier. We were all sitting around having tea, and pasta with Alfredo

sauce (powdered milk was the base, and Jess found a package of Alfredo mix in the house's pantry), when Michael looked outside and asked why there were arrows in the sky. We all asked "huh?" quite intelligently, and then Darren looked outside and said there were three planes leaving contrails. We all rushed out, and this time it was Sarah who grabbed the binoculars. We all took turns looking at the three parallel contrails as they passed southwest, and when it was my turn I could make out a large jet, another Galaxy, I suspected, and two fighter escorts. It looked like a pair of CF-18's. We all watched them silently pass beyond the horizon, then trooped back inside. They had been holding approximately the same course as the Galaxy we had seen on the 21st, and going the same direction at the same time. We had no idea what it meant. Was there a base somewhere still operating? Were these planes coming or going? Did they make return flights to and from the airports, or were they fleeing a base that was over-run? We speculated for hours after it got dark, and now we are all too tired to stay up any longer, except for me, since I drew watch. Sarah will relieve me in a few hours.

July 24, 2004

When I woke up this morning there was an arm draped over my chest. This made me think I was back in college for a few sweet delirious seconds, but then I really woke up and remembered where I was. The arm belonged to Jessica, who was lying beside me. I guess we are a couple now. She made her intentions clear last night after I was relieved from sentry duty, and she spent the night here with me in one of the bedrooms. Michael is in here too,

in a single bed, sleeping soundly, as Jess makes sure she's always near where he is sleeping. When I got out of bed Jess woke up, and we had a few minutes of solitude. It's nice, but it gives me one more reason to worry. And that list of things to worry about is getting pretty long now.

This morning we are setting out to retrieve some CB radio sets that are likely in two of the broken-down 18-wheelers we have seen here and there on the highway. We remembered at least three big trucks between here and the outskirts of Prince George, and we are going to top up the tanks on our vehicles and scavenge whatever else may be of interest. Our plan is to stop at the outskirts, and find a way into the industrial park and the offices of Can-Pro. We plan to check the area carefully before entering the city again, but according to Dave we'll be on the other side of the city from the horde.

Bright and early today Darren and I took a look at the tire that I blew out a few days ago. Its wrecked. Bone chunks tore a large section out. The patch kit I have won't help with this, so we need to look for another Rav4 someplace and see if it has a tire we can salvage. We also did oil changes on both vehicles, but that's about the limit of what I think we can do. There's just too much computerized stuff in each vehicle. Once they break down, that'll be it.

Darren asked me if maybe we should head for Cold Lake, as there appears to be a military presence there. I reminded him that all we'd seen were some planes going over, with only a guess about where they came from. It could be CFB Cold Lake, but it

could also be somewhere further east, and there might not be anyone there now. We really had no idea.

10:28 p.m.

After some trouble we secured two working CB radio sets from two of the 18-wheeler cabs I had mentioned earlier. The first was a straight removal. The set was built into the dash, secured on two brackets that ran from the floor of the cab to the comfort height by the driver's right hand. It took about ten minutes to remove the bolts, mostly because we had to find something to loosen the bolts with. I finally remembered we had a toolkit in the van, and there was a set of pliers there with those adjustable pump handles. Worked like a charm. Then we had to remove the wiring. That was easier, and we got the unit out and into the Rav4. The whole time I was doing this, the others were on guard duty, keeping a watchful eye out for hungry dead things.

The second radio was a little harder. It was about ten kilometers down the road from the first one, and we had passed by there noting that the driver was still in the cab, but somewhat restless. When we pulled up he got pretty excited, but was firmly belted in, so all he could do was make a noise that drove slivers of ice up my spine, wave his arms at us, and sit there. This truck had not gone off the road. It had stopped by a traffic accident, and the semi driver had apparently been attacked even before he could get out of his truck. There was a corpse on the road by his door, and its head was mostly gone, but I suspected this had been a zombie

that attacked the driver, only to have him kill it. The driver then succumbed to a wound and rose, but was unable to get out of the seat belt. Dave and Darren handled this one. Sarah and Jess and I handled guard duty. Dave opened the passenger door while keeping the shotgun trained on the undead driver, and then backed away. Darren had lined up a shot from several dozen feet away, and took it once Dave was clear. He was using the hunting rifle that we had picked up from the house east of Prince George, and I saw Jess check his form out as he fired, and she nodded once he was done. She's a good teacher. Darren's single shot killed the undead driver, and we got to work. Dave had this radio out in about five minutes, and also found another handgun in the cab. It was a revolver, and Jess told us it was a classic, a .357 Magnum. It only had four unfired rounds left in it, and we searched but found no more ammo. Presumably the other two rounds were what destroyed the head of the zombie on the road.

Just as we were loading the last of us into the van, two walking dead stumbled out of the woods southwest of the road. They probably had heard the shot and were coming to see if there was a meal to be had. They started towards us, two males in what was left of business suits, both of them clean cut and young. I spotted a tag on the pocket of one of them, and it looked like those tags the Mormon missionaries wear. They fit the look, but I don't think they wanted to share Jesus' love with us right that second. They were ripe too. The stench was terrible, and we were all gagging as we drove away from them. No matter how long we are exposed to it, the smell is still just terrible. I wonder if disease

will be a problem for us. This many corpses, walking or not, is sure to be a major health problem.

We got back here to the house without trouble, and now Jess is on watch, Dave and Darren have installed the first radio, and I have finished cleaning up dinner. Michael is sleeping in mine and Jess' room. Man, I like saying that. Sarah was giving me the talk about birth control earlier, and I agreed completely. It hasn't actually gotten that far right now, but I think a good supply of prevention is in order. I'll talk to Jess about that when she comes to bed. For now, I need some sleep. Tomorrow we are heading into Prince George to the offices of Can-Pro.

July 26, 2004

We drove into Prince George yesterday from the north, aiming for the industrial park. It was pretty easy to find, though the numbers of the walking dead increased the closer we got to the city. We passed most of them without trouble. They pursued for a while, and are probably still on our trail somewhere, but we made several turns in this largely uninhabited area, and found a warehouse on the outer rim of the area that we can operate from. It has steel doors front and back, concrete pre-cast walls, and two large rolling bay doors. One of these doors was open, so we drove in and stopped, and then sat and waited for several minutes to see if there were any zombies inside. When nothing came to dinner we got out and rolled the door down by hand. It was very dark inside, but we all had flashlights now, and searched the place carefully, opening all doors after knocking loudly first. All we

found was empty offices, and it looked like whoever had been here left quickly. Half cups of coffee were moulding in the cups, and a box half filled with petrified donuts was still on the table in what I took to be a staff lunch room. There was a large front reception area with tinted windows, and the light there was enough for us to see out and shut off the lights. There was a Coke cooler there too, and we pried it open to find maybe fifty cans of soda and juice. They should still be good, so we loaded them into the vehicles. We found a Yellow Pages and checked Can-Pro's address, about 18 blocks away. We left the vehicles behind with Michael and Darren and Sarah, and Dave and Jessica and myself all set out to retrieve the information we needed. Michael cried a little when Jess kissed him goodbye, but we all told him we'd be careful, and I promised I wouldn't let anything happen to his mom.

The plan was we'd stealth our way towards the address we had, and Dave would be our guide since he'd been there before. Once inside, we'd locate the plans for the shopping center and see if the sewer plans were helpful. From there, sneak into the storm sewers and creep under the buildings, hopefully coming up under the grocery store and into its mechanical room.

No plan survives contact with the Enemy, the old saying goes. That was as true for us as any military commander. We made it about three blocks before we ran into some undead. We were being as careful as we could, staying hidden in alleys, crouching and moving in ditches when we had to go in the open, and trying to keep big solid objects between us and

open spaces. Jess was crossing a street ahead of me, with Dave covering and myself about to follow her, when three walking dead literally burst out of a window about forty feet ahead of her. We had talked about just such an event, and Jess instantly moved at a ninety to her right, into the open street, and crouched down. Dave opened fire with the shotgun at the lead walker, and his shot took it in the chest, knocking it back and down. I took aim and shot the second one with the carbine, but it didn't penetrate, just bounced off the high point of the skull. I took a step forward and fired again, this time hitting the same zombie in the neck. It fell over as a glob of flesh and bone blew out the far side, and then Jess shot at the last one, right into the left eye socket. It's head simply vanished in the back, and it toppled over like a falling tree. The first one was getting up, and Jess was backing off now, towards me, and I took a second to check around us. There was nothing moving close by, but a look down the side street showed about half a dozen things walking towards us in the heat. The shimmer off the pavement distorted them, almost making them look alive. I turned back as Dave shot the first one again, closer range this time, and the blast destroyed it's skull quite messily. The three of us regrouped in the center of the street, back to back and had a quick look around. We spotted a few more approaching from another direction, but it looked like our way ahead was clear for now. We took off at a trot, and as soon as we were out of sight of both groups we detoured down a side street, and resumed the hide/sneak way of moving about.

In this fashion it took another hour and a half to get ten more blocks, and we were constantly checking

behind us to make sure the fifteen or so zombies back there hadn't found a trail to follow. It was really getting hot out now, so we took a few minutes in some shade for a drink and a rest. We were in the shade at the side of a building, just behind a dumpster, with a clear view of the streets, when a zombie shambled past the front of the building, heading back the way we had come from. It was followed by three more, presumably drawn by the noise of the shooting earlier. Ten more minutes passed before we were willing to venture out again, and we hadn't seen any more of them appear. The four that had passed were no longer in sight, so we cautiously made our way down the back of the building, and out onto the front again. In this leapfrogging manner (two covering, one moving) we made our way to the offices of Can-Pro. It took some time to find the actual offices once we arrived at the right building, since Unit 4 of Nondescript Industrial Park Building A looked an awful lot like Units 2, 7, and 8 through 12 of Nondescript Industrial Park Buildings A, B and C. Half an hour later Dave spotted a familiar sign on a door, *Can-Pro Constructs and Developments, LTD* with a phone number and business hours.

It was getting really hot now, and we wanted some rest, water, and lunch. We approached the door, and I spotted motion inside the office. A split second later a corpse hit the door hard, making all of us jump back. The door held, and the once-attractive young woman's animated shell inside the offices started pounding her black and blue fists on the glass to get at us. The door was obviously locked, I thought, since it would have opened under her onslaught otherwise. Dave and Jess and I went

around the side of the building to the back doors, and remembering what unit it was, found the loading dock and man-door there. Both were locked. Both were metal doors, so we were not getting in that way, unless we could find a key, a prospect I held as slim at best. We snuck around front again, and sure enough, as soon as we were at the door the undead woman inside was there, smashing and clawing at the glass, frantically trying to get at us. If she'd had any brain power at all she'd have just turned the lock. Looking at her I felt a sudden hope. These things were stupider than snails. Given time, we'd defeat them. Given time they'd rot away and become moot.

We discussed what to do, and finally got a plan together. We needed to be quiet, not attract any more of the undead, and get in there. Jess had an idea. We each had brought a backpack with extra ammo, extra clothes, water and food, binoculars in mine, flashlights, and sunglasses. We each took out a spare shirt and wrapped it around my hand while I was holding the Glock, then used a few pins to hold them in place. This primitive silencer should quiet the Glock enough to get us in without detection. I walked to the door, held the hand up to the glass, aimed at her head while she was frantically scrabbling, and pulled the trigger.

Three things happened. First, the gun fired through the glass, and was far louder than any of us had expected. Second, the glass shattered and fell with a crash to the ground. Third, the zombie fell backwards like a prizefighter had just popped her one in the face. Her skull leaked a gooey brown and blue-grey fluid onto the carpet, and she didn't move

again. We all looked around frantically, realizing at the same time that the many nearby undead would be trying to find the source of the gunshot now, and that our time was very limited. We all walked into the office. Having come so far we were willing to hide here for a while rather than run away with no information. Dave and I quickly took a large table and upended it to block the useless door, and pushed some heavy furniture behind it. It wouldn't hold long if attacked, but it might block us from sight. We knew there was another way out in back.

Before we searched I reloaded the Glock. It was down to ten rounds. We had enough ammo for each of the other guns except the pistols. We then searched the offices carefully, always looking out for more undead. We found none. Only then did we search for the building plans we needed. It took hours, and we had to stop a few times when Dave (on sentry duty at the front) told us that there were zombies outside. They always moved on, and we were able to continue. Finally, near dusk, in a back office with a sign on the door reading "Charles Danforth, CFO", we found the plans for the shopping center on top of a pile in one corner.

We wrapped up the whole thing and put it in Jess' pack. We then returned to Dave and saw that there were a few walking dead outside, moving past the building. Dave then pointed at the girl on the floor and asked us if we noticed anything about her that was unusual. We both looked at her, and it took a few minutes before Jess said, "She doesn't have any injuries other than the headshot." I honestly hadn't noticed, but I could see it was true now. Other than the bullet wound she was whole. None of us knew

what to make of it, but some thought gave us some disturbing things to ponder.

Eventually the zombies moved on. We waited for half an hour and then went back out. It was getting dark by now, and this was not an area where the lights were on. We made our slow way back towards where the others waited, taking a long time to move from place to place, always waiting, watching and listening. It was almost easier in the dark. There was less chance they would see us, and the smell always got stronger when they were nearer. At least the temperature lowered as it got dark.

We reached the intersection where we'd shot the three zombies earlier in the day when it all went to shit. The sky was lightening with impending dawn. Three blocks from safety, and about 4:30 in the morning, and Jess steps on a rock in the darkness and twists her ankle. She went down hard, and cried out before she had a chance to muffle it. Dave and I were at her side instantly, and as we crouched down to help her up we heard the moans. All around us, probably all the ones from earlier, plus a few more. We were in it now. I hauled Jess up and she put her arm around my shoulders, and Dave and I shared a look just as the first of them loomed into view. Dave raised the shotgun and fired point blank, and I turned and pulled Jess towards the warehouse, feeling in my gut that we were fucked. I raised the carbine one handed and shot a looming figure, then heard Dave fire again behind me. The muzzle flash showed me about ten walking corpses within twenty-five feet, and I shot the nearest with the carbine, then slung it and pulled out the Glock.

Three of them stepped forward, reaching for us, and Dave was there beside me, firing. I fired the Glock, missed, and fired again. Jess managed a shot with the rifle, but I couldn't tell the result. Then they were in hand-to-hand range, and it got really interesting.

I heard Dave get another shot off, and then he started swinging. One of the damned things grabbed my arm, and I just raised the Glock and shot it in the face. Another was right behind it, and I had to let go of Jess to evade its grasp. It swung its arms at me, and I ducked, and as I came up I shoved it in the chest hard. It went over, and toppled two of its fellows. Dave was swinging the shotgun like a club when I turned, and I shot the one he was fighting through the temple, then turned to Jess. She had turned around and was using her rifle like a spear, stabbing at faces and firing. She ran out of ammo after the fifth shot. I grabbed her around the chest with my left arm and pulled her away from one that got too close, and used the elbow of my right arm to smoke another one in the head. It grabbed on and was trying to get its mouth to my arm when I hooked its legs out from under it, and it dropped like a wet sack of potatoes. I stepped on its neck and head a pop, then pulled Jess away towards the warehouse again. I yelled for Dave, and shot another one in the face as it stepped into my path. I heard a shriek, and then when I looked Dave had one of the things by the throat and was pulling it away from his left leg. He dropped it and fired his shotgun at its head, and then looked at me with eyes suddenly very bright in the dark. "Run! I'm fucked!" he said. We ran. I pushed a few down,

pulling Jess along behind me, and then we were suddenly clear of the horde.

We'd talked about this seriously. If one of us got a bite, they were as good as dead, and we'd leave them. It hurt to do it, but it was our only chance. If we stayed, we all died. I dragged Jess away, and heard the shotgun roar again, and I shot at one more as I helped her limp along as fast as we could. She reached in her coat and pulled a new clip out, and fumbled it into her rifle while we staggered along. I could hear Dave yelling in the background, damning them all, and making as much noise as he could. One last blast he managed to fire, and then he started screaming. I will never in my life forget that sound, if I live to be two hundred. We were probably seventy feet from him, and the nearest zombie to us was about forty feet away. Jess stopped, turned, aimed, and fired, and Dave's screaming cut off like that. The zombies nearest us were getting too close, so we kept going. Ahead of us we suddenly saw lights! The van! I pulled her towards it, and waved as the van pulled up. Sarah was driving, Michael was in the back, Darren was riding shotgun, and I pushed Jess in and climbed in the back on top of her. Sarah hit the gas before we even had the door closed, and we spun around in the street, hitting a walking corpse that got too close. "Where's Dave?" she asked. "Dead. Dave's dead," I said. "Let's get the fuck away from here." So we ran. Drove. Whatever. We fled and left Dave's body there on the street, to become food. The only comfort was that Jess hit him in the head with her last shot. He wasn't going to rise.

8:14 p.m., 26th of July

We held a brief ceremony for Dave earlier. None of us is a priest, so it was non-denominational. Heck, we didn't even know if he went to church. We stopped by a river north of the city, stood in a circle, and I said a few words about Dave. I didn't know him long, but he was a great guy. Funny, smart, and good to have at your back. The others said a few words too, and then we stood there and stood there. Finally we left.

The bad news is that we are down a vehicle and about half our transportable food and water, two guns (shotgun and handgun), and one man. The only thing good I can see in this is we have the plans to the complex. Jess' ankle swelled up pretty bad, but Sarah says nothing is broken. Michael got mad at me for letting his mom get hurt, and I nearly lost it. I could feel the strain breaking through, and rather than break down crying in front of a four year old, I walked away to sit in the van. Sarah came and talked to me after a while. Then Jess. She said that Michael didn't understand what had happened, and she had told him, and he was sorry. He came over a few minutes later and sat on my lap, and I told him it was okay. We had a good hug, and I managed to have a laugh.

We've been looking over the plans now. I think we can do this. I really think we can. I just made myself a promise. If there are survivors inside the store, we will get ALL of them out alive. Every fucking one. I promise this to myself. I promise this to Dave.

July 28, 2004

We spent the last day and a half gathering supplies and making contact with the survivors in the grocery store. Most of yesterday we raided houses and vehicles much more carefully and thoroughly than we had been. We have replaced the food, mostly, and the water, but we need to purify a few more gallons before we risk this rescue. We emptied a few gas tanks, into several jerry cans which are strapped to the back of the van now. The gas tank is full, and late last evening we salvaged a Ford Bronco. Darren and I got it to start, and it blew a big black cloud out the pipe for a few seconds, and then settled into a nice purr. I drove it to the next abandoned car and we drained out the tank into the Bronco. I wanted a larger vehicle, but this will have to do. We tried a Caravan earlier, but it wouldn't even turn over once. I think as time passes more and more vehicles won't respond to salvage attempts.

We drove towards the shopping center this morning, and stopped a few kilometers away, on a road more north of it than the one we had taken previously. We checked a city map and decided to try to find a high point to view the area from, and finally settled on a water tower on a farm just west of where we had stopped. We cleared the house and barn, finding no undead, just five really dead people, four dead horses, and a shotgun in the house. Another 12 gauge, with a box of 25 shells. It's a double barrelled breech loading weapon, not a pump action like the one Dave was using, but a gun is a gun. Jess and I climbed the tower (Jess being careful of her ankle, still tender) while Sarah and Darren watched Michael. Once on top we looked through binoculars to see if our view of the center was good enough to

serve our purposes. It was close. There were trees blocking part of the view, but we could see the roof, part of the doors and windows, and *just* see the tops of the zombies' heads milling around out front. Part of the roof was blocked from us by the front facing sign, and trees made seeing the entire front of the building impossible, but the armoured cars and the trucks and vans were still there. We hoped to see survivors, but there was only the undead. We waited.

Finally, Jess had to go down and take care of Michael. Darren came up and kept me company. Around lunchtime I went down and helped make lunch and Sarah took some up to Darren and kept him company for a while. We went on trading off until about an hour ago. Sarah and Jess were up in the tower while Darren played tag with Michael in the yard, and I kept lookout. Sparkle was sitting on a fence nearby watching, and meowing once in a while. He never went far from us, even when we let him outside. He slept on Michael's or Darren's bed most nights. He was also a great guard cat. If an undead came within fifty feet he started hissing and ran for cover. Anyways, Sarah called down that there were three people on the roof now. I climbed up with a mirror when she came down, and found Jess peering through her scope. I looked through the binoculars, and found three people, alive and apparently healthy, on the roof of the store. They were nowhere near the edge, and I doubt the undead knew they were there. There was a young man, possibly a teenager, with longish dark hair and a black Danzig shirt on. There was a young woman, mid twenties, with a severe burn scar on the side of her face, dressed all in black, dress, boots, and

leather jacket. The Goth look, I guess. These two appeared to be arguing with another man, older, maybe late thirties, short military-style haircut, farmers tan, and wearing a Country 105 FM t-shirt. God, a country fan from Calgary! No wonder the punk guy and Goth girl were arguing with him! I lifted the mirror and flashed sunlight at them, but they didn't appear to notice. Maybe it was a bad angle, or we were just too far away, but they didn't see it. I didn't care if they could see it or not at this point, I was just happy to see other living people. Eventually they stopped talking to each other and went back inside.

So now we know there are at least three survivors. We are staying here until the light fails, and hoping someone comes out so we can try flashing them. This farm is far enough away that if the undead swarm notice us we can flee easily, and it's a nice house with a lot of canned foodstuffs inside. We are going to have a hot meal tonight, and if we can get this woodstove to light we'll try to heat up water for a bath. I just noticed something. When the wind is right we can hear, dimly and distantly, the moaning and gasping of the walking dead. The noise inside the food store must be terrible. Not to mention the smell on the roof, in this summer heat.

July 29, 2004

Nobody showed up on the roof today, and we've kept a constant lookout. Perhaps tomorrow we'll see someone, and can get a flash off to them. All that's needed is a way to communicate. We are close enough that radios would work, but getting one to them could be problematic, unless they have a CB.

A big sheet of paper and some markers would work if they had binoculars or a telescope, but we don't have either. Morse code? None of us know it. It'll have to be flashes until they or we can figure something out.

The undead in this area all appear to have congregated at the shopping center. We haven't seen any here in any direction. We think the noise has drawn them all together down there, like moths drawn to light. Sarah and I talked about the implications of the zombie we found in Can-Pro's office. She thinks, and I agree with her, that it means that the agent that causes us to reanimate after we die is present in the environment now. It's no longer necessary for a zombie to kill its victim via a bite or scratch. The long term implications are scary. We probably all have this virus, or bacteria, or whatever it is. Why it hasn't killed us yet and reanimated us, I have no idea. I would love to run these thoughts by a biologist or a geneticist to see what they think, but where I am going to meet one now, I have no idea.

Time to go. Jess and I have a dinner planned for the others, and I have to go help out. Darren is up in the tower right now, keeping watch, and Sarah is keeping Michael distracted so Jess can cook. She's also decided to teach us all First Aid so we can be more helpful if/when we meet other survivors. First lesson is after supper.

July 30, 2004, 11:27 p.m.

We made contact about 4 p.m. The Goth girl came out onto the roof alone around 3:45 and lit up a

cigarette. She stood in the center of the roof and looked away to the south for a while, until her cigarette was gone. Then she walked along the paving stones on the roof, and did this little dance thing. When she turned around I was ready with the mirror, and I flashed it three times at her. She didn't appear to notice at first, so I did it again, and she was turning to look another way then, so I thought I'd lost that chance, but she stopped and turned back towards us. I flashed three times again, and Jess laughed as she saw the expression on Goth Girl's face. She nearly had to pick her jaw up off the ground. She ran towards the roof hatch while trying to keep an eye on our location, and nearly fell once. She reached the hatch and appeared to call down, and a minute later the country fan came up with a pair of binoculars. She pointed in our direction, and I flashed again. Country Fan trained the binoculars on us, so I waved. So did Jess. He must have seen her looking through the rifle scope at him, since he flinched, but he waved back after a second.

Jess called down that we had contact with them, and then returned to her scope. I was watching as Country Fan handed the Goth Girl the binoculars, and she waved when she saw us too, and then started jumping about and laughing. Country Fan said something to her and started towards the access hatch, and climbed down while Goth Girl kept waving and smiling. A few minutes later people started climbing onto the roof, and Country Fan had a whiteboard and a few markers with him. Within a minute there were seven people on the roof, three women and four men. They all looked excited to see us, and waved and laughed. Country Fan wrote something on the sign and held it up. I couldn't

make it out, but Jess could. It said “We are happy to see you!” He held it there until we waved again, then took it down and wrote “One flash = YES, Two flashes = NO”, and I flashed once to show I understood. He then wrote “Are there only two of you?”

NO.

“How many are you?” I flashed five times. There was some discussion as Goth Girl relayed my answer.

“Do you have vehicles?”

YES.

“Do you have a CB radio?”

YES. They had a radio! This would make things so much easier if they had a radio.

“Channel 5 in 5 minutes? Can we talk?”

YES.

We rushed down, calling to Sarah to get on Channel Five right away. She ran for the van and turned the radio on, and Darren grabbed Michael and brought him along too. Jess and I made it there in a few minutes, and as we arrived we heard a man saying hello.

We talked to them for about fifteen minutes. There were seven of them, and they’d been inside the store for forty-three days. They had all ended up there at roughly the same time, and two armoured car guards had blocked the doors before a crowd of a few hundred zombies had arrived. They were Marty (whom I called Country Fan earlier) and his daughter Amanda (aka Goth Girl. Guess that makes Marty older than I thought at first), her boyfriend Adam and his cousin Christie, a little girl named Megan (about 8, and no one knew where her parents

were), and Jay and Sanji Singh, brothers from Vancouver. Marty was the oldest one there. There had been nine of them, but the two armoured car security guards had left to try to find help fifteen days ago, and hadn't been seen since. They had a rifle and a handgun, several baseball bats, and a machete between them, and that was it. The vehicles outside were all either broken down or out of gas or surrounded by walking dead, so were useless. They had plenty of food and water, and up until eight days ago the power had been on so they'd had perishables (wisely eating them first). They were secure inside, but knew they couldn't last there, and the sheer weight of the undead would find a way in eventually. We introduced ourselves, told our story briefly, and told them our plan to get them out. There were risks involved, and getting enough transportation for all of us was going to be problematic. Sure, there were tons of cars around, but finding gas and keys and equipment was going to be a major undertaking for us. They could hold out long enough to let us do that, and we agreed that the situation they were in was bad. We signed off with the promise to start looking for vehicles to carry everyone, and to explore the route through the storm sewers. They would prepare a grocery list we called in, and we'd try to get as much food and supplies out as we could. Each person would carry a pack with as much dehydrated or packaged foods as they could, and we'd assume only one trip, one way. After we got to the vehicles we'd try to get as much distance between us and the swarm as we could. We could decide where to go after we had them all out.

After we signed off, we all talked about the chances we had of pulling this off. We all wanted to try, since this was the first group of any size any of us had seen since the convoy passed us in Rogers Pass. That seems like ages ago now. We have all decided to get some sleep now, and we'll start looking for vehicles in the morning. I have first watch.

July 31, 2004

I dreamed last night that I was running through fields of waist-high grass and thistles, and that I was being chased. I knew in the dream that if I stopped and turned around *they* would get me. I was terrified, even though it was a bright sunny day, with fluffy clouds and a bright blue sky. I had this feeling that behind me there were storm clouds, just waiting to wash over me, and in the shadow of those clouds were thousands and thousands of the walking dead. I was having trouble breathing, and I could hear a rumbling, like distant thunder, that came and went like a tide rolling in and out. I woke up with Jess snoring beside me, Sparkle purring on my chest, and bright sunlight streaming onto my face.

God, I *hate* dreams like that...

We got up late, Jess and I, and found everyone else awake and waiting for us. After a quick breakfast and a wash we went looking for new cars or trucks to salvage. The first five we thought might be good turned out either to not start, or have hidden problems like flat tires or no fuel. The sixth, a Dodge Caravan, started easily and had $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tank in it. We went through it and stripped out the junk

we didn't need, and Sarah took the drivers seat with Darren along to ride shotgun. We wanted another one just to be safe, so we kept looking. By this afternoon we had found a Ford F350 that turned over on the second try, had $\frac{1}{4}$ of a tank of gas, and a box of ammo in the glove box that fits the hunting rifle, so we have another 50 rounds for the 30.-06, for a total of about 285. If I could find some more ammo for this Glock I'd be really happy. I'm down to 4 rounds.

We drove back to the house we had been at before, slow and careful. Jess drove the Odyssey, I drove the F350, and Sarah took the Caravan. We were spread kind of thin between three vehicles, but we were going to be leaving two of them at a storm sewer exit. A late lunch was eaten, and then we siphoned the tanks of the farm truck outside into the F350, and I used the last of the case of motor oil we had to change the oil on the Caravan and Ford. The Bronco we salvaged the other day was leaking transmission fluid all over the place this morning, so we drained its tank and left it, moving the supplies from it to the other vehicles. Looking around this farm, Darren found a generator in a shed, and several lanterns in the barn. The generator would make too much noise to use, but the lanterns could come in handy.

We are all going to go and scout out the storm sewer entrances to the south of the complex. It could take a while, since we have to go around the swarm and find a safe place to operate from. We are likely going to do the same as last time, but Jess and I will go in daylight this time, and hopefully not be out overnight again.

August 2, 2004

The storm sewers may pose a few problems. Access will be the biggest one, and then we have to deal with claustrophobia. We parked the van yesterday in a residential area of spread out houses and fields, where some construction appeared to be going on before the start of this nightmare. We chose this area specifically because the houses were probably uninhabited at the time, it was fairly close to the shops without being in sight of the horde, and the storm sewer was unburied. We managed to avoid the few walking dead we saw on the way here, but had a scary moment once we arrived. The area wasn't entirely abandoned. We parked behind a construction trailer sitting in an overgrown field, next to a large pile of concrete pipes (presumably the pieces of the sewer) and as we were getting out we saw something move near the pipe sections. Sarah and I cautiously went to check it out, and we found a re-animated construction worker pinned beneath one of the sections. He was wearing a safety vest, and a hardhat lay nearby. A section had fallen loose and crushed his legs, so he couldn't move, and he had several old bite marks on his arms and neck. He was flailing at us and moving his mouth, but there was no way he could reach us. From the look of the weeds and debris, he had been here since this started, about two months or so. Sarah went back to the van and got the fire axe, and handed it to me. I slung the carbine and stepped closer to this unfortunate, so I was standing just out of reach of his arms. He was lifting his torso off the ground with one arm, and reaching to me with the other. I lifted the axe and brought the blade down on the top of the skull hard, and that was that. I

cleaned the axe with some water and bleach while the others checked the area, and then we got down to business.

The sewer access here was blocked by a safety gate designed to keep animals and small kids out of it while it was being laid in. There was a padlock on it, and rather than search for keys we used a pry bar to snap it off. We took a look at the sewer pipe. It had maybe an inch of water in it here, and the pipe itself was about four feet across on the inside. So it would be dark and cramped and wet in there. We had the maps of the mall area, and the sewer grid was shown on one page. It appeared that this area we were in was connected, but there were several turns and rises between here and there. Darren and I took some flashlights and went in a ways. It was blacker than night in there, rocks of various sizes were littering the floor, and there was a faint trickle of water that could be heard, but other than that it seemed doable. We got to the first turn and found the first problem. There was a pile of tree limbs blocking the way we needed to turn. If it was too deep, it would be impossible to clear out. After poking and prodding the pile for a while we got a few branches out, but the great mass was stuck. We went back and told the other what we'd found, and decided on a plan of action. After a quick lunch I took the axe, a larger flashlight and spare batteries, and returned with Sarah this time. It took an hour of hard work in the dark, hacking the branches and mud apart, until between us we finally cleared the block away. When it finally came loose a lot of water rushed out with it, and we both got soaked to the skin very quickly. We left it to drain, and went out the way we had come in to dry off.

Outside we told the others what we'd found, and got changed into dry clothing. We spent a little while talking to Marty on the radio, getting things ready on his end. His group was preparing to travel, sorting what they'd bring and leave behind. There were quite a lot of useful things in there, so the list of potential supplies had grown quickly. We had to get it pared down again or nobody would be able to move. So preserved and dried foods were top on the list along with water, first aid supplies, personal hygiene, and spare batteries and clothing. I asked Marty to bring along a few boxes of condoms too, and I think I did it with a straight face.

By that time it was mid-afternoon. We decided on one more trip into the sewer to plot the route. This time it was Darren and I again. We brought along the Glock, carbine, and 30-.06, backpacks with extra flashlights and batteries, a short rope and gloves, and the fire axe. We each took a large water bottle and some food, but were not planning to be in there too late. We set off around 4:30 and made good time for the first hour or so. We passed manhole covers, and took the opportunity to stand upright again for a few seconds each time. The water level was lower now, only a few inches, but it was a constant stream. Often we had to step around boulders, clumps of tree branches, and once a dead dog, though I have no idea how it got down there. We paused to pull the dog carcass to a manhole, since it was wider there, and stuff it to the side. As we paused for a breather around 5:45 at another manhole ladder we could hear the moans and croaks of the undead above us. We must have been nearby to the complex. We had actually had to make climbs at some of the ladders, only a few feet each time,

but it adds up. Darren and I stood there looking at each other in the dim light of a flashlight, listening to the sounds, and then quietly we turned into the passage and kept going.

Another twenty minutes brought us to the end. We'd had a really easy time of it so far, and I was relieved. There was a ladder leading up, and according to the prints it should lead directly into the mechanical room of the complex. We looked up, and there was daylight coming in from around the hatch, a thin line of bright sky. That wasn't right. It should be indoors. I climbed up cautiously, and could see through a small gap at one edge of the cover. It was outside. From underneath it was a large hinged cover that rested on a metal framework in the concrete. I could actually see outside, but the view was not so good. All I could see was a grey metal pipe, a concrete wall, and the edge of a chain link fence off to the right. I could hear the swarm well enough though, and smell them, even if I couldn't see them. I climbed back down as quietly as I could and told Darren what I had found. This was going to be harder than we had first thought.

After some discussion we made our way back to the construction end of the sewer, and the ladies were very relieved when we emerged, filthy and wet, from the pipe. That was around 7:15, and we had a dinner and decided to move into one of the more completed houses for shelter. We were just doing that when we heard and saw more aircraft go over. They were again quite high up, and when we looked we could see it was a Hercules or something that size, plus two more fighter escorts. The new thing was they were *going the other way this time*. Back

the way they had come from when we had seen them go over days ago. We watched until they were out of sight and hearing, then went and cleared the house. It was utterly empty, and we all bedded down on sleeping bags and blankets in the main room. I took first watch.

This morning we called Marty and talked about what we'd seen. He sent Adam and Sanji to have a look over the edge at the back and see if they could find what I had described. They did. There was good news and bad news. The good news was that they could see the cover plate out back of the building, surrounded by a fence and undisturbed, and he thought they had the padlock key. The bad news was the fifteen feet between the back door of the store and the gate on the fence was home to about thirty or forty of the zombies, and several hundred more were within easy pursuit distance if someone came out that way. My guess was that the plans had changed between this version of the prints and what had been built. Those fifteen feet might as well have been fifteen kilometers.

Marty called back about half an hour later and told us they had cooked up a plan to distract the undead long enough for someone to rush out, open the locks on the gate and cover door, and then retreat inside again. He said it was going to take a while to set up, but it would probably work. I asked what the plan was and he told me it was something stupid, and I didn't want to know. This only got us all more curious, so I kept pushing him to tell us. Finally he caved. They had figured out these damned things were attracted to light (or motion) and noise, so they were going to make a loud noise at the front of the

store by lowering a ghetto blaster with a loud cd in it down to about ten feet from the ground, and let it play. If the zombies fell for it (and I was sure they would, they're no brighter than a can of slugs) they'd wait until all were around the sides of the building away from the cage, and Marty would go and unlock the gate and cover. He'd then retreat back inside until we got there to show them the way out. Hopefully the swarm would be distracted long enough to get everyone away. I'd hate to leave anybody at all, and I didn't give a chain link fence much chance of holding back several thousand of those things for longer than a minute or so. If they caught sight or sound of any one of the survivors it would become very bad, very quickly.

The problem was we'd have to go out there and wait in the tunnel for the door to open from above, and then get everyone in as fast as we could. We also needed to move the vehicles here, one at a time. This increased the risks substantially. Every trip made it more likely we'd be seen or heard. So we planned to get this done tomorrow. We spent part of the day here today moving the vehicles, parking them with keys in the ignitions, just up the slope from the opening to the sewer. This took some time, since we had to avoid a few undead. Fortunately they are pretty stupid, so it's easy once we know how they act. So now it's evening, getting late, and we are holed up in the house again. I'm taking first watch again, and then Jess is relieving me. First thing tomorrow we contact Marty again and Darren and I will head down the sewer while Jess and Sarah guard the entrance. I wish we had a couple radios to carry with us. I wish we could get

more supplies out of there. I wish I was on vacation in Bermuda, but what can you do, really?

August 3, 2004, 10:15 p.m.

I'm injured, and so is Marty. Marty could die, he shattered a rib when he fell down the ladder, and Sarah thinks bits of it may have torn some lung tissue. We'll know in a day or so, if he starts spitting up blood. My own injury is less life threatening. I have a badly sprained ankle. Jess and I can hobble along together now. Darren's already said how cute that would be.

We managed to make it to the tunnel under the store easily this morning, and faster than we expected. Scouting the route really cut some time off the travel. The plan seemed to be working, and we could hear some loud C&W music being played on a stereo out of sight. For us to hear it here in the sewer it must have been loud indeed. After a while the undead must have moved away around the other side of the building, but this took a long time. Understandable when you are talking about so many of them. They didn't move like a herd animal either. Each one chose to go check out the noise, and bumped into its fellows seeking a path of least resistance to the front of the building. The ladder was about twelve feet high, and there was a drop at the bottom of about four feet. Numerous smaller pipes met the main storm sewer here, but they were trickling rather than gushing.

Five minutes later we heard them coming. Someone, presumably Marty, opened the gate and approached the lock on the door above my head. He

pulled it open and there I was. He jumped back in surprise, then realizing who I was he grinned and shook my hand. After that he didn't waste any time, just started passing me packs to drop down to Darren below. He had made up two more, one for Darren and myself, since we hadn't brought a pack along. Extra supplies? Hell yes!

Within two minutes we had the packs at the bottom of the ladder, and it was time for people. First was the little girl, who looked terrified at first, but put up a good brave face and climbed down after me. She was followed by Christie, a young blonde girl who held Megan's hand tightly at the bottom. They both got packs on, and I saw that Darren already had his on. Jay came next, and shook hands with us and said hello, then grabbed a pack himself. Amanda and Adam followed, and Sanji was just starting down the ladder when we all heard the sudden uproar from above. My guess is that one or two of the dead had come back around the building and had seen Marty and Sanji starting to climb down. Sanji yelled and came down so fast I thought he'd let go. He landed as I was telling Darren to lead them out, and everyone turned on flashlights. Marty was still up there, and just as I was about to start climbing to see why, he jumped into the shaft and tried to grab a rung. He missed and fell about halfway before he grabbed on. He cried out then dropped the rest of the way, landing heavily. The others were well down the tunnel by now, Darren leading them to the waiting vans and trucks. I helped Marty up and he gasped out that he'd locked the gate before the undead could knock it in, and it should hold for a while. I had my doubts, but

grabbed the last two packs and pushed him ahead of me into the dark tunnel.

About three minutes later we heard a crash behind us. I was guessing that it was the fence collapsing, and that soon the tunnel would be hip-deep in the crouching dead. I had the Glock in hand, and a large maglite and I turned around and aimed both back where we had just come from. I could hear them groaning as well as the sound of the metal being bashed around, but I didn't see anything following us. I kept going, and soon caught up with Marty. He was wheezing and panting, and I hate to think what a smashed rib must have been doing to him, but he kept right on going. I could dimly see the others ahead, the light of their flashlights just coming back to us.

I heard a loud thump behind me, then another, and then several more. I guessed that the fence had been pulled away from the opening in the ground, and that several zombies had just fallen into the pit. I really hoped enough would all fall on top of each other that they couldn't pursue us, but I wasn't going to bet on that. Darren and I had a surprise planned up ahead just in case.

We came to the first turn, and I showed Marty which way to go. When he was safely off down the tunnel I turned to the gas can we had left here earlier, and poured a few precious liters of gasoline all over the tunnel mouth and farther inside the sewer. I then stood well back and got out a pack of matches, and flicked a lit match at the far wall. Almost instantly there was a hot dry blast, and for the second time during a rescue I found myself on

my ass. Flames leapt up the walls and along the sewer pipe behind me, and hopefully would burn long enough for us to get out. I was just about to turn and follow when I saw one come along the tunnel towards the fire. It must have seen me, and it picked up the pace. An old man, this one was, had been. He stopped at the fire's edge, and as I backed away he reached out towards me. Something black and wet dripped from his mouth as he snarled, and I had to resist the urge to shoot him. That image was going to cause me some lost sleep, I just knew it. I couldn't see others behind, but they must be following. I turned and went along as quick as I could. There was no telling how long those flames would last. Sheer pressure from behind might even push many of them through the flames.

I caught up to Marty at the second-to-last turn, and he seemed in a lot of pain. I told him it wasn't far now, and he moved on. We made it to the last turn, and just as we stepped down into the last stretch of tunnel I turned my left ankle on some rock or root or branch buried in the muck. I went down. The pain was unreal, and as I lay there in the mud gasping at the thought of a broken ankle, I was sure I could hear the moans of the undead come from the tunnel behind me. That was motivation enough. Marty helped me up with his left arm, but kept the right clutched to his side. He gritted his teeth the whole time, but the two of us managed to help each other along the tunnel towards daylight. Fifteen excruciating minutes later and the two of us staggered outside. Darren and Jess and Sarah and Sanji were all aiming guns at the tunnel, and put them up when they saw it was us. The other folk were loading the packs into the vehicles quietly, and

turned to look when we came outside. Darren jumped down and slammed the gate closed behind us, and then Jay and Adam pushed several large blocks of concrete slab down on top of it. Jess took charge while Sarah checked us both over. She made a point of asking if either of us had been bitten. We were then helped into the vehicles, and we drove away from there. Within fifteen minutes we had left the city, on a direct route that we had planned out earlier. We went northwest, going well around the swarm, and the shopping center, until we were about a dozen kilometers away. We then pulled over, having seen no undead anywhere nearby, and Sarah gave Marty a thorough exam. She gave him painkillers, wrapped his chest in a large tight bandage, and told us his ribs were busted pretty badly. My ankle got a tensor bandage. It wasn't broken, it just hurt a lot, and she told me not to be a baby about it. Ha!

We also took the time to get introduced. They all seemed like nice folks, were really happy to be out of the store. We decided to find a safe place to sleep for tonight, and discuss plans for the future. I had some ideas in that direction that I wanted to share, but maybe after a meal and some getting to know each other.

August 4, 2004

Sitting around a wood-burning stove in an empty house, drinking instant coffee, tea, and iced tea (Oh thank you, thank you Amanda for bringing that!) all day, talking, making plans, and cooking a big meal was pretty much all we did today. Sanji turns out to have been a police officer, VPD for six years, and

knew a lot about the guns we had, and what to look for if we found any more. Jess and Sanji were talking shop like old friends, and we left them to it. Amanda and Adam are a couple, and were living together before the rise, and both were musicians who had been planning a tour of their band, Elegant Blasphemies (and thank you, thank you Amanda for NOT playing any of your music for us!), but it got interrupted by the re-animation of several million corpses. Jay is a dentist! That's great news, since we probably all need a little check-up by now, though without Novocain it'll hurt a little if we need work done. Christie is 21, was just going to college for her first semester of Criminology, and has decided to pursue a major course in Survival instead. She's been looking after Megan, whom she found on the street all alone and crying and about to be attacked by a crowd of zombies, and has become a surrogate mom to her. Megan is quiet and shy, but was very happy to meet Sparkle and Michael, and Jess let her sleep with Michael and the cat last night.

Marty is a mess. His broken ribs (its plural for sure) are painful and the bruising will be spectacular, but it looks like he didn't puncture a lung. He'll be in bed a few days, and then he's allowed to be up and about. He argues with Amanda all the time, about anything. She is definitely his daughter, she argues right back. Adam just stands aside and lets them go to it. Smart guy. Apparently Amanda's burn was a result of trying something similar to what I did when we rescued Dave. She set a car on fire to distract some pursuing undead, and it blew up before she got away. Sarah has examined everyone,

and says Amanda has some impressive scars from the shrapnel, but nothing that didn't heal cleanly.

We talked a lot about possible destinations. The amount of scavenging we'll need to do has just increased a lot. We talked about where we could go, and an island off the coast was suggested, as was a farmstead somewhere in the backwoods, or a small town that managed to isolate itself (but where we would find that I have no idea). I think I surprised everyone when I suggested CFB Cold Lake. After the initial 'what the hell?' reaction I explained my thoughts. The military at Cold Lake would have likely survived an outbreak like this, and would have weapons, supplies, and vehicles, not to mention a hospital, a huge lake for water, and plenty of room safe from the hordes of walking dead things. Sanji asked me what made me think they had survived. I reminded him of the planes we have seen three times now, on the same course, one of them just a few days ago. It seemed like a good bet that the base was intact if they were running air flights out of it. We had a map of Alberta, so we looked at it and I showed them where Cold Lake was. I also explained that while it was warm now, in a few months it was going to be freezing at night, and without proper shelter we'd all likely have a much harder time surviving.

It took some more talking, but in the end we decided that it was our best option. The journey would be long and dangerous, but I hoped we might rescue others *en route*, gather more weapons and vehicles, and get safely to Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake. What we'd find there was anybody's guess. We leave in the morning.

End of Part Two

August 5, 2004, somewhere east of Prince George

I am in hell. I am typing this as we drive. It's around 4:15, and for the last hour Amanda and Adam have been arguing. Amanda is driving, I am in the passenger seat of the Odyssey, Jess and Adam and Michael are in the back, and the others are behind us split up between the other vehicles. My ankle won't let me drive, but at this point I think I'd rather walk. Without weapons. Through the horde of undead we just left behind, wearing barbeque sauce and a sign that says "Eat me". What are they arguing about? The topic for the last hour has been whether the last album by a mysterious German black metal band called *Gemalte Leiche*, an opus with the pretentious title of *Lattentragödie* is superior to the previous album, *Über Winter Hinaus*. After listening to this for an hour I think I may go completely mad. It has become apparent that Amanda's chief method of communication is argument, and she's pretty good at it.

Today we left early, everyone eager to be away from there. We skirted the city in a small convoy of vehicles, and were very careful to avoid as many of the undead as we could. A few got in the way, here and there, but after running two of them over in the F350, we found it was easier to drive around them and watch them try to figure out which vehicle to chase. They inevitably chose the nearest.

We got onto Highway 16 heading east around 11 this morning, and have stopped three times at abandoned vehicles to siphon gas or check for supplies. We haven't found a lot. The map shows this road goes on quite a ways before we'll see another town, so we are stopping every chance we get. We plan to stop at the next house we see and search it for supplies, or at a store if we see one. We'll be needing groceries pretty soon with this many to feed.

6:10 p.m.

We found a police cruiser, an RCMP Ford Explorer actually, off the road and down a hillside. The front end was wrapped around a tree, and the officer in the drivers' seat was rather dead. The zombie was in the backseat, behind a plastic partition, with handcuffs on. Jay and Sarah and Darren went to look around while Jess and I played sentry up at the roadside. The others sat in the cars or stood outside. I heard a shot, probably Sarah killing the zombie, and a few minutes later they came back with some gear. There was a roadside emergency kit, a shotgun with 24 shells, and another Glock with four clips, all full. Sanji got the handgun, and we shared the clips. There was no food or water, but it was nice to have the guns.

Within a few more kilometers we found an empty house, a large six-bedroom family house with a small pool out the back. The pool was a mess, and we avoided it. The filth in it was black and thick, and we didn't want to know what was in there. The house was empty. No food, very little in the way of supplies, and even the beds were missing sheets and

blankets. We suspected some other group of survivors had been here and cleaned the place out. We decided to stay, since it was secure enough, we had seen no undead for a while, and it was getting on in the day. Better to have a secure place to stay before it gets close to dark. Jess and I even get a room to ourselves, on the second floor. On account of us both being injured we are excused from sentry duty tonight!

Marty seems to be doing a little better. We give him painkillers when he complains too much. Sarah is keeping a close eye on him, and hoping we can keep him from getting an infection. Now I need to go help with dinner. Using the propane BBQ we found in the garage, we are cooking stew and chili, making coffee, and are going to try to bake some of those instant cinnamon rolls.

August 7, 2004

It's raining this morning. We were awakened yesterday morning by Jay (who was on sentry duty) to find a walking dead standing in the fog outside, right between the vehicles. Jay claims that as the fog lifted he could see this dead fellow just standing there, and he had no idea where the zombie came from. We all kept away from the windows except for furtive peaks out to see if there were more nearby, but the one was all we could see. He was probably a trucker from the look of him, dressed in jeans and a fleece vest, leather gloves on his hands, and a bright red baseball cap on his head. He was probably in his early thirties. He was just standing there, facing the Caravan, not even looking in the direction of the house. He was utterly still until a

bird flew by, then he moved his head to track it, and when it was out of sight he just turned his head back to face forward.

So we stayed for an hour to make sure the fog had lifted well enough to see, and also to be sure that no more zombies were waiting in the distance. When the hour was up we could see that he was alone. I took the carbine and went up to the bedroom overlooking the driveway, and slowly opened the window, only a few inches, making almost no sound. I saw my angle would hit the F350 if I shot at him, so we decided one of us had to go outside and deal with this. Sanji and Sarah volunteered, and began making plans to do it quietly. Sanji had his Glock, but we all hoped he wouldn't need it. Sarah took the fire-axe, my Glock (newly reloaded with a full clip), and they went out the back of the house while Jess and I went upstairs to provide cover if they needed it.

The undead trucker just stood there until Sanji walked out from behind the house and onto the opposite side of the Caravan from where the dead man was standing. The change was immediate. The trucker tried to reach through the glass to get at him and started that damned noise up. Finding his way blocked he started to the right, trying to walk around the van but keeping bumping into it as he went. He was quicker than a lot of them. Sanji kept the gun out and aimed, but didn't fire. He walked right as well, keeping the van between himself and the former trucker. Once they had traded starting spots Sanji jumped around a bit, keeping the zombie in one spot trying to figure out which was the shortest route to go. He didn't even notice Sarah

behind him until her fire-axe sank point first into the side of his head. It was a horrible sight. He dropped and flopped around on the ground for a full twenty seconds, probably the random firings of nerves. Then he was still. She retrieved the axe and went to clean it off, and Sanji came and stood over the corpse. His eyes followed Sarah as she walked away, or possibly he was watching the gore encrusted axe, and thinking how easily my sister had just destroyed a walking corpse with it.

After that we all got ready to leave. Jess is walking fine now, and my own ankle swelling is much smaller. Sanji and Darren dragged the body away so the kids wouldn't have to see it when we got into the vehicles. We loaded the vehicles and all climbed in, and made our way east. The Yellowhead Highway, number 16, the Northern Trans-Canada, is truly a beautiful place to travel through. We saw many deer, a few bears, and a large number of birds. The large animals still shied away and left the road when they saw or heard us coming, but they appeared to be thriving. The only thing that took away from the beauty was the large number of abandoned vehicles, some with corpses, and some without. We managed to fill all the gas tanks up by noon, and if we found a gas can we put it in the back of the F350. After fifty kilometers the abandoned cars dwindled out, and finally stopped entirely. I don't know why that would be, but the highway here is largely empty, and very quiet. We drove along slowly, watching out for areas where the road had washed out or rubble from the slopes had fallen. We were getting back into serious mountains, and the ice and snow on the peaks was getting more pronounced.

We stopped for the evening at Slim Creek Provincial Park, a smallish park with no camping facilities except a roadside turnout and a pit toilet. It was very quiet as we got out to stretch, and we hadn't seen a car or walking dead thing in a long time. We had no tents, so it looked like we'd be sleeping in the vehicle seats. At least we could make hot food. Jess and I set up the camp stove and started on dinner while Jay and Sarah and Darren watched the kids play. Marty came over to us and helped, and Sanji and Amanda and Adam went for a short walk (not out of sight). Christie watched Megan for a bit, then came over and talked to us while helping make dinner. In all, we had a pleasant evening. The insects were minimal, scenery was fantastic, the air was clean and fresh, and the lack of undead was a relief.

We got talking about why we hadn't seen other survivors. Surely there must be more people than just us alive in the area. Come to think of it, we hadn't seen that high a number of undead either. Not equal to the population, anyways. Sure, a lot of people had died or been devoured right after the dead walked, but what about after? Why hadn't we seen other groups wandering like we were doing? I told them all about the caravan of motorcycles and cars we had seen in Rogers Pass, but we hadn't seen anything like it since. We were in a large unpopulated area, I admit, but we were on a highway, a well maintained road (before, anyways) between provinces. None of us knew the answer.

This morning, after a bad nights sleep in the Caravan, it's raining and overcast. We made hot tea to warm ourselves, and are about to get on the road

again. All the towns along Highway 16 are off the road a ways until McBride. It's where the railway and highway cross. We hope to make it there by sundown. We'll be going slowly to watch for rocks and washouts

August 8, 2004, 11 p.m.

We arrived at McBride just before 4 p.m. yesterday. A sign outside town said it had a population of 725. Nobody was home when we got there. We'd seen this before, towns entirely depopulated and empty of both the living and undead. It was always creepy, and this was no exception. The highway ran alongside the train tracks on our right, then veered off to pass north of the main streets of the town itself, and as we passed we could see the empty houses. The doors were all open, and the black windows stared like dark eyes as we drove along. Nothing moved. There were a few cars and trucks abandoned, and some trash littering the streets, but it was entirely quiet. We came to a bridge over the Fraser River (the same one that ran through Prince George and all the way to Vancouver? I wasn't sure), and passed out of that dead town without stopping. A few kilometers farther on and we stopped to fill the gas tanks up. We were in a valley between high mountains here, following the road southeast.

We stopped at a roadside turnout and parked for the night. There was a motorcycle in the long grass beside the pit toilet, a Kawasaki. It was lying on its side and looked like it had been there a while. Grass

was growing straight up through the engine block and wheels. Looking around cautiously we found a small tent staked down, a three man dome tent, about fifty feet back from the bike, and out of sight of the road. There was what looked like a big bloodstain inside the tent, and the back panel was ripped away. A filthy sleeping bag was all that was left, and mice had been nesting in it. Whatever happened here was a long time ago. We all slept lightly that night anyways. There was a definite chill in the air this high when we got up this morning.

I was on last watch, so I got to see the sun rise, and I made tea for everyone to help chase off the chill. It was a good reminder of the looming winter. I know it's still August, but this is Canada, and it can snow here at any time.

Today we ran into problems. We made it a few dozen kilometers when we found part of the road had been washed out. It was by Rearguard Falls Provincial Park. The rains and lack of road maintenance had combined to undermine the surface, and a big chunk of highway had slid about six feet. There was a gap of a few feet between the road and the migrant piece, so we decided we'd have to go around it. I took the F350 first, and it handled the wet grass on the side of the road fairly well. The Caravan came next, Sanji driving, and slid a bit, kicking up some mud, but it managed to get onto the pavement again. Sarah drove the Odyssey, and it almost got stuck in the mud where the Caravan had slid, and did get stuck a few feet later on. Most of us except for Darren and Jess (lookouts) and Marty (busted ribs) piled out to help

push it out and onto the road again, getting wet and muddy as a result. These vehicles are great on the roads, these minivans, but take them off-road and you see what they aren't so good at.

We found the turnoff for the Continental Divide, where the 16 climbs up and up. This was our route, up into the clouds and away from the lower mountains behind us. Ahead of us, across the Alberta border, was Jasper. We'd be coming at it from another direction this time, and could avoid the town completely if we so chose, but I have to admit I am curious to see what it's like now. Last time I was there was just after this all started.

We've stopped at a campground called Mount Robson. There's a sign that points to the actual mountain, with a peak of 3954 meters. We found a few tons of firewood, another abandoned tent, this one empty, so we are taking it. Jay saw a wolf earlier, looking at us from across the road. It stared for a few moments then went on its way. Again we are sleeping in the vehicles. It's quite chill outside, and I am just finishing this before curling up next to Jess, Michael and Sparkle between us. We are all glad we brought those spare blankets along with us. Darren is on guard right now. He's turning 16 in three days, he told us. I thought he was older. But he insists, so Jess and I are planning something for him. He's really like no 16 year old I ever knew. In the months we've known him he's become a lot more mature and serious. I guess we all have.

August 9, 2004

Just over the Alberta border is the town of Jasper. I had a cabin near here once. That seems so long ago now. Before the dead walked I would go there with whatever girlfriend I had at the time, spend a weekend with wine and skiing, and go back to Calgary and get back to life as usual. Nothing is “as usual” now, of course. Most of those girlfriends are probably dead now, and I don’t even want to imagine them as undead.

We cruised down the highway from the pass slowly, and as we came into sight of the first service station the adrenalin kicked in. There was a fuel tanker parked there! I motioned for Jess to pull over, as we were in the lead van. The others pulled over behind us. I took her rifle and leaned out the window with it, peering through the scope. The tanker was pulled up beside the building, not in the usual ‘blocking all lanes’ mode for refuelling the underground tanks. Three cars and a motorcycle were parked in the lot, and the motorcycle was tipped over. One of the cars was destroyed, looking a lot like a group of zombies had shattered all the windows and torn the doors open. I checked around the car and sure enough there were bones and a human skull scattered about. The other two cars were intact. From here I didn’t see any undead, but that meant nothing. Without going down there we wouldn’t be able to tell.

I got out and walked back to the other vehicles, and told everyone what I had seen. We were all in agreement that the tanker was a priority. It would make life a *lot* easier if we didn’t keep needing to scavenge fuel. So we looked and listened for a good half hour, and after seeing nothing moving we decided what to do. Jess would stay up on the ridge

as our lookout/sniper, and Sanji, myself, and Darren would walk down towards the tanker. Jay and Amanda would come halfway with us with the Caravan, and then wait there should we need a hasty rescue. That left Sarah, Adam, and Christie up on the hill with Jess to watch the kids and Marty. I had the carbine and my Glock, Sanji was armed with the police shotgun, and Darren had the 30.-06. That left the rest of the guns with Jess and the 'rescue squad', whom I hoped we wouldn't need.

My ankle was doing fine as we headed down the road towards the gas station. We didn't talk, just used hand signals to indicate what we were doing. Sanji and I had devised them, based on his prior military and police work. So we went along with me on the left, and Darren in the center. We were spread apart a bit, and we looked around whenever we stopped, just to be safe. As we got to the edge of the gas station lot we could see grass was making inroads, along with weeds in the cracks, and a birds nest was being built above the first gas pump, high up in the canopy. The cab of the tanker truck was shut, and Sanji walked over to it and tried the door. It was locked, and the cab was empty. It looked in decent shape though, no flat tires or leaks, windows all intact. We decided to look around for a key. The service station was locked as well, and nobody appeared to be inside, living or dead. We walked around the back cautiously, and tried the back door. It was locked too, so we returned to the front. There was a thick line of trees out back, so we didn't think we'd have trouble staying out of sight of whatever was in the area. We conversed briefly, and decided to look around a bit more for a key hidden outside, and then break in if we couldn't find one. After five

minutes more of turning over rocks and looking on door sills we hadn't found anything, but Darren beckoned us to a window and we peered in at what he pointed at. A large set of keys was hung on the wall behind the cashiers' station, with a tag that clearly read 'Front Door'. We broke in.

We did this with a roll of duct tape and a pry bar. We taped the glass panel on the front door, and then simply bashed it. It came out after three blows, and no glass fell to tinkle on the ground. The sound of the blows was muffled by the tape, and wasn't that loud. We placed the glass on the ground and walked in through the doorframe. It smelled stale, like it had been locked up for months. We cleared all the rooms first, opening the freezers, bathrooms, employee change room, and office. It was all empty of inhabitants, though there were a few canned goods on the shelves that were probably okay to eat still. Sanji and Darren packed those up and I went to look behind the cashiers counter. I found a set of keys there, hung on a hook. They had a license plate written on a tag, and I was sure it was for the truck outside. We finished packing up the groceries, and took note of about a dozen liter bottles of engine oil as well as several four liter bottles of windscreen cleaner fluid. Mental note; Grab all this stuff! Hell, there was a set of yellow jumper cables too. Sold!

We went outside again, and I took the keys around to the driver's side. They fit the lock, but it wouldn't turn. I suspected dirt and water had frozen up the lock, so I sent Darren in for some WD-40, and he sprayed a load of it into the key slot. We let it soak for a bit, and then I tried the key again. This time it turned after a second of resistance, and I

heard the door lock pop open. Presto, we were in! I turned around to grin at the other two and saw the undead approaching.

There were three of them, and they were thirty feet away, staggering out of the trees. From the angle, nobody up the hill could see them. They started groaning as I brought up the carbine, and Darren and Sanji got out of my way as they saw my expression. One or two we could probably have handled quietly, but these three were too close. They were twenty feet away when I had aim on the lead one, a male about forty-five wearing a business suit. He was covered in blood, but it was old and black on his clothes. I pulled the trigger and three bullets entered his skull. Darren had his rifle up and aimed at the one nearest him, and Sanji was backpedalling to get room to fire when Darren pulled the trigger. His gun just clicked. No explosion of a bullet firing, just a quiet click. He tried to jack the failed round out, and the zombie grabbed the barrel of the gun and pulled it out of his hands. This one was a girl with short hair and a tattoo of a butterfly on her shoulder. She was wearing jeans and a black tank top. She stood there looking at the gun for a second then dropped it. I was already tracking her, and I heard Sanji firing over my shoulder. Darren backed away quickly, and the living dead girl moved to follow him. I fired another three rounds, these hitting her in the neck and shoulder. She fell over sideways, and I spun around to check on Sanji. He was just firing a second shot at the undead grandfather who had tried to eat him, and his shotgun blew the neck out completely. Head and body fell in different directions. I turned back around, and Darren was right there by me. The last

zombie was getting up again, and Darren and I backed towards the front of the truck. She followed. Sanji held his fire, since from his angle he'd hit the truck, and that would probably be very bad for all of us. So we all walked back, Darren taking the Glock when I handed it to him, and she followed. When she was clear of the front of the truck I raised the gun to fire again, but Jess beat me to it. There was a sound like distant thunder, but it came just after living dead girl's head was passed through from left to right by high velocity lead. She crumpled on the pavement, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. I waved at Jess, and Darren went to retrieve his gun. It had misfired a round, and he jacked it out. He kept the Glock, since I told him not to trust the rifle until we checked it out.

Unfortunately, our gunfire had shortened the amount of time we had to salvage things drastically. More walking corpses would no doubt be arriving at any time, drawn by the multiple gunshots. I jumped into the cab and put the key in the starter, and turned. Nothing happened. Sanji told me to get out, and he climbed in. He did something other than just turn the key, and the engine rumbled. He did it again, and it rumbled twice more, then gave a titanic cough of black smoke, and caught! I told Darren to wave down the others, and I headed back in to grab the things I had seen earlier. That was my stupid mistake. I just got to the door when four more of these stinking atrocities came around the corner of the building. Darren shouted a warning at me, and I had to dive away from the first one as its torn fingers flailed at me. The other three were right there, so I rolled away and heard a gunshot. Must have been Darren; it sounded like a Glock. The one

nearest me went down, and I got to my feet as fast as I could and ran for the side door of the truck. The Caravan was pulling up, and Darren ran for that as Jay leaned out the window with the other shotgun. He aimed behind me, and I dodged to the left as he fired. I have no idea if he hit anything, I just ran. I jumped up on the side of the truck and hit the panel with my palm. Sanji started the truck rolling, but slowly at first, and the three zombies were reaching for my legs as we rolled past. I grabbed the mirror frame and pulled my legs up, and rode by just over the rotten hands. One went under the back wheels, and I opened the door and climbed in as we pulled onto the road. I looked back and could see the other vehicles moving, and at least another two dozen undead coming out of the trees. Where were they all coming from? It didn't matter. We left them behind us as we drove away. This was getting familiar. As a bonus, Sanji showed me the display for the tanker's fuel load. It was full! We had a tanker with 18,000 liters of fuel in it. In my wildest dreams I had not expected this. Things were looking up.

August 12, 2004, Miette Hot Springs

Ah, to be clean again. I haven't felt this good in weeks! We saw the turn-off for the Miette Hot Springs on the way down out of the Rockies, and decided to take the road up and see if it was still intact. To make a long story short, we arrived at the parking lot in our little convoy and found it utterly empty. The springs themselves fed into a pool located outside, and near to changing rooms and tourist shops meant to gouge as much money out of visiting travelers as possible. The group of us searched the complex, but that didn't take long. It's

a small area, and there was nobody there at all. The main gates were locked, but that wasn't much of a problem to people determined to get in. We got in by climbing over the fence and locating a key in the front office.

An hour later we had locked the vehicles, and all of us but Darren and Sarah were relaxing in the hot water of the main pool, shedding weeks worth of grime and sweat. After being together so long, none of us were really concerned that nobody had a bathing suit. Looks like modesty is going out the window for now, and we were just so relieved to swim and bathe. Sarah had lost the draw, and Darren had volunteered to stay out with her and keep watch. The pool was covered with a huge net when we arrived, and we rolled it back when we got in, but we've replaced it every time we leave, so as little debris gets in it as possible. Drainage appears to be a natural thing here, with no machinery to foul up.

We stayed the night in the tourist cottages just up the hill from the springs, and then the next night, and now we are getting ready to leave in the morning. We're clean, we washed all our clothing in the side pools, and we've managed to find some more food here. Water hasn't been a problem so far, due to the streams and creeks we've passed. Sarah still insists on purifying it, and I agree.

We are going to have to think seriously about raiding a grocery store in a town we pass through, if the risk is worth it, to restock on groceries. With this many people, we only have another weeks worth of food now. That might seem like a lot. It

really isn't. We'll be closing on Hinton soon, and the IGA or Safeway or whatever is there will be seeing a visit from us if there's a chance of doing it with safety.

Now I am going to go relax for what time we have left here in this beautiful place. Dinner needs to be made, and then I promised to play with the kids for a while. After that Sarah is going to teach us more about CPR.

August 15, 2004

This is Sarah. My brother is hurt, and asked me to write this entry for him. I don't know why though, since nobody will likely ever read it. He's always saying that we'll find help, other people, if we look far and hard enough. I think he's wrong, but I don't make a point of arguing with him about it.

Anyways, he wants me to write what happened when we reached Hinton. We rolled the truck and cars down the hill there, and stopped a little bit back from the town itself. Jessica got her gun and looked through the scope at the town from a hill, and told us that it looked pretty good, but she could see a few of the animated casualties around. She sounded so serious talking about it. Like it was some big commando raid thing or something. I guess that's why he likes her, she talks so tough all the time.

We (and by that I mean my brother and Jessica) decided that it was safe enough to try to get in and raid a grocery store we could see from the hilltop. I volunteered to stay with the kids again. The closer I get to those animated casualties the more I thought about disease and contamination and infection

vectors. This seemed to be okay with Jessica, I think she likes having another grown-up woman to take care of her kid while she's off with my brother playing soldier.

So my brother, Darren, Jay, and Sanji took a van and left us there on top of the hill, where we could see for a few kilometers in every direction. Jess went with them, leaving the kids and myself, with Martin and Amanda, and her no good boyfriend Adam. He doesn't appreciate her at all. She tries to be strong, but underneath it all she's sad, misses her mom I think.

Anyways, we were up there for a while, and nothing came near us. That night we heard some shooting in the town, and I went to look through the binoculars, but it was too dark to see anything. What were they thinking crawling around down there in that disease trap in the dark anyways? We waited until morning and they didn't come back, so Christie and I took the truck and drove closer to the town to another spot we'd decided on earlier. From there we scanned the town for an hour. We saw plenty of the animated casualties, but not much else moving. Come lunchtime we returned to the others to wait. If they weren't out of there by nightfall we were to assume they weren't coming back and leave without them.

In typical male bravado fashion they showed up at the last minute. My brother had fallen down a set of stairs while some of the casualties were chasing him, and had broken his left arm above the wrist. They all had to hole up in a business while trying to find a way out. They snuck out yesterday morning at dawn and made it back to the van, where they had stocked it with enough groceries to last a while. They came back to us, and I set his wrist correctly

(the field dressing Sanji put on was cheap, I think he needs a refresher in bone setting) so it wouldn't heal crookedly. We drove back to a house we had spotted earlier, and stayed there for the night. Oh God I miss showers. And clean sheets. Sleeping in the vans is driving me nuts. That's all I have to write. He'll write some more when he's feeling better. Sarah out, 20:18hrs

August 17, 2004, Hinton AB

I cannot believe my sister sometimes. She was supposed to write the events I related to her, not go off on some vaguely disappointed tone about how we're all gung-ho and paramilitary. Whatever. When I read that I knew I'd have to do it myself, so here it is.

Right now we are in a house west and a bit south of Hinton, just off the highway. It's secluded and abandoned, has two floors above ground, and a lot of bedrooms. There's still some sharing going on, of course, but we are all sleeping comfortably. My wrist is broken, so I am typing this very slowly with my right hand. It hurts. The painkillers are good, but it's still a broken bone. Sarah says it'll heal straight, and the improvised splint is quite effective.

So what happened to us? Jess, Sanji, Darren, Jay and I took the Caravan down into the town after we'd had a look at the town from a nearby hill. It was pretty quiet, with only a thin scattering of undead here and there. The town looked to be in decent shape. By that I mean that only a few uncontrolled fires had burned through here, and most of the structures appeared intact. There were

numerous old traffic accidents blocking the various streets, and I could see the local Safeway through the binoculars clearly. It appeared that the front of the store had been damaged, so it had probably been looted, but it was still our best bet for food.

As we drove down the hill we checked our guns. Full loads and extra ammo were the order of the day. We each had a rifle, and Sanji and I had the two Glocks. We'd each taken the precaution of wearing long sleeved shirts, jeans, bandanas for our noses, decent running shoes, and hats. All dark colours, all tight clothes. The less for them to grab onto the better, and the covering was to help keep gore off us if we had to kill anything. Given the choice I would have had military gear. Yeah, Sarah, I guess we are playing soldier. Happy?

Hinton was a nice little town. I'd been here a few times while staying at the cabin by Jasper. Right now it looked like a set from *The Stand*. The highway drove right past the Safeway, and we were able to get pretty close before we were stopped by a series of crashed and abandoned vehicles. We pulled up about fifteen feet from a three car pileup, and Jess and Sanji and I got out to see if we could get around it, or push the wrecks off the road. The cars had no inhabitants, though from the stench we could tell there was something dead nearby. No undead were in sight right that second, though I imagined it wouldn't be long. We walked to the pileup and checked each vehicle. We could probably move the front car enough to get the Caravan through, if we pushed it forwards and turned its wheels to the left. Jess got in the driver's seat while Sanji and I pushed, and after a few false

starts as the wheels tried and failed to turn, we got it moving. We were sweating heavily by the time we rolled it onto the far curb, leaving plenty of room to get the van by.

Jess went on sentry duty then with her rifle. She climbed on top of the Caravan, to a roof rack we had mounted there, made out of plywood and bungee cords that we found. She could see farther and be lookout this way. Slowly Jay drove the van into the Safeway parking lot, and we saw our first undead come lumbering out of the store. It was alone, a male in company uniform, and he was ripe. His stench preceded him, and bits actually fell off as he walked towards us. It was a revolting sight, but it made me think that he might just decompose by himself if given enough time. I wonder how long it would take. He looked like a stock boy. His apron was still on, but covered in gore and bits of his own or someone else's flesh. We had decided to deal with lone undead as quietly as possible. This meant no shooting. So three of us circled him while Jess and Jay kept watch. I had the baseball bat ready, and I stayed back a little so he'd focus on someone else. He chose Sanji, who stood with levelled shotgun, and took steps towards him as I came up from behind. He was leaving foul squishy footprints as he walked, and the smell as I got closer was indescribable. Sanji lowered the shotgun as I got behind the undead stock boy, and I swung the bat as hard as I could. The right side of his head caved in, and he fell. The smell actually got worse, and I gagged. He rolled over and attempted to rise, but I swung again, this time coming straight down on top of his skull. His head bounced off the pavement as I struck, and I heard a crack. Still he didn't die, but he

was a lot slower trying to get up. The third blow landed as he was rising to his knees, and this one was solid enough that his skull opened like a blooming flower of gore. He didn't get up from that. I looked around, but it had taken only a few seconds, and was quieter than I had thought. Nothing else was approaching.

We approached the store on foot. Jay parked the van about 40 feet from the front doors, and stayed with Jess in case a quick getaway was required. Darren on my right, and Sanji on my left, we went to the front doors and looked inside. The lights were all out, so it was dark as a tomb inside. We'd expected this, and turned on our flashlights as we entered. We listened. This more than anything we had learned. Listen for them. So we stood and listened for five minutes. When we were certain there was nothing making noise other than us, we proceeded.

The store *had* been looted, but not thoroughly. It looked like whoever had hit the place had taken a lot of water bottles, some canned foods and snacks, and medicines. There was a lot left over though, more than we could carry. Before taking anything at all we searched the entire store. Quiet as mice, and stealthy as ninja, we'd have liked to have been. As it was we made enough noise walking into spilled cans or stepping on things scattered on the floor that if anything *had* been walking in there, it would have heard us and come running.

We went shopping in the dark. A little light made it inside from the windows, but not enough for us to see clearly at the back of the store. Flashlights were an essential, so we loaded up a few baskets full of

batteries and put them by the front door. Then we grabbed medicines. Advil, Tylenol, Polysporin, and a whole list of things from the pharmacy that Sarah had requested. Some would have gone bad by now, so we'd have to sort them out carefully. After that was loaded safely in the van we went back and grabbed ALL the canned food that we could. Stews and soups and chili and canned fruit, canned vegetables, beans and milk and anything we could see. We checked expiry dates as we went, and only a few things were even close. We also grabbed powdered milk, juice mixes, cans of iced tea powder and coffee, and Gatorade. I threw a few boxes of cereal in for the kids, and took all the instant oatmeal boxes that were left. We opened the boxes of those and dumped the packages into a larger plastic container for easier transportation. All this we took to the front doors and loaded. We still had a bit of room, so we went back for a third trip. Toiletries, like razors and extra blades, toilet paper, several bottles of shampoo, and brushes and combs. Jess had us get a few cases of tampons and related things, and we all raided the sock & underwear aisle. Shoes! We all grabbed new shoes, and got new pairs for the others as well. This was like Christmas!

So of course it was all spoiled by the undead. We were taking the third load back to the front when shots rang out. We dropped the things we were carrying near the front door as we went to the entrance, and paused in the doorway to look at what was happening. Jay was standing near the back of the van, with the hatch open and looked like he'd been rearranging the load. He was supposed to be in the driver's seat the whole time, ready to go, but I

guess he'd got complacent, and wanted to fit more things in. I couldn't really blame him, but it was bad timing. Nearly twenty walking dead were approaching from the north, just come around the west corner of the store, and were close enough that we could hear them moaning. They stank to heaven in this heat, and the smell was like a physical force pushing us back gagging. Jess had shot two of them so far, but they'd be surrounding the van before she could kill many more. Jay was trying to shut the tailgate and pick up his rifle at the same time, and was doing neither very well. From what I'd seen of his shooting he'd be pretty easily overwhelmed by the time they got there, so I did the only thing I could think of. I raised the carbine and stepped out shooting. I fired into the lead undead, hoping if I killed one or two the others might fall over it. Several of them changed direction towards us, but most kept going towards the van. Sanji and Darren called to Jay and Jess to get out of there and run, and Jay stayed long enough to help Jess off the roof while I fired the carbine. I emptied the clip in three-round bursts, hitting many of the zombies, but only killing four. It was enough to slow them so that we could get away. As a group we ran east across the parking lot, and around another building, a former pizza place ("Free delivery!"). The crowd of undead was following faster than I'd have liked, so we looked around then crossed the street towards a church. Inside there could be anything, so we didn't go in. We stayed outside, getting distance between us and the dead things following, winding down alleys and streets as we fled. We made it four blocks before we ran into another cluster of undead. Why do they seem to travel in groups? There were four of them, and they just appeared around an

overgrown hedge, and got very excited when they saw us. Sanji shot one and it's head vanished. I clubbed the next one down, and evaded the grasp of the third, but the fourth grabbed Darren, and was going for the bite when Jess slammed it's head with her rifle stock. It let go of Darren and tried to grab her, but I stepped up and shoved the carbine's barrel under its ear. One pull of the trigger and it fell. We ran. More of them were coming out of the woodwork now. Out of houses, or alleys. Some were alone, but most were in groups, usually three or four at a time. Why?

Sanji changed our direction to the south. He said it was to get us back to the van eventually, running in a circle. Good idea. We ran between a school bus and a gas station, and found ourselves on the highway again. Behind us a group of forty or so was chasing, and to our west another group was coming. We wouldn't be getting back that way, so we ran across the highway towards the tree line. This was getting tiring. The undead didn't tire though, so we had to keep ahead of them or we'd be slaughtered. We took shelter in the trees, and hoped they'd lose interest when they lost sight of us. We ran uphill for a few hundred feet, and then came out of the trees onto another road, this one clear for now. Darren was the second last up the hill, followed by Jay. I got the impression he had waited to make sure Jay got there. The undead were wandering in the trees below us, slowly making their way up the hill.

The road ran east and west, so we went west. It wound around a hill overlooking the town, and we ended up in someone's driveway. The view must have raised the property value to insane levels back

before, and was still impressive. It had a set of stone steps leading up to the deck, and a wrought iron gate at the bottom. There was a stone fence that ran around the property, about 8' high. This could be a decent place to hide. We got to the gate just as the first of them rounded the corner of the drive behind us. I turned and aimed the carbine, and shot the first two that appeared. One went down, and I missed the other. I was the last one through the gate, and slammed it shut. I turned to run up the stairs and my foot missed the first step. I threw my hand out as I fell, the other arm holding the carbine so I didn't bend anything on the rocks. My arm crunched under me as I landed, and instant agony flared through my hand and forearm. Hands pulled me up as I fogged out in a haze of pain, and I came to on the deck with Jess leaning over me. I tried moving my arm and the pain flared, white hot and sharp as needles. I yelled, then bit down on my tongue. That hurt too, but less than my arm. It was busted bad. It was already swelling, and the pain was incredible. I heard someone shooting, and Jess told them to stop it. I couldn't tell who. I tried to get up, and the pain as I jostled my arm made me pass out again.

I woke up, and it was quiet. Not to mention dark. When did that happen? My arm was hurting, but wrapped up in something tight. I was lying on a couch facing a set of floor to ceiling windows, and across the room was a huge widescreen TV and DVD setup. Whoever had owned this place was loaded, once upon a time. Jess and Sanji were talking somewhere out of sight, and Jay and Darren were sitting looking out the windows, rifles in hand. I asked for some water, as I was extremely thirsty, and instantly they were all around me, asking if I

was okay. I had a drink and told them I was good. They told me what was going on.

We were safe for now. About fifty undead had found us, and were currently surrounding the front fence. The fence was stone all the way around, and solid. The one gate was wrought iron and solid too. They could not get in that way. Then they told me about the grow op they had found in the basement. The plants had long since died from lack of light, but there was a tunnel dug into the hillside, and a passage ran from the basement to the hillside about fifty feet away out the back. It was locked, but it wasn't a serious problem. We were going to try it in the morning. They gave me some painkillers and I went back to sleep.

August 18, 2004

Still outside Hinton, and still typing one handed. Damn, this is painful. Remind me never to break my wrist again. Where was I? Ah yes, back on the 14th. I woke up that morning and completely forgot that my arm was broken. Jess was already awake, and reminded me first thing not to move my left arm. She knows me well, Jess does.

After getting up, and getting dressed with Jess' help, we ate a fast breakfast. The drugs had made me woozy, and I'd slept the night through. It was nearly 8:30 when I woke up. Sanji was concerned about the undead outside. He was thinking that enough of them piled up at the foot of the fence might enable others to climb right over the wall. We didn't want to stay long enough to test this theory, so we packed up what we had and got ready to take

the 'back door' tunnel in the grow op basement. When we got down there, Sanji just shook his head. I remembered then he used to be on the Vancouver Police Department. He'd probably seen a few of these marijuana operations in his time. The plants were all dead, but the smell lingered. We went to the escape tunnel and opened the first door, shining lights down the cramped hallway. It was lined with railway ties. Someone must have taken a long time to make this. It was our good luck that we'd picked this house. Well, if it was luck remained to be seen. We still had half a hundred zombies to contend with outside.

Down the hallway about fifty feet there was a stair of dirt and wooden planks. It rose up to another door, a small hatch. Sanji went up and listened, then peeked through the cracks to see what he could determine about our foes. They were nearby, and too close to risk us fleeing without a distraction. Darren looked up, and said he had a plan involving a portable cd player and a cd. He went back to the house, and a few minutes later we heard music. I recognized the song. It was REM's *It's the End of the World As We Know It*. Darren came back and we all just looked at him like he'd committed a great crime. He just grinned.

We waited for the song to end, and then it began again. The little shit had put it on repeat. Sanji opened the door, and we snuck out into the morning sun. There were plenty of trees between us and them, so we made a quiet getaway. The makeshift splint on my arm was taped up pretty well, and I had it slung next to my chest. I had my Glock, but

Sanji was carrying the carbine now, since with a busted arm I couldn't hold it to fire. This sucked.

Nearly an hour of walking through the trees led us to the road, about a kilometer from the house. We found ourselves upon a hill overlooking Hinton. A familiar sight. We could see the Safeway and the van from here, and with the binoculars we could also see the four undead who refused to believe there was nothing there for them to eat. They were walking around the van, bumping into each other, or just staring off into space.

We needed that van and its supplies. Getting there from here was going to take a bit of work. There was about three kilometers of ground, a highway, a bunch of houses, and a large empty parking lot with several zombies in it between us and the van. We set off down the slope and took several hours to get across the expanse of trees and brush. We went slowly, trying to be as quiet as five people can be. We reached the edge of the residential area, and sat quietly for a while. We all remembered the groups of walking dead that had emerged from houses the day before. When we heard nothing, we moved on. Another hour of us creeping about the alleyways and across streets. We hid, we scouted, and we snuck. We were careful, and avoided anything too open or suspect. We made it to the highway around three in the afternoon, and watched with dismay as our van was surrounded by six undead. Two more had shown up in the hours between. We needed to do something about this quickly before more arrived. Jess suggested that she and I set up a sniper position across the highway, and that the rest go to get the van while she took out the six we could see.

I'd be her backup in case anything came up behind us. We talked over the specifics and set up a field of fire for Jess. The other three would approach from the west and only step into the open when Jess had finished shooting. We ate a bite really quickly, and they left. We'd give them half an hour to get into position, and then Jess would take out all six of the walking dead in the parking lot.

True to her word, she started shooting in exactly thirty minutes, lining up her first shot and gently squeezing the trigger. I'd never really watched her snipe before. She seemed to have an entire love affair with this rifle that I was just realizing existed. She talked to it, like it was a person. She must have seen my expression, because she just smiled and shrugged. Her first shot took the top of the skull off one that was standing just a few feet from the front of the van. It fell and didn't move, and she switched targets. The other five were standing, trying to figure out where the sound came from, and she shot again. Another one, this time a business man, dropped with finality as a bullet passed through his forehead. I stopped paying attention to that end, and looked around us. We were up on top of a kids play park set in a schoolyard across the highway from the Safeway. She was leaning on the monkey bars, steady as a rock. I scanned behind us and around us, and nothing was moving. I counted five shots, and she stopped for a minute to change clips. One last shot and we were set. She missed nothing. Everything she had pointed her gun at had died. My girlfriend is scary.

She packed up and we ran. Down onto the highway and across the pavement. The others were at the van

already, and Sanji and Jay ran inside to grab the last of the things we had set down. They came back a minute later with armloads. We got there and packed it all in the van as fast as we could, then climbed in. Jess drove. We did a u-turn in the lot, and sped back the way we had come the day before. We made it back to the others without incident, and Sarah took a look at my arm and winced when I told her what I'd done. She set it properly, after I had a few shots of some really nasty whiskey we'd found.

That brings us up to date now. We are still in the house. We sorted everything, and have been eating well. No undead have approached, though we know they are there in the town. With luck we'll be able to slip by easily when we decide to leave.

August 22, 2004, 11:30 a.m.

It's raining now. Appropriate weather for a funeral. We lost Marty. He died last night, coughing up blood and phlegm. Sarah says it was pneumonia, a complication of infection from his shattered ribs. And we all thought he was doing better. He started coughing several days ago, and it just got worse. We didn't have the right antibiotics from the raid on Hinton, didn't even know we'd need them.

We haven't left the house yet, outside of town. It's as secure as we can make it and nothing living or dead has found us.

Amanda is taking it pretty badly. She sat up last night talking to her dad, and stayed with him until he died around midnight. She's lost her mother and father to this nightmare and the only person she has

left is Adam. She was up all night crying, and Sarah and Jess and pretty much everyone else have been there for her.

We buried Marty this morning. Sanji and Sarah and Darren dug a hole in the back yard, and Jay made a marker out of some two-by-fours and carved Marty's name into it along with the relevant dates.

He didn't rise. He stayed dead once he died. I don't know what that means, if the thing that makes the dead return is active in all of us he should have risen. If not, then it must be a directly transferred thing. I have no idea. But we wrapped him in some bed sheets, and buried him early this morning just as the rain was starting.

My wrist is feeling better. The pain is more manageable since we returned from Hinton with some pretty amazing painkillers. The problem is that if I take a heavy dose I end up really sleepy. That's why I haven't written much the last few days, I've been sleeping. And now my arm is all itchy under the cast Sarah managed to make out of some of the supplies we returned with.

August 23, 2004, 10 km east of Edson

We drove through Hinton this morning, our little convoy of stragglers and survivors. Heading east into the prairies. We passed down out of the foothills and into less rugged terrain. A few undead took notice of us in the few towns we passed, and some tried chasing us. It didn't do them any good. Nowhere did we see signs of survivors or any kind of recovery. Just wreckage and death. We'd

checked the radios periodically, both CB and the AM/FM sets just to be sure, but we got nothing but static. There has been some discussion of the route we are going to take. None of us want to risk Edmonton. It's too big a city to be safe. The former population there would be sure to engulf us without really trying. So we planned to avoid the city, which was on a more or less direct route between us and Cold Lake. After discussion we decided on the following route. We'll take the #16 to where it meets the #22, and go north to Mayerthorpe. From there we will swing east to Barrhead and then to Westlock. Then onto the #2, and north to Athabasca, east again to Lac la Biche, and then south-east on the #55 to Cold Lake. This route will take us well around Edmonton and the high population regions in the center of the province. Going south isn't really an option, since the area between Edmonton and Calgary was huge and heavily populated. This journey is going to be over 650 km from Hinton to Cold Lake.

We have to get some diesel for the rig pretty soon too. It's a little ironic that it cannot use the fuel it is carrying. I am going to update more later on. There's something on the road ahead that we are going to check out.

August 24, 2004

Yesterday

Ahead of us on the road was a horse. It was standing by another body lying on the pavement, a man's body by the look of it. The horse was brown with a white diamond on it's nose. It was saddled,

and very much alive. We couldn't tell about the fallen figure from this distance. We stopped the vehicles about 75 feet away from the horse, and all the adults got out. We quickly looked around, and saw no undead within sight. We decided to leave Jess, Jay, and Amanda driving the vans and truck, and Sanji in the rig in case they had to haul ass out of there. That left Adam, Darren, Sarah, Christie and I to investigate. We all went armed, Darren with the 30-.06, me with the Glock (damn wrist, can't fire the carbine), Christie with the police shotgun, and Adam with the other Glock. We brought a first aid kit in case the figure on the street was alive.

Nearby there were several cars wrecked on the highway. One was driven off the road into a tree, but we couldn't see a body in it. We spread out and approached. I thought the figure might be alive, since the horse was standing right there. Most animals we've seen are terrified of the undead. Given that this horse was standing still and occasionally sniffing the figure, it was a good bet he or she was still alive. Approaching, we could see green pants and black boots, and what looked like a military vest. A soldier maybe? There was blood. We could see in on the man's clothes, and were now close enough to see it was indeed a man. He looked about 25, and was badly injured. Christie went to the horse and let it sniff her. She calmed it down as it shied a bit, and then took its reins and led it away, and I waved to Darren to go with her. Sarah, Adam and I looked at the man, and he surprised us by opening his eyes. He was sunburned, and had three bites on his body, one on his arm, and two on his legs. He gasped and asked

for some water. Adam and I looked at each other, and I gave him some water. He drank a little, then coughed it up. We gave him some more.

Eventually he was able to talk to us. His name was Master Corporal David Chambers, of the 3rd Battalion PPCLI. He was feverish, and shaking, but very glad to see us. He told us he was part of a scouting unit that was checking the western highways for “survivors, salvage, and hostiles”, but his group had been destroyed by a large number of undead last night. He himself was badly wounded, but managed to get away in the chaos. He estimated between fifty and seventy undead had swarmed his unit’s camp at about 2 a.m., and his unit of horse-mounted scouts, fifteen men and women, had all been killed. His unit was now based out of CFB Wainright, and had contact with CFB Cold Lake and CFB Comox. Apparently the military was trying to reclaim as much of the provinces as they could. Several thousand survivors were being sheltered at Cold Lake, and missions were sent out to search for more constantly.

We explained our story and what we’d seen, places we’d been. MCpl Chambers asked us to relay his mission report to his superiors at Wainright, if we made it there. He knew he was doomed, knew he’d come back as one of the walking dead when he died. From his condition, we were amazed he was still alive. Sarah was checking his pulse and temperature, and wanted to move him out of the road, but he kept insisting that we take his report. I agreed, and he took a notebook from his vest and handed it to me, and had me copy down his last report. He dictated it and I recorded it exactly, to

hand over to his superiors. I promised him we'd do this. He also gave us his dog tags, and asked us to look after his horse, whom he'd named General Veers. He also told us that there was a larger unit from the 3rd Battalion, with vehicles and medical staff, somewhere between Westlock and Swan Hills, that was heading north to see about survivors around the Lesser Slave Lake.

We moved him back to the vans, and made him as comfortable as we could. He looked surprised to see the children and cat. He also noticed Jess' rifle, and asked her where she had gotten her hands on a C3A1 Sniper Rifle. She told him that an old boyfriend had given it to her, 'on loan' while he was in the Gulf. He asked her if she knew how to handle it, and I told him that she was the best shot I'd ever seen, and everything she got in her sights died. Jess nodded, and MCpl Chambers looked at her for a minute, then asked her to shoot him when the time came. He really did not want to re-animate, and wanted her to promise that once he died, he wouldn't get up again. She looked at him sadly, and agreed to do it.

He didn't last much longer. He went into convulsions after another half hour, and started raving. His fever peaked and stayed hot, and Sarah found a few ampoules of morphine in his vest and gave them to him. That calmed him, and he died about twenty minutes later. We all sat around for a few minutes and watched him, but he didn't move. We remembered it can take up to an hour. So Jess and I dragged his body off down into the ditch, and I took his tags while Jess went back for the .22. She returned, and we sat and watched him for a few

more minutes. He was dead. No breath, no pulse, just dead. Finally, Jess stood, and pointed the rifle at his head. She stood there for about five more minutes, before she turned to me, and I saw tears running down her face. I stood up and hugged her, whispering to her that it was what he wanted. He didn't want to come back. He had asked us and we had agreed. She sniffled, and wiped her eyes, and said to me, "I really love you, you know that?" She turned back and I stepped away a few paces. She raised the gun and aimed, and I heard the shot.

Today

We buried Master Corporal Chambers today in a field under a huge tree. I don't know what kind it was. We took his weapon, a C7A1 Assault Rifle and four clips, which was on his horse. We took his tags and notebook, and I took his military ID as well to turn in. Sarah made notes on his condition when we found him, his final requests, and his body's location in his book, and gave it back to me. I put it in the glove box in the Odyssey, in a plastic bag. There wasn't much else on the horse. He must have left a lot of stuff behind when he fled. Christie has taken to looking after General Veers. We have him tied behind the F350 on a long rope so he can walk with us. If we find a horse trailer we'll grab that, since we can make better time that way.

We have been talking about heading up to Swan Hills to see if we can intercept the Army unit there. We've decided against it, because we have no idea if they'll even still be there by the time we arrive,

and we didn't think to ask what CB channel they might be listening to. We are going to head for Cold Lake. The prospect of several *thousand* survivors there is a comforting one.

August 25, 2004

We found a horse trailer at the first farm we approached. It took some work to get it though. It was mired in mud, and it took about an hour for us to work it free. We cleaned it out, washed it with some water from the nearby pond, and led General Veers inside it. He took it well. We hooked it up to the F350, and just as we were getting back into the vehicles we heard a motorcycle running. We looked over and saw someone on a road rocket flash by. I had a brief image of a red helmet, leather jacket, and black jeans. The bike was blue, and was doing about 140 kph. By the time we had run to the road the person was long gone. He or she had come from the same direction we had, from Hinton.

I wondered who it was. Had he been following us through BC? Did he come up from southern Alberta? I really wanted to know who it was and why he was alone, how he'd survived.

The undead were slightly thicker in this area. We hadn't seen any at this particular farm, but there were more than we were used to on the roads. Quite often they were in or near cars, or standing in ditches or fields. They'd see us and start lurching towards us, some running a few steps before they fell and got up to do it all over again. They seemed a little more weathered here too, a little more rotten. We saw some that had bone showing through the

rotting flesh. And yet they still moved, still wanted to devour us and tear us apart. Well, maybe that's not correct. Maybe it's an instinct; maybe they don't actually *want* anything?

The few we have seen we have driven past. We saw no sign of the soldiers' camp anywhere, but we weren't looking very hard either. Just up the road is Westlock and we'll try to get through it or go around it, as needed. Hopefully there won't be any trouble.

August 29, 2004

Thursday

It was raining and I was in the leading vehicle, the Odyssey, with Darren (I can drive fine, just can't shoot the carbine two-handed), Jess, and Michael. We were approaching Westlock from the west, and from a few thousand feet away on the highway we could see that there was a barricade up across the road. Our best guess was that the town had tried to seal itself off when all the shit hit the fan. We stopped a few hundred feet from the barricade, and looked at it through scopes and binoculars. All across the highway there was a chest high barrier of earth and wood. We could see an earthmover behind it, and several other vehicles, mostly trucks and quads. There was a second barrier as well, concrete highway dividers, and a pile of sandbags. And there were a lot of corpses. In front of the barrier were several dozen bloated bodies, none moving. Cars were parked to either side of the road, leaving a long empty run towards the barricade. We couldn't see anyone moving on the other side of the

barrier, and there was a hole through it wide enough for a car to drive in. Something was bothering me about the scene, though I had no idea why until I handed the binoculars to Sanji. He took a good long look, and then said that it looked like the barrier had been blown in from the outside. I asked what he meant, and he said it looked like someone outside had used a big vehicle like a plow to breach the barricade.

What did this mean? Would we be finding groups of raiders out here, who moved from town to town taking things by force? Or was it the military, getting into the town *after* it had been overwhelmed? We didn't know. What we did know was we needed to replenish our water supply, and the hospital here in town was likely to have some supplies we'd really like to get our hands on.

We drove up to the barricade and slowly moved into the gap. Inside were more bodies, and we paused to check them out. Many had head wounds, but quite a few did not. Several had obviously been alive when they were shot down by bullets. Living men had killed each other here. This only raised our fears of raiders. We moved in with extreme caution. There were no walking dead in sight, so we moved slowly down the streets, coming to a large grocery store in a mall. The IGA was being renovated when the disaster struck, and was unfinished. The doors were shattered, blown in by a vehicle, in all probability. Bodies were everywhere. They littered the streets closest to the barricades, and gradually fell off as the distance increased. By the time we had reached the high school there were very few to be seen, and the school itself looked intact. Only one

broken window was visible. It was big, solid looking, and had steel doors. Across the street was a museum, with a sign saying "Visitor Information", but I doubted anyone was going to be in there to help us.

We reached the center of the town, an unlikely intersection of 100th Street and 104th Avenue, and according to the map there was a hospital to our south. To the north-east a water tower was looming up, behind several rows of houses. Only a few unmoving bodies could be seen here, lying on the curbs or sidewalks like they'd been pushed out of the way of vehicles. Abandoned cars were everywhere, and the front doors of the nearby gas station were shattered and lying next to the cash register on the pavement. The entire town was silent, an eerie quiet that made our skin crawl. We couldn't hear birds or animals above the rain, but I imagined there must be none here. Most animals we'd seen were freaked out by the undead.

Turning south we went only a few blocks to 93rd Street until we saw the hospital. It was small, only one floor and probably less than fifty beds in the whole thing, but it had an Emergency Room, an ambulance door, and probably a trauma unit. There was a helipad outside too, but no helicopter. It was right at the south end of the town, and there was a barricade here across the south-bound road. It was the same as the one to the west, earth and wood.

The front doors were closed and appeared undamaged. The rain had washed the dust off the cars and trucks still parked in the lot, making them look almost new. It actually stopped raining as we

arrived at the hospital, and we parked our vehicles facing back the way we had come, just in case. Darren took a picture of the front of the hospital with a digital camera he'd grabbed someplace. We decided that Darren and Adam and Jay would stay outside and watch the vehicles, and call us on the radios we'd salvaged from the farm earlier if anything happened, or walking corpses showed up. They'd guard Michael and Megan, who would be in the Odyssey. Their job was to make sure the kids got away if the undead showed up. The rest of us were going inside, in search of whatever treasures the place could offer.

We approached as a group, but spread out when we got before the doors. They pushed open easily, after momentary resistance. We looked into the darkness, lit only sporadically by the dim light filtering in through windows and skylights, and we could smell the rot before we took a step inside. Bandanas soaked in water with a tiny bit of bleach went over our faces, and we all had guns and flashlights ready, as well as backpacks to carry what we could find. Sarah also told me that if she could find stuff for a proper cast, she'd make me one on the spot, so my arm wouldn't heal wrong. She was worried the bones would heal curled, and I'd lose a lot of mobility.

In we went, myself and Sanji first with the Glocks out, followed by Sarah and Christie with shotguns, and Jess and Amanda bringing up the rear with the rifles. This wasn't some sexist "manly men go first" bullshit either. Sanji was leading because he was a former cop, and I couldn't hold the damned carbine with two hands. That happy gun and the assault rifle

were outside with Darren and Adam. We had all single shot and lever action guns inside.

We all searched. First and foremost we looked for people, alive or dead or undead. It was potential suicide searching a building for gear before searching for zombies. We *had* to clear it before we could relax. With a building like this, with lockable fire doors at various points, we could clear a section at a time, search for goodies, and then move on. It gave us breathing room to do it this way.

We searched and found the source of the rotting smell. There were no bodies at first, but it looked like the place had been ransacked some time earlier. Sarah looked around a room and said whoever looted were amateurs, and didn't know what they were doing. Too much valuable gear and medicine had been left behind. Eventually, about three hallways down and four rooms to the left, we found bodies. Sanji went in first, and then waved us all out. He looked pale when he came back, but said it was safe, there were no zombies inside the room. I asked him what it was, and he just shook his head and didn't reply. I went inside, and I really wish I hadn't. There were four women's bodies inside. They were all naked, all looked like they were young and pretty in life, and all had been shot through the chest and head at close range. The bodies were all tied down, and it looked like they'd been raped before they were killed. I turned to a corner and threw up all the lunch I had eaten a few hours before. The wreckage in the hospital, and now this, pretty much confirmed the worst scenario I had in mind. From the talking and swearing I could hear out in the hall, Sanji must have told them what he

had seen. Sarah burst in and grabbed me, hauling me out of there, and then Jess and Amanda were in there too. Christie looked even more scared than usual, and stayed out in the hallway until the others came back. Sarah, after a minute, said she thought they'd been dead a few weeks, but she wasn't sure. Jess just looked pissed. I think if she'd had one of the men who did this there right now he wouldn't have lived another five seconds. This gave us something new and more terrifying to worry about than just the living dead. The undead weren't deliberately evil, so far as we could tell. Living people preying on other survivors pretty much defined evil for all of us now.

An hour later we had cleared the building completely. There were a few more bodies, three men and another woman, all executed in another area, and apparently tortured as well. There were no zombies. We spent the next forty-five minutes taking the bodies into the morgue and wrapping them all up in bags. It was the best we could do for them under the circumstances. Then we spent some time getting me a new cast, sorting medicines into bottles for transport, and loading a few essentials into the vans. I was on my last trip through the building when I heard shooting from outside. Jess was with me, and we dropped what we were holding and sprinted for the doors. On the way I grabbed the radio and asked what was going on. Darren replied that a large pack of dogs had appeared, and had started circling Jay, looking like they wanted to attack. Darren fired a few shots to scare them off, but they were still there. We got to the doors just in time to see Sanji and Christie come up from another hall, and Sarah and Amanda were

already there. Outside the others were all inside the vehicles, and a pack of nine dogs, all looking shaggy and thin, were circling the vans and sniffing around. Jess levelled her rifle and told me to open the door. I pushed it open and she aimed and fired. One of the dogs fell, a Doberman, with a large hole through its chest. She wasn't kidding around, and she aimed at another one and pulled the trigger. A collie fell, and the rest scattered, retreating from the vans and running when she shot another one in the hindquarters as it fled. Of course, any undead within earshot of those shots would be attracted here now. Hopefully there weren't too many in the area.

We loaded what we could, painkillers and bandages and all kinds of gear and medicines. Really I have no idea what half of the things Sarah told us to grab do. She said we needed them, so here they are. It took about 20 minutes to get everything stowed away safely, and we are really starting to get crowded in the vehicles. Darren let out the alarm that he could see some undead approaching from the south. We all looked, and sure enough four of them were making their persistent way towards us. We had plenty of time, but we still hurried and got out of there as quick as we could. No use tempting fate.

We drove back towards the main intersection, and it was our intention to go east again, then veer north down the highway towards Athabasca. When we looked down that road we could see an approaching mass of walking dead. Thirty or so of the hungry fiends were shambling towards us, and some broke into a jog when they saw us. We accelerated through the intersection northbound, just as the first

of them reached out to grab at the windows. It did them no good, and many fell. Looking back I saw at least three crushed by the tanker truck. We were then clear of them and accelerating north along the road out of town. This would have been great if the road wasn't also blocked by an earth and wood barricade, nine or ten trucks and cars, and three school buses. Damnit! We couldn't stop, the undead were behind us and relentless. We turned instead, a left onto a residential street. I saw a sign that said 104th Street. How big was this town anyways? It didn't look that big. The street led back to a point north of the high school. We turned back south again hoping to reach the road we had come in on and get out of town that way, but the way was again blocked. This time it was cars. The street was blocked by wrecked cars, and the only way through was the schoolyard. Sanji drove the rig up over the curb and through the chain link fence surrounding the school. Uncut grass was flattened under his wheels, and he aimed for what I took to be a staff parking lot, blissfully empty of undead or cars. We followed. Two vans and a truck with a horse trailer. The others led, and Jess and I (with Michael and Megan in back) were bringing up the rear. As I looked around I could see zombies coming into view all around us. Where were they hiding? They were now appearing in groups of three or four or seven or more, and closing on us from all sides. They had trouble with the fence, of course, but there were gaps they'd find eventually. I saw Sanji drive the rig onto the parking lot and off he went, onto the road we'd come in on, going the other way. He crushed another two walking dead that got in his path. Then the Caravan and F350 were bouncing up onto the pavement, gunning for the road, and it was

our turn. Jess turned the wheel to follow, and we slid. The grass was just slick enough from the rain and flat from the vehicles ahead of us that we got no traction. The Odyssey slid straight into a concrete filled steel pillar at about 25 kph, and the airbags were suddenly in our faces.

Within a few seconds we were pushing deflating airbags away, and Jess tried to start the van again. It started, but there was a god-awful squealing noise coming from the engine. She threw it into drive and we lurched forwards again, around the pillar. The wheels wouldn't turn back without some major effort, and I knew right then that we'd have to abandon the vehicle or we'd die inside it within a few minutes. The van made incredible grinding noises, and I shouted over them for Jess to drive right up beside the windows we could see on the side of the school. She tried her best, but the van was so slow and the steering so poor that we missed the first window, and had to stop at the third one along. She turned off the engine as I was climbing out of the passenger seat and into the back where the kids were. I unbuckled Michael and spoke to Megan, telling her to unbuckle herself and follow me with her bug-out bag. I grabbed Jess' bag and tossed it to her, and then mine. Michael doesn't have one; he's too small to really carry one easily. I made sure I had the Glock in its holster, and pulled the door nearest the window open. Megan started to scream, and I turned to see a zombie, once a teenage boy, looming at her window. He was not able to get in, but he was really gruesome. I reached over and grabbed her, and the boy's eyes followed me with excited interest. I made sure she had her bag, and that Michael was with Jess, and then I turned back

to the window of the school. One firm kick with my boot and it shattered. I had lots of leverage. The building had looked intact and secure from every angle I had seen it from, so I was betting that it was zombie-free for the time being. I moved aside and Jess climbed in first. I handed through her rifle, Michael, and her bug-out bag, in that order. Then it was Megan and her bag, then my bag, then me. The whole thing took about forty seconds, in which time we went from one desperate undead to seven of them pounding on the side, rear, and front of the van. The side we had parked closest to the window was nearly flush, but enough of those things could push it over if they tried hard enough, and I could see more on the way. I dove into the window, leaving food, water, extra ammo, sleeping gear and all kinds of goodies behind. Jess helped me down off the desk I found myself on, and I immediately helped her grab a large table and push it up against the window. We had nothing to secure it with. Shit. The door had a lock though. We went for the door, leading the kids. I drew the Glock and told Megan to stay at my shoulder. She looked terrified, the poor girl, but did what I told her. Michael was crying, but not too badly. He had hold of his mom and wasn't letting go, but she needed both hands for her rifle. The hallway was empty, and over the noise of the walking corpses outside I couldn't hear anything. I locked the office door and pulled it shut. That diminished the noise some, but we could still hear them. We moved on, heading down the hall towards darker regions, and we both pulled flashlights, shining them into every corner.

We found a door out of the offices, leading to the hallways of the school itself. To the right was a

main door, to the left a gymnasium or machine shop. Lockers lined the hall, some open and some not. The main door to the left was thick with the undead, but the doors were solid and the zombies appeared to have no idea how to get through them other than pounding of fists. They'd break them down eventually, I had no doubt, but we could reinforce with furniture or plywood or even metal from the machine shop. First things first though. Fortunately for us the schools of this era are more like prisons. Few ways in, few ways out, and many smaller windows. We headed for the stairwell, and as we were climbing we heard a sound above us. Immediately I was aiming up the stairs, and Jess pressed the children to the wall and got in front of them. No zombie appeared, so I climbed up to the landing and looked up. The door at the top of the stairs was closing slowly. Was there a zombie up there, or was it a survivor? I whispered to Jess that I was going to check it out, and I stepped quietly up the stairs. At the top I glanced through the glass, and I thought I saw a light in a room down the hall. Leading with the Glock I opened the door, pulling it with my broken wrist. That stung a little, but it wasn't too bad. Pulling the door open I entered the upper hall, quietly walking down the hall towards where I had seen the light, or thought I had. It was a classroom, and there was a pile of stuff in there on the floor. I saw motion in one corner, and trained the gun there. I was pretty sure it was a survivor at this point, but I wasn't ready to rule anything out. I called out for whoever it was to come out. Whoever it was, they were behind a set of metal file boxes. I stepped into the room, and from my left I felt something cold press against my temple.

"I'm armed," said a female voice.

“So am I,” I pointed out.

“Drop the gun,” she said, her voice shaking. I could tell she was nervous, but I think I was on a level of nervousness previously unattained on earth.

“Not a chance, there’s about fifty undead just outside right now,” I said. I added, “I’m really *not* here to hurt you.”

We stood there a while... nobody moved, and I thought I saw a girl, maybe 16, peek out from behind the boxes. My attention wasn’t on her though, right at that second. And then Jess called me from down the corridor. The mystery woman asked me who that was.

“My girlfriend. And her son. And another eight year old girl.” I lowered the Glock, careful to do it slowly. “Look,” I said, “we’re not here to hurt you. Can I get you to aim that thing somewhere else?”

She lowered it suddenly, and I let go of a bunch of tension I hadn’t even been aware of. I turned; keeping the Glock pointed at the floor, and saw a woman in filthy clothes, maybe thirty or so, with reddish hair and a haunted look in her eyes. She had a revolver, and her hands were shaking as she lowered it. She still looked like she expected me to try to kill her, but when Jess walked in to the room she started crying. She started apologizing and sobbing, saying she thought I was one of the gang of bikers who’d come through a few weeks ago.

Jess and I calmed her down, and I went over to the girl hiding in the corner. She was still crouching behind the boxes, and I was careful to put the Glock away before I went over. She cowered, and her eyes looked even more haunted than the other woman’s were. She actually flinched from me when I asked her name. I backed off, thinking she’d been through some trauma.

We learned that the woman was named Phillipa, and had been a teacher here, before. The girl was one of her students, Janice. They'd been here hiding for weeks. Phillipa had been living inside the town when the dead walked, and had helped in the defence of the town and the building of the barricades. She'd been given the gun by someone, and had fled here when a gang of raiders had arrived and breached the barricade. They'd ignored the school, but had killed a lot of people in town and then left when the undead had breached the defences too. Seeing the undead around town, she'd stayed here on the second floor. She'd seen Janice running through the field outside later that evening, and had called her and let her in. The walking corpses had gradually wandered off after that. Jess asked what was wrong with Janice, and Phillipa told her that the girl had been assaulted by several of the raiders.

Supplies included what food they had recovered from the cafeteria, which wasn't much, and about fifty large water jugs, the kind for water coolers. They had some basic first aid supplies, a few blankets, and whatever they could steal out of lockers. I figured with us there, we had enough food for a week. If we could get to the Odyssey we could stretch that to three or four weeks easily. She also had a gun, a .38 revolver, with about a dozen bullets. That and a few fire axes were the only weapons they had.

Saturday

We've been here two days, and haven't seen a sign of Sarah, Darren, or any of the others. Good. I hope

they got away clean, and get to Cold Lake. I hope I get there soon too, and I hope they are smart about how they do things.

The undead outside show no sign of losing interest. They stopped trying to push over the Odyssey sometime during the first night, and are content now to lurk outside and hope for a free meal. We spy on them through the 2nd floor windows, carefully using mirrors.

Jess managed to get Janice to talk to her after a day, and confirmed the worst suspicions we had. The poor girl was gang-raped by several of the raiders before she managed to escape, and wandered through the town until she was spotted by some undead. She was rescued by her teacher, and had spent the last few weeks here with her. When I barged in she was afraid that she was going to be attacked again. She's coming out of it slowly, but still won't talk to me. I'm not taking it personally.

Jess and I talked to Phillipa about escaping. We all know the school is a deathtrap, either by starvation or the undead getting inside. So we are trying to put together a plan to get out. We're working on the details.

August 31, 2004

Still here. The school is secure, though the undead are still hanging around. Our plans have evolved, and we have a course of action in mind. There's a Jeep Cherokee that belonged to some townspeople in the school auto shop. It needs some basic work done, and Jess and I are tackling it. Once it's done

we'll get going, hopefully distracting the zombies with some noisy thing while we sneak out and away. I hope we can get to the Odyssey and grab the supplies we left there. Some food and ammo would be wonderful, as well as some of the other things. Painkillers. My wrist aches. And some extra clothing, since the weather is definitely cooler these last few days.

Phillipa is getting herself together now that we have a plan. She hadn't heard about the military in Cold Lake, but wants to come with us. Janice needs medical care and some counselling, and they'll be able to help her there I hope. She's withdrawn, but she talked to me for the first time yesterday. She just said thanks for the food I handed her, but I think that's progress.

Bed time now. It's late and the light from the laptop monitor is keeping Jess awake. I need to conserve battery power anyway, so I may not update until we get out of here.

September 2, 2004

10:34 a.m.

The Cherokee is ready. It needed an oil change, new filters, new brake pads, and some tweaking here and there, but we got it done as quietly as we could. All six of us would wait together in the auto shop while Jess and I worked. The only time we'd separate was when somebody needed to go to the bathroom, and even then we went in threes. That bears mentioning. The facilities no longer have water, so they don't work. What Phillipa figured was that

waste would have to be deposited someplace to keep the smell down. She found a big oil receptacle in the auto shop, and had been slowly filling that up. When we arrived, she showed us the tank, and I noticed it was on wheels. We hauled it down the corridor to the far end of the hall, into a music room. There were screens there so we set up some privacy areas. The top of the tank is sealable with a large cap, so the only time we have to smell it is when we remove the cap to dump waste in. The oil inside helps make it not be *quite* so foul smelling. We put a large sign on it saying "Human Waste! Careful!" so it can be disposed of properly when someone finally gets around to cleaning up this mess.

We are going to distract the undead outside with a stereo and some rap music we found in a locker. That done, we'll get what we can out of the Odyssey, and load it into the Jeep. Then tomorrow morning we'll get out of here. We might even catch up to the others, if they kept to the route we planned.

7:55 p.m.

An aircraft went over. Not a big jet like last time, this one was a small passenger plane. A Cessna of some kind, I think. We heard it flying low, and rushed to the windows. It went over heading west, and then turned south and circled. It was flying at about 500 feet. Phillipa said she knew how to get to the roof, so we ran up there as fast as we could. I ended up carrying Michael, it was easier than waiting.

On the roof we looked, and spotted the plane overhead. We waved and jumped around for a while before the plane levelled out and flew straight over us, wagging his wings back and forth as he went. He went around and came back, and waved at us out the window. Something fell from his hand, a shiny cylinder with something hanging from it. It fell towards us, and we saw a small parachute open. The cylinder still fell pretty quickly, but it landed gently enough that it didn't break anything. It fell on the roof near us (a really good shot), and proved to be a short cardboard tube wrapped in bubble wrap, with a mini chute strapped around it. Inside, after peeling away some tape, was a radio! There was a note. It was handwritten on loose-leaf paper, and said, "Set the radio to Channel 6. Range is short, so conserve battery power!"

We set the radio to 6 and turned it on. Immediately a voice was talking to us. He identified himself as Gavin Thompson, a civilian pilot working for the military in Cold Lake, and asked us if we were all alright. We told him we were fine, and who we were. He asked if we could hold on a day or so, since that would be the quickest he could get a unit from Cold Lake here to bail us out. We told him about the Jeep. He advised us that the area was heavily infested, and travel in anything less than a military convoy was very dangerous. Apparently there was an SAR (Search and Rescue) unit nearby, and could be here by midmorning tomorrow. We told him we could wait for the military, and he told us that they'd call us when they got into town. With that he flew off.

Salvation comes in the strangest forms.

September 4, 2004

I wasn't sure at first that this was a good idea, but they've let us have our gear and weapons back, as well as my computer, and a hot shower can do wonders for my state of mind.

Late on the night of the 2nd Phillipa and I were walking through the lower halls of the school, checking the doors quietly and making sure all the windows were secure. Three times a day we did this, just to be safe. We were walking silently down the main hallway when we heard a crash from the far end, and I thought it was from the room where we had come in through the window. I told Phillipa to go upstairs and tell Jess what we heard, and then come back. I'd wait for her right there in the hall. She took off, and was back in a few minutes. We went down the hall, guns out and pointed towards the noise, and I waved her to the far side so we were both walking along opposite walls. There was another crash, this time sounding like a table falling over, maybe? One of the things might have gotten in the window, I thought. We got to the corner, and I looked around it with the flashlight. The hallway was clear, the door to the office was still shut, and I breathed a quiet sigh. I had been half expecting to come around the corner and see a pack of the damned things.

I looked at Phillipa and she looked pretty scared. I was too, but I think I've seen enough of these things to know what the limits they have are. We listened. There were a few more sounds from the office. Shuffling and some papers falling. I suspected only one had gotten in, though how? Had they pushed

the van clear of the window finally? Or had one gone through it? We had to know. If the van was moved then we'd have to secure the window with something bigger and solid. I really didn't want to open that door, but if it was just the one, then we should be able to handle it. If not, we'd run and shoot as we fled. I whispered all this to Phillipa, and made sure she understood what I had in mind. I told her to let me do the shooting.

I prepared myself, and went to turn the handle. It was locked. Then I remembered we'd locked it when we first came in. I little chuckle escaped me before I could smother it, and even before I could stifle it all the way, the thing in the room was slamming against the door, groaning and trying to break through to us. Me and my big mouth! Phillipa jumped as the thing slammed the door the first time, and looked like she wanted to run away. She actually backed up a step. Hell, I had to, and the adrenalin was still flowing nicely. The door slammed again, and I heard a crack in the frame. Damn, it was going to get through. How was it doing this without breaking bones in its arms? Maybe it was, and just wasn't feeling it.

The door frame splintered, and the door started to open. It got stuck a few inches open, and we backed off to the corner. The walking corpse inside shoved its arms through the gap and pushed, and the door flew open. The smell hit us almost instantly, and the gag reflex was nasty, but I fought it down. The zombie that appeared looked terrible in the light from my flashlight. A businessman by the looks of the shredded clothes he wore, his torso was nearly bare, covered only by the tattered remnants of a

white shirt. There were long bloody scratches down his chest, and a lot of blood had leaked onto his pants. He was missing one shoe. He was also missing one eye, and a big chunk of his cheek, so we could see teeth inside his jaw. He turned around towards us and his one eye locked on me. I raised the Glock as he took a step forward, and I fired once. The bullet smashed into his face just under the remaining eye, and pummelled his head sideways. He fell, and started to get up again. Shit! I stepped forward and took aim again, and fired as he started to stand again. This one took him in the top of the head, went through, and exited out where his spine met his skull. A spray of black blood and rotten grey matter went splashing across the floor, and he went limp. I turned to Phillips and said, "See, nothing to worry about," and the second zombie lurched out the door and grabbed my left arm.

It raised my arm before I had time to react, and bit down hard. The cast took the bite, cracking in one spot, but protecting me pretty well. I didn't have time to aim, so I just shoved and took three steps forward, driving the rotten thing before me. It fell, and I landed on top of it. Immediately it was trying to bite my face, and I forced the cast under its chin and shoved down. The teeth missed me by an inch. I pinned its neck to the ground and raised the gun, while its arms tried to pull me closer. Damn it was strong! I forced the gun up between us, and shoved the barrel onto its face. One shot and it was done, but the sound was deafening. My ears were ringing as I rolled off the corpse. I checked for Phillipa, and she was about a dozen paces away down the hall, shaking and crying. She shrieked then, and raised her gun and shot over my head. I just scrambled

forward, and got up as she shot again. A quick look over my shoulder showed me a few more zombies had made it inside, and there were probably more out there attracted by the gunfire. They'd be inside soon enough. I yelled, "Run!" at her, and she turned and fled. I was right behind her.

Phillipa made it to the stairs ahead of me, and I stopped once she'd gotten through. I turned and saw four of the fuckers walking towards me. A fifth turned the corner behind them. God damn it! I took careful aim with the Glock and fired at the leader twice. He went down as his brains were scrambled. I waited a few seconds to aim again, and shot the next one down too. Three more had entered behind them, so there were six in the hall now still animated. I wasn't going to have enough ammo.

I went through the door, and as I closed it I threw the locks and barred the door with the 2x4's we'd placed there for just this possibility. I heard scraping from up above, and I looked up to see Jess hauling a huge desk to the edge of the stairs. I climbed up to her and she and I hauled the desk down as well as we could, and used it to blockade the doors at the bottom. We threw more furniture down as well to make it harder and harder to get through. Finally, we retreated back through to the upper hall, closed and barred the upper doors, and went back down to the classroom we'd adopted as home. I used some water to clean the rotten corpse goo off me, and Jess checked me carefully for bites or scratches. I was clear, much to my relief. My cast had saved me. I could see the tooth marks on the cast, and it took some scrubbing to get all the rotten flesh off. My ears were still ringing, but I could still

hear the thumping and pounding down below. The vast host of walking dead was inside now. This was bad news. The Jeep was down there. Our way out was down there.

We spent the night hardly sleeping. The noise kept the kids awake and scared, and we spent some time reassuring them. Megan came and sat with me, and I wrapped her in a blanket and settled her next to me for the night. Once in a while one of us would get up and go listen at the stairwell, to make sure they weren't getting through the piled furniture. They appeared to settle down a bit after a few hours, though the moans and groans didn't let up at all.

By the time dawn rolled around, we were all exhausted and fighting to stay awake. The children had all managed to sleep, but the adults (myself included) were weary and relying on cans of Coke raided from the vending machines to stay awake. The undead assault continued. They knew we were in here, and were hungry.

A few hours later the radio chirped, and we found ourselves talking to Captain Ingram, an Army officer who was in charge of the SAR unit that was coming to get us out. We told him of the situation, and the probable numbers of undead involved, and he told us to sit tight. About half an hour later we heard vehicles. Looking out the window we could see several small wheeled tank-like vehicles, and a few jeep-like cars. Soldiers drove these around the school, disappearing from our sight. Finally, after another few minutes, we heard shooting. Lots of shooting. It went on for some time. After that, the

Captain came on the radio again and asked where we were in the building. I told him. He said that a squad would be in to get us out in a few minutes, so be ready to move. He also told us to surrender any weapons we had, “for security reasons”, but that we’d get them back once the situation was under control. Jess looked a little miffed, and I was sure I didn’t want to give up my Glock, but what choice did we have?

Downstairs we heard shooting. Automatic weapons, it sounded like. The gunfire came in short bursts, and then there was a pause, then a series of single shots. Finally, we heard the crunch of the doors downstairs being removed, and furniture falling out. We started down the hallway to see if we could help, and ended up hauling away a fair bit of the crap we’d thrown down so that a clear path could be formed. Once I could see a live soldier through the tangle, I called out, and a live face appeared at the hole. He asked how we were doing, and I said we were ok. He told us to back away for a minute; they were going to haul the entire remaining blockade away. I went back upstairs then and told the others to grab their bags. On the way back I heard the rumble of the rest of the furniture being hauled away, and then soldiers were coming up the stairs. They stopped us where we were and asked for our guns. They had us outnumbered by a lot, and they *had* just rescued us, so we turned over our weapons. They took our bags as well, then escorted us downstairs and outside. On the way through the hallway below I saw about fifteen zombies lying destroyed in the hallway. They had been pushed aside, and more soldiers were looking in other rooms, presumably for salvage and more undead. A

few said hello when we went by, but most of the men and women just gave us a curious look before getting back to business.

Outside, we met Captain Ingram, a short bulky man with a thick moustache and grey hair. He asked us to stand beside a large 8-wheeled tank-like vehicle with a cannon on top. Our escort of soldiers stood off to our right. Another man approached us, this one in uniform also, but with a red cross on him, so I assumed he was a medic. He stopped a few feet away and asked if any of us were bitten. He then asked each of us to come with him to a tent quickly set up nearby, where we could be checked. We told him none of us were infected, but he insisted, and the Captain asked us to please cooperate. Fine. I went first. A soldier came with us. I stepped into the tent and he asked me to remove my shirt and pants. I did so, and the bloody, gore-encrusted clothes were placed in a plastic bag. He looked me over carefully, asked about my wrist and a few other abrasions I had, and pronounced me clean. The soldier who had come in with us took his hand away from his gun then, and handed me a new set of clothes. These were military issue, and fit pretty well. I asked him if they had a female medic here, and he said they didn't. I told him about Janice, and asked if it would be okay for her to be either skipped or have her teacher Phillipa there to help reassure her. He said he'd talk to the CO. I was shown back outside, and ushered over to Ingram. He shook my hand as he introduced himself, and asked me to wait until everyone else had been cleared, and then he'd tell me what was going on. In the meantime, I was offered coffee! There was no milk or sugar, but what the hell!

Around us, the undead were showing up still, and soldiers were destroying them. They'd let a single undead come fairly close before killing it, but groups they destroyed at a distance. Soldiers were dragging the bodies into a pile in the center of the field and dowsing them with fuel, for a cremation, I supposed. Others were watching the perimeter, or scouting the inside of the school. I asked the Captain if I could get some supplies out of the Odyssey and transfer them to the Jeep we had inside. He thought it over and said I could, after the others were cleared. We wouldn't have long to do it though, as he wanted to get out of this town and get back to his base before lunch.

Jess was next to be cleared, then Michael. They both came out wearing new clothes, but Michael's were civilian kids' clothes. Phillipa went next, then Megan, and then they asked Phillipa to come back in with a female soldier and the medic for Janice's exam. She went, and then came out dressed in slightly-too-large army clothes. She seemed ok, and the medic reported to the Captain that we were all clear and in good health. He sat us all down at a table while the bodies in the field were piled up, coffee and fruit juice were handed out, and he told us what was going on.

This region was heavily infested with undead, he told us, and wasn't safe to travel in. We would be taken to a temporary base at Athabasca, which had survived the uprising fairly well, and was now a fortified town. Many other survivors were there, and from there we'd likely be moved to Cold Lake once the region had been scouted. By tonight, he promised, we'd get hot showers, fresh food, and a

clean bed. We looked at each other, and Jess and I in particular shared the thought, *but then what?* We asked if we could have our weapons back, and load up the Jeep. He assured us that we'd have them back as soon as the situation was under control. I looked around. No more undead were approaching right this moment, the soldiers were tearing down the tent and packing up, and the pile of corpses was getting pretty big. I remarked that it looked under control, and we'd like our weapons back. I don't think he liked my attitude, but he sighed and waved over a soldier standing nearby. Our weapons and ammo were placed on the table, and Jess and I instantly took them and checked them, making sure they were loaded and clean, safeties on. Jess seemed pleased. Phillipa took her gun too, though she looked a little uncertain. I thanked the Captain, and the group of us got up and went over to the Odyssey. Its other side door was open, and a lot of stuff had spilled out onto the ground. Zombies had climbed over the seats to get in the window, it seemed. But how had they opened the door? I reached in and started gathering things, and we carried them all over to the Jeep in the auto shop, loading carefully. Two of the soldiers introduced themselves and offered to help. We accepted, and it made the loading go a lot faster. We got our bags back too. Once we were done we realized we'd have enough room for only four people in the Jeep. Janice did not want to be separated from us. No way was Michael going anywhere his mom wasn't, and Megan was attached to Jess and I like she was glued on. We compromised. Phillipa and I would go with the soldiers in one of the tank-things, and Jess would take Megan, Michael, and Janice in the Jeep.

We simply didn't have time to search for another working vehicle.

We were ready, except for one final thing. Captain Ingram gathered everyone in the field by the corpses, and said a prayer. He reminded us that the dead were once our neighbours and friends, family members and citizens of our communities. The soldiers all bowed their heads a moment, and then we got moving while the pyre was lit. I saw the plastic bags with our clothes on the pile as well. Just before we left I handed the Captain the dog tags, ID, and journal of MCpl Chambers, and told him where we'd buried him. He thanked me solemnly and got into his vehicle.

We rolled into Athabasca in the convoy just before lunch yesterday. The town was fortified alright. Barricades and armed guards everywhere. We drove through the lines and the gates were closed behind us. Hundreds of people were out on the streets, and some waved at us as we passed. We stopped at a school, and all six of us were taken inside. The Jeep was parked and Jess locked it up, after grabbing a few things out of it. Inside we met an officer who took our names, where we were from, and what our occupations were before the dead rose. He then assigned us to a tent outside, telling us it was ours to live in until this latest group of survivors was moved to more permanent housing at Cold Lake. That would be in a week or so. I asked him if he'd had any other groups come in recently, and he said yes, a few people here and there, plus one larger group a few days ago. I asked if my sister was among them, and he looked up the name. "Yes, she's here. Assigned to tent #41."

I asked the way, and he pointed. I picked up Michael and Jess took Megan by the hand. Phillipa said she'd take Janice to our tent and get settled, but I almost didn't hear her. I walked over to the tents and began hunting for 41. I figured out the order, and walked right to it. The flap was closed, but there was a wooden post out front with a bucket hung on it. I knocked on it and called, "Anybody home?"

Seconds later Sarah came bursting outside, and stared at me in disbelief. Then I was hugging her, and then Amanda was there, and Adam, and Sanji, and Christie, Jay, and even Sparkle. I didn't see Darren, but Sarah reassured me after she was done hugging me and Jess that he was alright. Darren had volunteered to help with the kitchens today, and was inside getting lunch ready. Sanji still wore his Glock, I saw. His clothes, like mine, were military issued. Some of the others were also dressed the same. We went inside the tent and exchanged tales. I told them what had happened to us, and about Janice and Phillipa. I asked Sarah if she could talk to Janice and maybe give her a check-up, and she said yes, and she'd see if she could find a pregnancy kit as well. She told us that some marauders had been killed a few days ago when they had run into the military near Smoky Lake, and had foolishly tried to fight rather than be arrested.

We got settled, and went to see Darren in the kitchens. He was really happy we weren't dead, and gave us a plate of hot food each, since it was basically lunch time. A lot of the survivors living in the tents came in to eat, and many said hello to us. Some had the shell shocked look, but others were happier and seemed to be healthy. We ate in the

schools cafeteria, which had power, so the lights were on. Lunch was wonderful! Hot bread rolls, soup, and tuna salad sandwiches. Amazing. After that Sarah and Sanji took us to the locker rooms, where showers were available. After that luxury of soap and hot water I felt human again for the first time in weeks. We all returned to the tents to hear what was going on.

After we had failed to follow them out of town, they had wanted to go back and see if we were alright, but too many undead were between us and them. They had reluctantly fled, and I agreed with their choice. They had made it up to Perryvale, a small town on the road to Athabasca, when they had met some military people. They'd been escorted back here, and had been here since. They'd been allowed to keep the guns and gear, but the gas tanker had been confiscated by the military. They'd each been interviewed about what they'd seen and done since the rise, and Sarah and Jay were now employed by the medical unit here. Sanji was going to be joining the military too, as his previous experience as a soldier and policeman was going to be useful. Phillipa would probably be taken to a school in Cold Lake, where they were in dire need of teachers. Children up to 15 years old stayed with their parents or relatives, or just whoever was looking after them when they came in. That meant Michael was taken care of, Megan would stay with either Jess and I or Christie, and Darren and Janice would probably be set up in quarters for young adults. I didn't see myself joining the military. I was an investment banker before. Not much use for those skills now. I guess I'll have to learn another trade.

Sleeping that night was a chore. The tent wasn't solid, and every twitch of wind, or person walking by outside, made me wake up in a cold sweat. Jess was right there with me, and neither of us slept well.

This morning a man came and interviewed us. He wanted to know anything at all we could tell him about the undead, where we'd been, who we'd seen, and how many living corpses we'd encountered. It took quite a while to relay all that had happened to us. We had to pause for lunch. After he was done, another man, military this time, came by and asked how we were. He was Major Davidson, a thin man with a thick head of black hair. He was polite and asked about each of us. He then told us our options. Everyone, he said, had to contribute if we were to survive. He asked what our skills were, and we told him. He seemed dubious when I told him that Jess was a very good sniper. She told him she used to shoot competitively. My own skills as an investment banker weren't so relevant, but he was interested in our progress and why we hadn't left anyone behind once we knew they were alive. Even a horse and cat had been rescued! It was hard at first to explain, but I tried to tell him why we couldn't leave anyone for the hungry undead. In the end, it came down to this.

"Well, because they were *alive*..."

He told us that since Jess was a parent of a small child, she wouldn't have to work at anything that took her away from his care. So something could be found for her near where Michael eventually went back to school. For myself, I could either join the military or perform some other useful task like farming or foraging. He'd let us think about it. I

asked him then what the global situation was like. “Bad, son. Very bad,” he said to me. Apparently the plague, or virus, or whatever it was, had swept the planet. Only a few places had escaped unscathed. Madagascar was untouched, as were a few Pacific islands. Hawaii was intact and was currently the United States seat of power. Iceland had escaped with only a few thousand deaths. But everywhere else, the chaos and carnage in the first several weeks had been unimaginable. Satellites were still functioning, and so communications between military bases around the world were ongoing. Many bases here in North America had been overwhelmed or had stopped transmitting since the beginning back in May. Only three here in Western Canada were functional. Cold Lake, Comox, and Wainright. The cities were deserted except for the undead and scattered survivors, and the countryside was barren of life in many areas, though the undead again seemed to prosper.

In the weeks right after the start of the rising, as refugees flooded in, military missions were launched to destroy large concentrations of the undead. The Major thought that at one point the Americans had considered that nuclear weapons should be used on the cities to incinerate the undead there, but he didn’t know what became of that idea. Since then, large groups of walking dead had approached CFB Cold Lake from the west three times. Once they were concentrated enough that a Fuel Air Explosive had been dropped on them, destroying the entire town of Bonnyville, and killing three or four thousand zombies. But there were more. Always more. The population of Alberta before this was over two point nine million

people. And add in the next door province of Saskatchewan, with its more than one million, and the picture gets grim. I can't even imagine what it's like in the USA or back east in Ontario.

Major Davidson left us to think. Jess and I sat there for a while, and absorbed all he said. We had some serious thinking to do. We needed to plan and figure out what the future was going to hold for us. We needed to take action. I know even though we have come here, to this relatively safe place, the future is uncertain. Athabasca could be attacked tomorrow, or even tonight. The few thousand surviving here won't be able to make it all winter unless huge amounts of crops and salvage are brought in. I left Jess to go for a walk around the town. I needed to think.

7 p.m.

I know what I am going to do. I have talked to Major Davidson and he has agreed to let me form a primarily civilian salvage team. Apparently there are a few of these operating. The military simply isn't large enough to cover everything, so civilians are being used to dig up generators, vehicles, fuel, food, and water, plus whatever else we need to find. We'll nominally be under military control, but free to use whatever means we have available to get the job done. There will be an assigned military officer in the team, and I'll have to ultimately answer to Maj. Davidson. Fine. That's one thing cleared up.

The second thing was a bit more fun. I asked Jessica to marry me. She was so surprised that she just looked stunned for nearly a minute, until Michael

laughed and told her, “Mommy, close your mouth!” She of course graciously agreed, and we are now going off to celebrate the announcement with my sister and friends.

September 5, 2004

The hardest part is getting used to the lights. It's dark now, and we are in the tent, and there are these big damned spotlights mounted by the school, pointed out away towards the fields. They absolutely ruin my night vision. We'd gone so long without electrical power that having a big bright light at night is something none of us are comfortable with now. Plus Jess and I are still waking up every time a sentry goes past, or someone goes to the bathroom. And that's something I am so grateful for. Flush toilets. I raise my hands to heaven in thanks for that alone.

Some more survivors were brought in today. A family of three. There was a young man, his even younger wife, and a baby. I have no idea how they kept the baby alive all this time, but they did. They are in the tent two down and across from us, and I can hear the two adults stir whenever somebody passes. I think a lot of people here have that reaction.

The Major and I talked for a few minutes today. He was interested in my proposal, and wanted to talk about it some more. I am going to talk to some more of the survivors here and see about gathering a crew together. The Major has offered us ammunition, vehicles, and fuel, as well as basic supplies. I am thinking that a group of seven will be large enough.

Darren expressed interest right away, but I think he may have been through enough already. He still needs to finish school.

The nights are cooler. We have blankets we were issued, plus what we had with us in the Jeep, so we're warm enough. The days are cool too. Not the best summer. But we get a hot shower every day and hot fresh food, so this is like heaven. After so long eating cold canned stews and soups, I am savouring every carrot and celery stick.

September 6, 2004

Wedding plans proceed. The Major got wind of it somehow, and now it's a big deal to everyone here. Military people and civilians alike, many of whom I don't even know the names of, were wishing us good luck all day! I blame Sarah. I saw the smug look she had on her face earlier. She's been working in the small hospital they have here, her skills as a paramedic being in high demand. The gym of the school is full of wounded survivors too, or sick people, and even a few pregnant women. There are no bite victims here. Apparently they are kept separate when they come in, and once they die they are cremated. There haven't been many of those over the last months, though.

Weather is decidedly cold and wet lately too. I mentioned this before. Sporadic rain, air so damned cold you can see your breath when you get up in the morning and brief flashes of warm sunlight in the daytime. I have a real bad feeling about winter, though a Corporal I was talking to earlier says they expect the zombies will freeze solid once it gets

cold enough to snow. That would make it really easy to dispose of a bunch of them, so I hope it happens. Snow would make it hard to find them, though.

Looks like we'll be getting out of here in a few more days. The tents are almost full now; I think there are three hundred or so of us here. Sarah says she might stay here to help out, and the Major said that she'd be welcome and a room in a house in town would be found for her if she chose to stay. Jay will be going along to Cold Lake. They have a dentist here, and one there, but apparently want more for the base. Lots more survivors there, I guess. I'll be operating out of Cold Lake, and Jess will want to go there to see that Michael and Megan get into the school that Phillipa will be teaching at. Christie has decided she'll go to Cold Lake and see if the Air Force wants her. She says she doesn't want to be Army, she's seen enough undead close up. Adam and Amanda are both staying here, to help out with the incoming survivors. Apparently Adam has some electrical training, and they need tradesmen here to help build the winter shelters. Amanda has volunteered to help in the hospital, and the Major has found them a place in town. Darren is coming to Cold Lake and is still pressing me to let him be one of the crew I am putting together. He's making more sense too. Janice has talked to a counsellor here, and is going to talk to a psychologist who's survived in Cold Lake. She seems a bit better, I think, but Phillipa and Jess seem really worried about her. Sanji has joined up, and apparently has been made an officer. Past experience, I suppose, or his former rank when he was in the military years ago. I plan to talk to the

Major to have him be our military liaison, since I know and trust him.

A man from town came into the tent camp earlier and asked for me. He said he was the priest at the local Roman Catholic Church, and would Jess and I like to be married there? I realised I had *no idea* if Jess was even religious. We talked about it, and she said she actually was a Catholic, though she hadn't practiced in years. I was Anglican, but similarly I hadn't practiced in ages. So we agreed to the wedding being at the church. Maybe it would be good luck? We get married in three days. Shit, I need a suit!

September 8, 2004

Tomorrow Jess and I are getting married. Wow. I am really drunk right now. This is the first time I have drunk any booze (beers don't count) since the stupid dead people got up and tried to eat me. Eat me! Ha! Stupid dead fuckers.

Sarah, lovely Sarah, came in and said, "Hey, lets get you plastered!" So we went to the bar in town and everyone is so great there, giving me drinks and there are pretzels too, where did they get pretzels? So I came back and now I have to drink some water or I'll wish I was dead tomorrow. Jess is pretty drunk right now too, but Christy is watching the kiddies, god she's got a tongue in my ear! Stop that youuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu, oh wait....

September 11, 2004

Oh, I shouldn't update when I'm drunk. I left the laptop on, and drained the battery down to nothing. I didn't have a chance to recharge it until late yesterday. I need to look around for either a spare, or a laptop with two or three batteries.

After the ceremony on the 9th the whole town turned out for a feast. There's no other word. It turned into a huge party.

The ceremony itself... Jess looked fantastic. She and Sarah and Christy and Amanda and a few women I didn't know disappeared the morning of the 9th before I was even fully awake. That made it simple for me to go to get ready. I found a tuxedo! There's a rental place in town, but they didn't charge me anything since nobody had any money. I just had to promise to find the guy something useful on a salvage mission at some point. I asked what 'useful' meant, and he said, "Oh you know, a supply of paper, or a laptop or PDA in working order."

Darren found me in town that morning and hustled me back to get changed. We went to the church after I shaved and showered, and I dressed there. At noon the whole thing started, and I found myself in a tux, standing at the head of the aisle waiting for Jess. Darren had gotten two rings for us, after finding out our sizes, from a jewellery store in town that had no owner. The owner had died in the initial uprising, and got killed again a few days later when some fool opened up the store and he was in there waiting to feed. The police had closed the store, but the Major got permission from the local cops to let Darren get us a couple rings. I hadn't seen them yet.

We had a full house well before the event began. My sister and the ladies showed up in varied but very nice dresses, and Darren was at my side. The priest, Father Harrison, signalled to the organist and suddenly there was wedding march music playing. I don't remember it at all, because Jess walked in at that point. I have *no idea* where she got that dress, but she looked absolutely beautiful in it. Sparkling white, little bits of lace on it in strategic places, and her hair was done up the nicest I have ever seen it, drawn off her face and pinned up. She looked hot! Suddenly I found myself remembering the night before, and I think I turned red. She sure gets frisky when she's drunk.

Anyways, she walked, and suddenly we were facing the priest and saying "I do," and then people were cheering and it was time for the feast. It was such a blur; I don't even remember most of it until the gifts. Oh, and the rings are nice! They are gold bands with three small diamonds each in them. Very tasteful.

We moved over to a hall in the community center, and the speeches began. The Major toasted us and said a short few words, and Sarah and Darren did too, and then Amanda got up and thanked us for saving her and all the others from Prince George. People actually applauded, to my horror.

We got presents. I won't go into details; I'll just say they are a nice selection of paramilitary survival gear, handy household objects, and other useful things. The rest of the night was a nice supper of fresh chicken, farm eggs, salad (oh how I missed fresh vegetables), and baked potatoes. This was

followed by the best fruit pies I have ever had, and lots of coffee. Glorious coffee!

They cleared the tables after that, and we ended up dancing. I can't dance, and Jess realised that pretty quickly. I gave it the old college try though.

I guess the point is that for a while we were able to forget about the undead. Life just seemed normal for a little while, and that was nice. The next day after the wedding we just lay around in bed until Michael and Megan jumped on us and woke us up. It seems we've sort of unofficially adopted Megan. I've gone from a bachelor to a husband and parent of two overnight. It's worrying, but I like it so far, and I have got to know Megan and Michael pretty well over the months. This really isn't that big of a change, it's the same sort of thing that we had been doing since we all met up. Yesterday they packed us all up (everyone in the tent area) and moved us either into town or to Cold Lake. So for now it's goodbye to Amanda and Adam, as well as Sarah, who's staying here with them in a house in town. Darren, Jay, Christie, and Sanji are coming to Cold Lake, along with Phillipa and Janice. Jess and I, and the two children are going to Cold Lake, but I know that I will be assembling a team pretty quick after that, and heading south for some salvage orders. The Major thinks that we'll be heading for Red Deer or Calgary before the snow flies, but after it snows we'll likely be going to Edmonton for some "extensive salvage operations", as he puts it. Gee, I can't wait.

So we drove through the countryside, a convoy of civilian and military vehicles about 40 cars long.

We actually passed oncoming traffic, and saw signs of human habitation in the houses and farms we passed. People waved at us, and we waved back. Everyone we saw, and I do mean everyone, was armed and traveling in groups. If they were sixteen or older, they had a gun. Mostly it was hunting rifles, but a fair number of pistols were in evidence as well. So much for Canada being not so much of a gun-nut culture as the USA. The towns we passed were inhabited and heavily defended, most with walls hastily built around them, or fences of barbed wire and chain link. Only once did we see undead, and that was in a field near the town of Rich Lake. Three of them were walking towards a pick-up truck, and they were shot down one by one before they even got close to it. There were snipers in the truck, and about a dozen men with guns all ready to deal with the corpses. They all turned and waved as we passed.

We arrived in the town of Cold Lake around 3 p.m., and were met by military and civilian officials. All of us were assigned housing inside the fenced town. It was protected on all sides by two rows of chain-link fences and sentry towers that I doubt had been there two months ago. What brush there was had been cleared away from the fences for almost 500 feet. Again all of us had to go through medical checks, and this took until well after dark. Waiting and listening to the soldiers and medics talk, I learned a lot. Asking questions taught me even more. Cold Lake is now a military encampment, not just the base but the town itself. They lost a lot of people in the initial outbreak, nearly a third of the civilians and a hundred of the soldiers, but they managed to clear the town and surrounding areas.

There is now a clear zone five kilometers wide along the highway to Athabasca, wider in some places. The area between the towns of Iron River and Cold Lake, and south to Bonnyville (where they dropped the F.A.E.) is completely cleared of undead, and is checked constantly. The military has gone east as far as Beacon Hill, Saskatchewan, and north to Fort McMurray, west to Whitecourt and Slave Lake, and as far south as Stettler. None of those areas are cleared of the undead, but whenever survivors are discovered they are rescued and returned here. There haven't been many. One of the soldiers was convinced that there were a lot more survivors out there, hiding and waiting to see if the undead would eventually just rot away. So far they haven't.

Eventually we were all cleared as healthy and uninfected, and given our house assignment. It was a house that had been empty for a while. I was told the former occupants had been killed when the undead rose, and the house was taken by the military as emergency housing. Now they were turning it over to us for the duration. Many other empty houses were being assigned as well. The population of the town was filling up again, and now was just over thirteen thousand. So now we are getting settled in and I have gone around and checked the fences, bars on all the windows, and made sure the doors are reinforced and solid. We also planned emergency escape routes, got a set of bug-out bags ready and set them in a central location, and made sure we had a full tank of gas in the Cherokee. Jess and I have set aside an upstairs room as a weapons room, and the children are under orders not to go in there unless we are attacked by

the undead. There are about a hundred things I want to do to this place to make it more secure. It's not that I think the town will be over-run by zombies... it's just that I *expect* the town to be over-run by zombies. And we want a way out of here if that happens. It's not paranoia when they really are out to eat you.

September 13, 2004

Questions plague me, constantly turning over and over in my mind. Why haven't they rotted away to nothing? What makes them rise from death? Why do they eat the living but not each other? The virus theory seems to have been disproved. Early reports from the CDC back in May seemed to lead people to think that a virus from Africa was behind this, but now the people here are not sure what the reason is. There's a minister preaching that God has damned us for our sins, there's a biologist at the base who claims that there's a genetic reason behind all this, and there's a couple of conspiracy theorists who claim to have proof that it was aliens. And that's just what I've heard people in town talking about in the last few days. Who knows what the real reasons for this apocalypse are.

A military officer came to see me, a Captain named Couper. He wanted to talk about my crew, even though I haven't put it together yet. He had some suggestions of people I might want to talk to, and had a military liaison in mind as well. I don't get Sanji, unfortunately. He's going to be on some extended training session. Speaking of training, before I go out on the first run, they want us ('us'

being all the civilian volunteers for this sort of thing) to go through a three week orientation and training school to teach us how not to shoot each other, basic tactics and survival skills, radio operations, motorcycle riding, and stuff like that. I think it's a great idea, and I wish I'd had it before this crap all began. I think I've got the 'not shooting each other' part down, but it'd be nice if anyone I went out there with had it too.

So Darren and I start on tomorrow on this program. Yes, Darren finally wore me down, and I actually think he'll be good at this. If he's going to be doing this scavenger bit, I want him with me. Jess is pretty cool with the idea of Darren going out with us, since she knows how he thinks and acts. I wish Jess were able to come too, but she has Michael and now Megan to raise and feed and care for. But damn it, she's the best shot I have ever seen. Having her there as a sniper backup always made me feel a lot safer.

There's a difference between the townsfolk who lived through the disaster, and those who came later as survivors. The survivors from outside, who've dealt with the undead on a daily basis, take this shit a lot more seriously. It has been noticed that they fortify the places they live in a *lot* more than the townsfolk, and most have the 'thousand yard stare' when they first arrive. Apparently even Jess and I have it.

The kids start school next Monday. They aren't sure what to think of that, but I hear that they are trying to cram as much basic education into them as they can, because the plan is that once they turn 15

they'll be out with the adults rebuilding. The teachers here have thought about it a lot, and basic skills and trades are going to be the major focus now. Math and sciences are still to be taught, as are languages and a few other subjects, but the rest is on the back burner until the crisis is over. When will that be? Who knows...

September 14, 2004

Oh lord, am I sore. I can barely move. First day of the training. Drill sergeant from Hell. Shit, man, I'm not in the army, I'm a civilian. Holy hell, I have pain in places I didn't know there were muscles. It's going to be worse tomorrow. And the insane part is Jess is arguing she should be in training too. Even more insane, I agreed. We're going to talk to Captain Couper about that in the morning. Now I go to bed, though. Ouch.

I did learn some interesting things though. Apparently I was doing some of the gun stuff right, like selecting targets and single shots per target. But we were crossing each others field of fire something awful. Miracle we didn't kill each other. Got to work on that. Hopefully it doesn't snow before we head out for the first retrieval.

September 19, 2004

School starts tomorrow for the kids. Neither one is sure what to think about that. It's technically kindergarten for Michael, and for Megan it's kind of a return to grade three. She's gotten basic math, reading, and science down, but it's been so long

since she's practiced these things that it might take some getting used to again.

Training for me is going well. Jess is out right now taking a turn on the night watch on the south tower. Once the dude in charge of the watch found out about her sniper skills he came over and practically demanded she take a few shifts a week, and she was happy to. She gets to be in the next go round of training too, even if she only uses it here. We've talked about how I'll be away on retrieval and salvage missions a lot, and she's made me promise to watch out for Darren, and Darren to watch my ass too. We don't want any close encounters again.

That's something I should mention. Yesterday I was talking to Sgt. Lindt, who was teaching us First Aid and basic zombie 'biology', and he asked if any of our group had been "up close and personal" with a zombie yet. I waved. He asked how close it was. I showed him the cast with the tooth marks on the wrist, and then told him what happened. He seemed appalled by how close we'd come to the damned things so often. A lot of the people here haven't even seen a zombie yet, so it's kind of unreal for them. But a lot more have seen them, so they know what we're up against. I get the cast off at the end of training, just over two more weeks. I also talked to some people in the class and in the town about being on the crew. So far I have three possible, and two confirmed (Darren and an Army guy named Corporal Eric Craig). The possibles will get back to me within a few days, and then we start training some together and getting to know one another.

I heard a few undead got near the fence the other night from the east. They were shot down by snipers before they got within 200 feet of the fences, and the bodies were burned in the morning. The town has strict rules here about bodies. Any death for whatever reason has to be reported, and any sickness, even a cold, goes to the hospital to be checked out. If someone you know dies you have to call the Body Squad right away. That's not the real name, it's a nickname for a bunch of people who take control of corpses before they potentially reanimate, and all bodies of the dead will be burned ASAP now. There are patrols through the town now at all hours, armed and driving trucks and cars.

It's cold out there now. Frost is common on the cars in the mornings. We expect snow any time, and it's only the very start of Fall. I have the feeling this is going to be a long, terrible winter.

September 22, 2004

I am so tired. The training is severely short so they cram a lot of things in to our 10 hour days. I have learned that suppressed weapons are a wonderful thing. How I wish I'd had silencers before. And the C7A1? Sweet hell, that's a great weapon, and now that I have an idea how to use it I think I'll hang up the carbine I have been lugging around. And radios! How cool is this?

The other primary weapon we have been trained on is the 9mm Browning, similar enough to the Glock that I have no trouble using it. Plentiful ammunition for the Browning, so I think we'll be carrying those on salvage runs.

Jess got her hands on a LRSW (Long Range Sniper Weapon) that one of the Army guys here has. She was in heaven for the hour she got to play with it. She gave it back, but told me she was going to talk to the base and see if she could get into the sniper training they do. I think they'll take her, with her record so far. She's already scheduled to take the 3-week course starting next Monday.

The cast is itching. The skin under it, I mean. I can't wait to get this thing off.

September 25, 2004

We had an emergency last night. Someone died down the street and it was unreported. So, zombie outbreak in town with a few casualties, and of course I was right in the middle of it. I was home that night with Jess, having put the two kids to bed a few hours ago. Jess and I were working on interior barricades that we could slip over the door frames and windows, and seal in case of an emergency, when I heard a sound of breaking glass through the window. Jess and I immediately looked at each other, then outside. I turned and closed the window, and Jess picked up the Glock that I had hung on the wall nearby.

First things first. Check on the kids, who were sleeping peacefully. Check all the doors and windows downstairs, and the basement. Jess took up her rifle and shut off the lights, while I got geared up with the Browning, Glock, and flashlight. We checked outside, all around, and saw no motion, so I went outside on the front step and listened, Glock in hand. It was very quiet, and I was hoping

someone had just broken a window. That would be great. Then I could go back inside and have some more dinner, a beer, not shoot anything.

It was not to be. I smelled the decay right before the first one shambled into view. Jess was still inside, so I opened the door and told her to call the Body Squad. Then I locked the door and shut it, and stepped down to deal with the undead walking towards me. I stayed on the last step, and took careful aim with the Glock. The shambling horror approaching me was one of my neighbours, Mr. Hamlyn. As I waited for him to get within range I saw another one step out of his house, three down and across the street. Shit, it was his wife, Barb. God damn it. They had a grown son in the base, but I think it was just them in the house. Doug Hamlyn, or what used to be Doug before tonight, shambled over my way. His wife was faster. There was blood on her mouth and hands, and a whole lot of missing tissue on Doug's neck and shoulders where she'd bit him. He'd leaked a lot, and his flesh was eerily pale in the streetlight. I shot him in the top of the head when he was about twenty feet from me, one shot that passed through his forehead with a wet smack. I aimed at his wife and fired before he hit the ground, and hit her in the face. She spun around and got back up, and her face was a real mess now. The bullet hadn't been gentle, but it had torn out one eye and half her cheek when it hit. She was far faster than her dead husband had ever been, living or undead, and she was coming right at me as lights were going on in the houses nearby. I aimed again, and just as she stepped over Doug's body I shot twice more. Both rounds went clean through her skull, and she fell on top of her husband.

The living neighbours arrived, mostly armed, and within a few minutes there were a dozen of us searching the Hamlyn's house. We were leaving again, the place being empty, when the Body Squad arrived with a truck full of troops. It was pretty obvious what had happened to them, and the son arrived after they had taken the bodies away, and we had to explain to him that his mom had died of a heart attack, and that his father had been killed by her when she rose. It wasn't fun at all, and he was glaring at me when he found out it was me who shot them.

I went back inside once it was obvious the situation was calming down. Jess and I went and sat in the kitchen and talked for a while. We are going to work on some more barricades over the next week, and I want to get the Jeep fuelled up again and restock our bug-out bags. Maybe we'll stock the Jeep with some non-perishable foods and have a rotating water cache in it too. This incident just made me real paranoid.

September 27, 2004

After an x-ray today at the hospital here, I got the cast removed. My arm is pale and felt a bit clammy when I touched it, but the bone set nicely. The skin is all smooth. It feels kind of neat, actually. I kept the cast. The medical staff had a few raised eyebrows when they saw the tooth marks on it.

Training is interesting. With the constant weapons drills, radio lessons, basic tactical classes, and vehicle familiarization, it's a wonder we have time for field first aid, biology, and weapons

maintenance. The instructors keep complaining that they want more time to train us. Three weeks isn't enough, apparently. They want five or six weeks. But the base CO said three, so we get three. Jess has started her classes too. It's a good thing the school doubles as a daycare with both of us in this.

Christie stopped by for dinner today, and we all spent a while playing with Michael and Megan. She's been provisionally accepted into the Air Force, with a group of other young and not-so-young recruits. She passed the aptitude tests, and was able to offer some real-life anti-zombie experiences to help get her in. She seems pretty happy about it. I also got a call from Sarah in Athabasca. We talked for about an hour, catching up on the latest news. A group of about sixty undead were destroyed less than a kilometer from the main barricade into town, and the next day thirty more were seen and destroyed. They had both come from the south, and there is a worry that more will show up. She sounded pretty confident though. More survivors have been brought in, and another group will be coming out here fairly soon. We said goodbye, each wishing the other good luck.

Darren is thriving in this town. He's doing really well in the classes, and has made some friends among the youngsters here. I think he has a girlfriend, but he's not saying.

September 29, 2004

Some more survivors were brought in from the south in a plane today. The plane landed at the base while I was there for training, so we heard all about

it. The plane was a passenger jet, about a twelve seater, and had come from Montana. Apparently the pilot had scrounged enough avgas for the trip after hearing a radio signal from the last Hercules heading to Comox. He and seven others had gathered what they could and scrounged all the avgas they could find, fuelled up this plane, and flown here. They landed on fumes, and had no idea what to expect when they arrived. I heard they were so overjoyed to find a large enclave of humanity that several of them broke down and had to be taken to the base medical center.

I've heard other tales from other survivors. There's a man in Cold Lake here who survived from the start on his own, traveling from Victoria on the day the outbreaks started there, by boat up to the Alaskan shore, and from there he took a car south, ending up here after three months.

There's a woman and her son who survived in Edmonton for six weeks before fleeing on a motorcycle. They made it to Vermilion before they ran out of luck. They spent another month trapped in a small grocery store while the population of the town tried to get inside. They were rescued by some passing survivors who belonged to some bike gang. They'd picked up these two and they had all made it here, picking up another three survivors on the way.

And the news from the rest of the world is trickling in. There's a group in Michigan that managed to get hold of a really powerful broadcaster, bounced a signal off a satellite, and told us here that they had about fifty people safe inside a housing project.

The US government in Hawaii has also shown itself again, making promises to the American people that they'll rid the continental US of the undead within ten years. I laughed! No mention of Canada or Mexico. And ten years? Good luck! And I really have to wonder who they were talking to. I doubt more than ten people in the US were even listening.

I also heard today that Britain was silenced within a few weeks of the initial outbreaks, but has recently been heard from. A British submarine surfaced somewhere in the east, off Newfoundland, apparently, and managed to resupply with a raid on Halifax. I don't know where this story comes from though, so it might be bogus.

It's quite relieving to hear that this isn't the end of the world after all. We've suffered a massive depopulation, there's an enemy we can't reason with trying to eat us, and the global society we once had has been shattered, but there's still hope. Always hope.

October 2, 2004

Time to get to work now. Classes are over, and three days from now we are heading south to scout out the area around Vegreville. Captain Couper came again to talk about this mission. We are looking for fuel, food, and whatever survivors we can find. There are several towns in the area that we are to check out, and anything that we can find we are to mark and secure if possible, and return with if we can. A lot of "if's" in that, eh? Too many, I think, but with the world in this state, it is the very best we can do.

The crew, other than Darren and I, consists of... Cpl Eric Craig. He's an Army guy, tall and skinny, can drink like a fish, but is a really good shot and a wicked hand-to-hand fighter. He's from Edmonton, and ended up here when they abandoned the infantry base in the city.

Laura Howard, a former mechanic from Saskatoon. Met her on the course we just finished. She's a bit shy, but a survivor. She can make any engine purr. Todd McGee, a local civilian. He's about 50, but taught karate at the Cold Lake Community Center and speaks a little German and Japanese. He's in good shape and isn't in denial like some of the locals appear to be.

Jim Ramsland, a journeyman electrician and our scrounger. He's also a former firefighter, and has Paramedic-level first aid training. He's a big guy, but in great shape.

Kim Barber, a student of jiu-jitsu, and maybe 19. She's tougher than anyone else in the crew. Met her on the course too. She's from Vancouver, and made her own way here on a motorcycle when the undead killed everyone else she knew. It was her that passed us that day. She made it all the way from Vancouver with no guns. If she had to fight the undead she used a crowbar.

To keep it simple, we are taking only three types of weapons. Each of us will have a Browning 9mm, and either a C7A1 or a 12-gauge shotgun. Other weapons will include knives, a crowbar in each vehicle, and whatever we want to pick up while out there. We're also using military clothing, for the most part. It's durable and has lots of pockets. Ammunition comes in cases, and we are taking lots of it. Also two vehicles, a Dodge Durango that used

to be an RCMP cruiser, and a Toyota Tacoma 4x4. Kim has said that if she can find a motorcycle in decent condition she'll try to salvage it as well.

We are going to carry water purification equipment, and a lot of food and water as well, but we'll be scrounging water and food as we go. Gas cans are going to be secured into the Tacoma's truck bed along with supplies and extra clothes. We expect it to get cold while we are away on this little excursion.

The plan is to drive south towards Vermilion, and take the #16 highway into Vegreville. There are a lot of things in that area to check out, and we might be able to get a survey of the local population of undead, and see how many we could be dealing with in the future. We're taking a radio in each car to keep in touch with each other and Cold Lake, and whatever other roving military outfits might be out there. There's a group of the PPCLI returning from that way in a few days, so we might get some intel from them.

Now, I plan to enjoy the rest of this day outside with Jess, the kids and Christie and Darren. It might be the last chance I have in a while of seeing them all together and happy.

October 3, 2004

I talked to Sarah on the phone again today. She said they are thinking of moving a lot of the sick and injured to Cold Lake for the winter, and that a disturbingly large number of undead had been spotted in the area recently. Small groups have been

seen within ten kilometers, wandering through the fields and trees, and far more of them farther south. I worry about her, but she assures me that they town is well fortified.

One thing that everyone has been curious about has been denied to us. We were hoping that the freezing temperatures at night would freeze the walking dead solid, but so far it hasn't happened. The observed undead (a group that they keep on the base in a secure field) just kept trying to get at the guards outside the fence. They only have a dozen there, and they are guarded constantly. They are trying to find out what it is that animates them, but so far they have had no luck. The virus theory has been disproved, but that's all we know. Or all they are telling us.

Darren has brought all his gear here, and we are loading up the vehicles. Going over and over our loads, because we don't want to miss anything. Once we leave we won't be back for weeks. Tomorrow we are all scheduled for a medical and dental exam to see if there's anything dire we need fixed.

One thing that has recently sprung to my attention is the mental health of people exposed to this nightmare. The people here who haven't been out there amongst the dead are either in denial about it or coping well, despite it being something they can't quite grasp. They know what happened; they can't just quite see it as real though. The ones in denial bother me the most. They seem sure that tomorrow things will be back to normal. We'll be bitching about Ottawa and cheering on the hockey

games anytime now.

Survivors have a few issues too. The strain of surviving tends to either make or break people.

We've seen a few of the broken ones, who mostly survived because they were with others and had help. Sarah and I fall into the category of people who thrived, I think. Jess too, and Darren. The people who break down get paranoid, isolate themselves, or go catatonic. And that's just the ones I know of.

It's cold today. We're packed up and the whole crew is coming over for dinner tonight. Jess wanted to meet everyone at the same time. We are making a huge chili, and baking fresh bread. It really smells wonderful in here.

October 4, 2004

Medical checks all went well. We are all in pretty good shape, plus I got to see Jay for a few minutes. He's doing well, and has a lot of patients coming in. He gave us all new toothbrushes and told us what to watch out for while we are out scavenging. Similarly, the doctors who checked us over gave us stern warnings about close contact with the undead. What a strange world.

October 5, 2004

We set out this morning. Jess came out to see us off, then went to her course. We were both pretty sad that I was leaving, but we'll be able to talk to each other at least. Once the vehicles were fuelled up and fully loaded we proceeded to the checkpoint at the

west side of town, the same one we'd entered by when we all arrived as refugees.

There, we signed ourselves out on official business, all of us signing a form indicating destination, radio call signs, and intended return date. The officer at the gate wished us good luck, and he was sincere about it too. The town needed the supplies we were hoping to find.

So, with Darren and I in the Durango, and Laura in the back, we left Cold Lake. Eric, Kim, Todd, and Jim are in the Tacoma, and we are leading. It felt really *wrong* to be leaving a safe and secure area to deliberately go back into zombie infested areas, but the need outweighs the risk. We turned south and headed towards the #28 highway, which lead us towards Bonnyville, the town the Air Force destroyed to stop a horde of undead from approaching Cold Lake. The farms we passed were surrounded by high fences, and patrolled by well armed guardians. We saw no undead until we passed the town of Fort Kent, a blink-and-you-miss-it town that was abandoned months ago. Passing through it we could see the remains of a fire ahead. Probably from the blast that destroyed Bonnyville, which we were fast approaching. And sure enough, just as the desolation and ruin came into view, we saw a lurching figure in the field to the right of the road. It was an elderly female, skin blackened, clothing crispy. She must have been on the far edge of the blast, and wasn't destroyed when the FAE went off. We passed her and kept going. Wrecked cars and trucks appeared on the road and in the ditches, all showing fire damage and shattered glass. We saw bodies soon after that, the rotted

corpses lying like felled trees where they had been tossed by the explosion. Not one was moving, so we pressed on. Entering the town, what was left of it, we saw a few moving undead, burned and blackened, who didn't even look in our direction. Darren said they probably didn't have eyes anymore. I tended to agree. The town itself was absolutely destroyed. Being an FAE it was kind of impossible to pinpoint the center of the blast. The roads were clear through to the other side, and we just kept on going, our tires leaving a trail of soot on the pavement on the other side of the town. Eventually we passed all sign of the conflagration, and were back onto regular roads. We had to slow many times to wind our way past blocked areas, and once had to shoot a walker that got too close while we were refuelling. We elected to keep the tanks topped up, so if they got down by a quarter on either vehicle we stopped and refuelled.

We could have pushed through to Vegreville in a day, but we stopped at the last human-inhabited farm we knew of instead. This particular farm belonged to Colin and Betty Dawson, who along with the seven guards they had working the property and watching the fences, were the last people alive we'd see in a while. They knew we were coming, and let us in. They wanted to hear all the news from Cold Lake, and we happily told them all we knew. I called Jess from there, and we talked for a while about the kids and her day and what I had seen out here. She sounded worried, and I did my best to reassure her, but we are both realists.

The Dawsons have given us a place to sleep for the night. We are helping with chores and guard duty

tonight as well. They haven't seen more than about ten undead a week for a month now, and have the entire property fenced. We should sleep pretty securely.

October 8, 2004 - Vegreville

We came into town from the east, after a half day of dodging wrecks and small groups of undead. We had come south on the 41, then west on the 16, passing small towns long abandoned. A few times we had to stop to clear vehicles off the road so we could pass, but this was a simple task, and the risk was minimal. Half of us watched out for stray dogs and zombies, while the rest pushed wrecks off the road.

Vegreville was ahead of us on the road still when we made our first find. We saw a big 18-wheeler ahead on the highway, pulled off onto the side. It was a grocery trailer, so we immediately hoped it was full and zombie-free. Checking the area we saw three undead within a half kilometer, all of them staggering towards us in the long grass or down the roadway. I told Laura, Todd, and Kim to watch the walking dead, and the rest of us walked around the trailer, checking underneath and around it for damage, undead stragglers, and anything else interesting. The truck was in good shape, and the cab was empty, so we went to the back and had a look at the doors. They were still sealed tight, so we got a pair of tin cutters and broke through the seal. The doors opened with a little effort; we had to oil the hinges. The smell of rotten food wafted out at us, and we all gagged, but compared to the undead this wasn't that bad. We backed off and swung the

doors open, and inside was a half trailer load of groceries. Some of the perishables had obviously gone bad, but the mass of it was packaged or canned, and should still be okay. There were also a couple of cases of cigarettes, but none of us smoked, so we were not too concerned about those. We sealed the doors up again and went to check out the cab. If the truck started we could take it back to Cold Lake today.

No such luck. It was out of gas entirely. That's why the driver had abandoned it here, I guess. We managed to get it to turn over twice, then it choked on lack of fuel. So we marked it with a tag, a bright orange flag with Cold Lake Salvage Team #107 printed on it in black, and I went back to call it in. We'd have to find some fuel before we could move this.

We continued on towards the town, and saw that some attempt to fortify had been started, and then abandoned. The highway went right through the center of the town, past a huge coloured egg that baffled me. What was this thing for? We drove up to the edge of the fortifications, a hasty barrier of bricks, lumber, rolls of wire, and soil shovelled into canvas sacks. It was incomplete, and a few decomposed skeletal remains were visible nearby. We stayed in the vehicles for a good five minutes, looking around with binoculars, making note of the gas stations we could see, grocery stores, the local police detachment, and noting how many walking dead were approaching. There were only about a dozen at first. Some were behind the barrier, within sight when we stopped, and they moved towards us immediately, some quickly, others dragging legs

along slowly. All looked hungry to me, but maybe I was just projecting. I asked Eric and Laura to thin them out, and they each started taking shots when the undead were about 100 feet away. They worked the line from the outside, Eric starting on the left, Laura on the right, using single shots to destroy the bastards. Eric was a slightly better shot, but I missed Jess right then. She is a far better shot than either of these two.

Once the shooting stopped, and the immediate threat was destroyed, we set about clearing some of the barricade away. It didn't take long. We pulled some reels of heavy wire aside, and tossed several dozen sandbags after them. This left us enough space to get the vehicles through. Eric and Laura stayed on sentry duty through this, and warned us that more zombies were approaching. We had expected that; the noise we made killing the first twelve of them had drawn what was left of the undead population out into the open to have brunch. What we hadn't expected was that there would be so many of them. Where had they been hiding? A few were approaching across the fields, maybe ten or so, but there were easily a hundred in the town, making their slow and steady way towards us. We could see more coming out of side streets behind the main group. I ordered everyone back in the vehicles. This was too many to deal with this way. We'd be overwhelmed if we tried to fight it out. We turned around while the horde was still struggling with the barricade, and drove away east for about ten kilometers. Finding a house off the highway, we approached it and checked it out. If it turned out to be empty we decided we would stay the night here. It was off the highway, a two storey farm house

with a water pump, and there was a barn out back too. It was far enough from the horde that they'd lose interest and wander about a little, but wouldn't follow us out here.

I sent Todd and Eric and Kim to clear the house, and the rest of us went to check the yard and barn. It was a nice little farm they had here, with a BBQ set out behind the house on a big wooden deck, trees placed for shade, and a horse corral. The barn was empty, but as we were returning we all heard a shot from inside the house. Eric was on the radio a second later telling us not to worry; Kim had destroyed an undead that was trapped in the bathroom upstairs. We went in to see what was up, and found the body of a farmer, I presumed, lying in a pool of blackened blood and brain matter on the bathroom floor. Kim said he had started banging around in there when they had called out, so Eric had opened the door while she waited, and she shot him when he exited. We went out to check the area again, and seeing nothing cannibalistic approaching, we took the place over.

Sentries were set, food was cooked, the body hauled outside and wrapped in sheets, then placed in the barn. A careful check of the house revealed a lot of canned and preserved foods, two rifles (a .22 and a nice .308 hunting rifle with a scope) with ammo, and a set of car keys. There was a truck parked outside, and the keys fit, but it didn't start. Laura took a look at it, and said the battery was dead, the hydraulics had leaked everywhere, and it had no oil. Other than that it was fine, she said.

So, we stayed the night, each taking turns on sentry duty. In the morning we worked out a plan to get back into Vegreville and search it. It should be a piece of cake.

October 14, 2004

Damn it! Well, I'm an idiot. I broke the laptop, and it took until now to fix it. What happened was I was sitting in the kitchen on a chair typing away, and it slipped right off my lap onto the floor when I went and tried to reach my cup of hot chocolate. After that it wouldn't start.

We've been using this place as a base of operations, scouting out the area for 50 km around. So far we've seen hundreds of the walking dead, but they are pretty thin on the ground in most areas. No survivors so far, but I bet there are some holed up nearby. I assume this because we found a grocery store in Mundare that had been cleared out and nearly emptied, but neatly. Not by looters. Whoever had done it had left a locked door behind to keep the undead out, then taped the key onto the door with duct tape. There were a few cases of food left inside, and some water. We left it alone, but also left a note with detailed instructions on how to contact either Cold Lake or us, and dated it the 10th of October, hoping they'd come back, or the next group along would call us.

We've so far identified several gas tankers, medical supplies, and about a full trailer load of groceries (including the half trailer we found earlier). There are many cars and trucks in dealerships that we have found to be salvageable too, if we can get

them to Cold Lake. We haven't seen a car transport trailer anyplace yet, but we are looking.

The animal life around here is thriving, we noticed. There are wild dogs and cats, many birds, and horses. A lot of horses. People must have let them out, I guess. Though we did see one still saddled a few days ago. It took off as soon as we tried to get near it. Poor thing looked starved and crazy. We should probably have shot it.

So, no close calls with the undead. No survivors, yet. We have another three days here, then we head back to Cold Lake with the trailer of groceries and other supplies. We managed to find a supply of diesel in Mundare as well, and transferred enough to the 18-wheeler to get it up north. We have flagged a lot of other things, for retrieval later. We have left notes and directions for any survivors, in obvious places and wherever we thought they'd be found.

I managed to fix the computer by taking out the battery, flattening out the bent pin inside, and plugging it back in. It was kind of loopy for the first boot after that, and didn't like the defrag I did on the hard drive, but it runs fine now. I'll start looking for a replacement for this one. Maybe I can find a nice 1 GHz machine! They had a few of those out when this all started, so I might find one.

October 16, 2004

We've changed our plans. We are leaving today to bring this stuff back to Cold Lake. We got the diesel running, and we'll take it back with us, along with all the other supplies we transferred to the trailer.

Eric will drive it, and one of our vehicles will precede him, the other following. We are going today because we got a call from the base. They want us to come in and fly to Calgary! Apparently there is a group of survivors in a building downtown who managed to contact the military a day ago. We're going in with a bunch of soldiers to see if we can pull off a rescue. That's all I know right now. I have some thoughts already how this'll work, but the potential for a disaster is enormous. Caution, oh caution.

October 17, 2004, Cold Lake

We made it back with no major problems. At the gates we had to go through the screening again for bites and contaminated stuff, and after that we delivered the truck full of goodies to the base. Then, and only then, did I get to go home. Jess was really happy to see me, and I was equally enthusiastic. After I had a shower (she insisted) we retired to our room. The kids were asleep already (we got in pretty late), so we spent the evening 'catching up'. This morning I made a big pancake breakfast for the kids before they got up, and Michael was up first. When he saw me he shrieked and ran up and jumped on me. Kid got bigger since I left. It's amazing how that happens.

This morning after breakfast I went over to the base and handed in my reports and intel. Captain Couper wants to see me about the Calgary mission this evening. Looks like we are going to fly out tomorrow or the next day. I'll write more once I get the situation briefing.

October 20, 2004 – 1407 hrs

I haven't had the time to update until right now. I am inbound to Calgary with the team, CLST107, onboard a great big damned cargo plane. There are 30 people onboard, a load of gear and supplies, and an Air Force Major named Peterson. The mission is simple. There are about 75 people in three buildings in downtown Calgary, and we're going to go help with the rescue effort. The CO of Cold Lake wants a foothold in Calgary, and had sent ahead a few teams to drive in and see if they could secure the airport. Fifteen men and women were sent in, and have secured the largest landing strip. They lost three people doing it, but have managed to secure the fence around the airport, and have managed to get three fuel trucks ready and waiting for us. The terminal itself is inhabited by a few hundred undead, and they haven't even tried going in there.

Being in land vehicles, they haven't attracted all that much attention from the walking corpses, but all that will change when this jet arrives. Major Peterson will establish a local HQ here somewhere, and the majority of the people here will be responsible for holding the area against the waves of undead they expect to be attracted to the noise. Weather conditions might help us out here. It's overcast and cold. Snow has fallen here in the last few days, and it's below freezing on the ground. The weather delayed us a few days. The pilots didn't want to try to fly through a snowstorm, so we used the time to prepare. Eric and I went over plans of the terminal and parkade, and I spent as much time with Jess and Michael and Megan as I could. Darren introduced us to his girlfriend, a shy 17 year

old named Sandy. She's from Ontario, and was out here in May with her dad visiting friends in Edmonton when the dead got up, and she made it to Cold Lake with some infantry she met. Her dad died of a bite three weeks later, while they were on the road. She's a sweet girl, and like all of us has the thousand yard stare.

Our mission here is to recon the parkade and surrounding area, find vehicles in good order, and gather in supplies. We won't be alone in this. The next flight in tomorrow will be bringing in another 30 people, and 30 more the next day. We'll also have to find a lot of jet fuel, but there are ideas that we can probably recover some from the planes sitting on the ground.

The Major just announced we're coming up on the city. I'm going to take a look out one of the small windows.

Sweet holy hell! I just came back from up front. There aren't many windows on this bird. We came in over the northeast, and a great deal of what I could see was burned. With no fire department running, vast areas of housing have been on fire. Not the majority, by any means, but a lot. There are cars crashed and parked all over the place, and clusters of what I assume are bodies walking about. The undead seemed to be congregating in groups here, walking slowly about, and searching for food. With the aircraft going overhead they were all looking up at us, waving arms and trying to reach up the few thousand feet of freezing air to reach us. I saw what must have been a few thousand scattered about. We could see downtown as we banked to

come into the main landing strip. There was a light flashing at us from one of the towers, the Petro-Canada Center, I think. As for the rest of the area... several of the towers had burned... the Saddledome was intact from our view... east of downtown was a huge wasteland of destruction that looked like someone had bombed it. The Trans-Canada bridge over Deerfoot trail was down, and there was a three-hundred car pileup all over the place there. We were turning by this point, but the east of the city that I could see was in pretty much the same state. I could see to the far west the ski jumps from the '88 Olympics were still standing and intact, but I could only see them for a few seconds as we passed the cloud layer.

We'll be landing in three minutes. Time to buckle up and get ready. It's going to be an interesting day.

2100 hrs, Calgary International Airport

What a nightmare. We got off the plane after it landed and found them waiting, the dozen survivors of the advance teams. They had cleared the landing strip and used flares to give the pilots something better than overcast to see by. Planes were parked all over the place, some on the other landing strips, some waiting at the terminal.

My team set out immediately after the supplies and gear were all off the plane. Eric and Darren set off towards the terminal to see how bad things were there, and the rest of us followed at a walk. All of us had been to Calgary before except Darren. I had lived here so I had the most experience with the city, and Laura had visited relatives here, so had

Todd. It was similar stories for Eric and Kim, and it turned out Jim had lived here too about 10 years ago. I'd been to the airport pretty frequently, flying off to Vancouver, Toronto, or Winnipeg for work about three times a year. The airport is pretty big. No comparison to LAX or other huge American terminals, but it is an International airport, and the attached hotel is proof enough of that.

Behind us was a hustle of activity as the plane made ready to fly back to Cold Lake tonight. We spotted the odd corpse, unmoving and frozen on the snow covered tarmac, and saw the blood spatters from the headshots that had brought them down. The advanced team had done a great job securing the grounds, but I didn't believe for a second that they had killed every single undead in a position to be a threat. There were simply too many ways into an area this size, so I advised everyone to be on guard. They already were, guns loaded and held ready. So it was that we approached the terminal buildings and jets parked near them.

Kim pointed up at the windows of a nearby passenger jet, a 737 parked right on the edge of the tarmac. There were faces watching us from the windows, rotted, bloated zombie faces with patches of missing tissue and blackened limbs. The glass was smeared in dried blood and gore where they had tried to get out of the aircraft. None of us spoke.

One thing we noticed after so long away was the odour. The stench of decay was probably less than it might have been due to the freezing temperatures, but it still reeked. Nobody gagged, but the first time we came into close contact someone was going to

throw up. Might even be me.

Ground level has a few entrances to the main terminal, but we were not interested in those. Our primary objective right now was to make sure all the doors were closed and either locked or blocked off so nothing could come out of there tonight. Yes, the advanced team had done this already, and yes we were doing it again. Caution pays off, and it only takes one of those dead bastards to ruin a perfectly good day.

We moved in a southern direction down the entire length of the structure. Always at ground level, slowly and with stealth so we didn't attract too much attention from the windows overhead. We got to the edge of the building and found a chain link fence 10 feet high. A few undead were standing still and quiet outside it, watching the men and women around the plane. They were unusually still, and I found this unsettling. We hid behind a cargo container and watched them for a few minutes, and they didn't move very much. Maybe the activity was too far away for them to get really excited? One way of testing that would be to step out where they could see us, but I wasn't about to let anyone do that. There were only seventeen of them on the other side of the fence, but I wasn't willing to risk if there were more nearby. So we turned back and I made a mental note to always have a sentry on the ends of the terminal. We went north now, along the western edge of the terminal and sealed doors as we went. I looked over at the tower, a separate structure, and could see men and women around it. I assumed they were securing it as the HQ and clearing any undead from inside it.

We turned a corner under the wing of a 747 parked next to the US departures gates, and saw our first major problem. The second floor, about 20 feet off the ground, had these huge bay windows facing west. The glass was in thick panes about fifteen to twenty feet high, and about eight feet wide. Waiting passengers inside could thus see the planes come and go. Three of the glass panes were missing in this section. One was entirely gone, and had probably fallen in. The other two were shattered, whether by bullets or something else, we couldn't tell. We could see walking dead inside and above us, and it was a wonder none of them were outside on the ground wandering about. The advanced team hadn't mentioned this particular thing. I took out binoculars and had a look. Immediately I saw why they hadn't mentioned it. There was a lip about thigh-high, with razor sharp glass all along it that the zombies would have to climb over to get outside. Several may have tried, as I saw dried gore all along the edges. Hmm.

We carefully kept close to the walls here, under overhangs and wings if possible. Three doors here were all sealed. The occasional thump from a plane above us reminded us all of the deadly inhabitants waiting inside the commuter jets. I cannot imagine the chaos inside the terminal on that last day when I fled the city with Sarah in my old Explorer. That seems so long ago now.

We made it to the far north end and found another fence. A few more undead lingered here, only five that we could see. There didn't appear to be a way in that we could find, so we returned to the plane from Cold Lake, being cautious not to let the

undead see us nearby. Other teams were scouting the perimeter in all directions, and the Major was eager to hear reports. So far there had been no shooting, we were all careful and aware of the problems that could cause us. The advanced team had actually done a real good job. The new HQ, the Control Tower, was cleared easily by four men with silenced weapons. No injuries. We all got busy hauling gear inside and getting the emergency generators in the basement running. Jim went to help with that, and soon we had power. For how long we don't know. Depends how much fuel we can find. Standing outside the noise is very little, so it probably won't carry far enough to attract more flesh eaters. It's cramped in there though; we won't be able to get a lot of people in there. A group was told to check out the hangars at the south end to see if any of those can be useful. We helped out with the setup and then had some dinner. The team that went off to check out the hangars reported back and said they'd found one that was ideal. We moved people and a lot of supplies over there just as it was getting dark. Now we are on a rotating sleep and guard schedule. No lights after dark, so we have to be careful until we get the blackout gear up on the windows.

That's it for now. Tomorrow we go to secure transport and try to scout the best routes towards downtown. The Major also wants us to go see about a helicopter, and see if we can extract the survivors that way. I think that might work for a few people, but 75? Too risky. We'd need something bigger than a traffic chopper for that. Time for some rest. We have a large office in the hangar for our team, with bedrolls spread out on the carpeted floor. It has

a locking door, it's out of the wind, and we can have a small propane stove for heat and making coffee. All in all, not bad.

October 21, 2004

Snowed all day today, on and off. It started small this morning, and stopped for a while around lunchtime. It wasn't that cold though, actually approaching melting point in the afternoon. CLST107 spent the day acquiring new vehicles for the base here to use. Our plan was to go through the parkade, but we decided not to do that after we had a good look at the terminal. Too many undead between us and the parking lot, even if we detoured around the outside. There were probably a hundred or so on the various parkade levels, so we altered the plan and decided to go across the airfield and exit via one of the gates. From there we planned to head to a rental agent and grab 7 cars, if we could find seven that started. We only got to the fence.

The nearest car rental place was actually a few hundred meters from the terminal. It had a big lot where you could rent or return the cars, and a gas station that charged a ridiculous premium if you fuelled there. We could see it from the northeast corner of the airfield, and we could see about two dozen cars and SUVs parked in the lot.

Unfortunately, there were also about seventy wandering zombies in this area, scattered about like wind blown trash. A few of the nearest ones saw us, and started our way. I'd give anything to know how they do that, how they can tell a living human from one more walking corpse. But I've never seen it fail, and I don't know how to counter it.

We backed off around the corner before they got near, but the moans were drawing others. Soon there were twenty of the bloody shamblers standing at the gate staring towards us. We needed a better plan than this. Pretty soon they would notice all the activity inside and start that awful wailing, and more would come. And then more, and the fences would fail and we'd all die horribly. We needed to be in a better place, more easily defended. The terminal would do, if we could clear it out.

October 27, 2004

We made it. We lived through it. Sweet mother of god, we're alive...

For the last week the undead have been attacking the fences to get to us. Thousands of them, drawn by the lights and activity, noise, and the landings of the aircraft. We thought we had enough ammo and supplies, but we had to get a drop in from Cold Lake. It was close, though, we almost lost the tower and we *did* lose twenty-nine people.

It started a week ago. I was just going outside to head to the bathroom, and I heard something odd in the pre-dawn darkness. Kind of a whistling, like through clenched teeth. It was snowing gently, and visibility was poor, so I started to call for the sentry when someone walked into view. Chills ran down my spine as I recognised the smell even in the cold air, and I had my Browning in my hand in a heartbeat. The figure walking unsteadily towards me across the runway was the source of the whistling. The zombie before me was male, mid thirties, Caucasian. He was dressed for a casual day

at the office, with comfortable shoes now covered in snow, dark slacks, and a business-casual shirt that might have been green once. His throat was torn out, and the blood had leaked all over his chest and arms, and gone dark long since. The whistling was his dead breath as he tried to moan at the sense of prey (me) nearby, and he walked closer. There was fresh blood on his hands and face, and I had a terrible feeling about what had happened to the sentry who was supposed to be patrolling the area.

No point in wasting time, so I raised the gun and took aim with my right hand. With my left I grabbed the radio we all carry, and held down the button just before I fired. That should wake everyone, I thought. I then said into the radio, “Hostiles inside the fence! Repeat, hostiles inside the fence!”, and walked over to the now-deanimated zombie to be sure it was really destroyed.

My bullet had hit him square in the face between the eyebrows, a clean shot. He was done. I looked around carefully, but I could barely see a thing in the falling snow. Lights were coming towards me, so I pulled out a flashlight and waved it around so they wouldn’t shoot me in the dark. Fifteen people were soon crowded around, and an officer arrived and started giving orders. Just then shooting started somewhere else, so I guess this one fellow wasn’t our only visitor. I ran back to the offices my team slept in and made sure everyone was up and getting armed. They were, and we quickly secured the building we were in, and went out into the grey dawn light to see what was up.

We killed over five hundred walking dead that day, and lost fourteen people. Most of the deaths were due to bites, but a few were surprised sentries or soldiers overwhelmed by sheer numbers. The fence to the west was pushed over by about a thousand of the dead just before dawn, and they swarmed the airfield looking for us. We fought a defensive battle from the buildings, with snipers on the roofs, in windows, and behind fences. They seemed to thin out at dusk, so we all stepped out to check, made an ammo run to the control tower, and started dragging the dead away. Within another hour a few hundred more showed up, and we did it all over again. The shooting went on for hours...

The next three days were like that. We started running low on ammo, and had to evacuate one building when the doors gave way under the combined weight of the undead. Sunday morning was foggy, and we used that to get a squad out to the bulldozers. They pushed a new gravel and rock barricade into the spot where the fence fell, and we drove some trucks around the airport trying to lure the undead into a group in the middle of the field. It sort of worked, and we managed to destroy another few hundred with a finely placed firebomb, though watching the burning corpses walk towards buildings was frightening. Bad idea, and we didn't try that again. 107 had to evacuate the offices when fourteen of the rotten fucks managed to break into the building at the south end. We destroyed them all, but nearly lost Eric. He got trapped in an office with no windows, and had to use his knife to defend himself from three of them when he ran out of ammo. We all thought he was done, but he came out

covered in gore, with a grin and a look in his eyes I really hope not to see again.

The last three days have seen a diminishing number, and we cleared the last hundred of them out of the area today. We lost a lot of people, and the Cold Lake base had to fly us in more food, ammo, and people today. We have about a hundred here again, but the look in the eyes most of us have is grim. We've managed to hold the fences, and we hope we can get to the people downtown soon, but really I don't think that's very likely. There's too many of *them* and nowhere near enough of *us* to mount a rescue unless we go in by air. I should mention that to the Major, but I bet he's already thought of it. Now I need to rest. We haven't slept much. The gunfire was almost constant. I need a shower and a shave, and something hot to eat.

God help us all.

November 1, 2004

Yesterday was Halloween. I just remembered. Nobody celebrated that holiday, and probably nobody ever will again, now that we know the monsters are real.

Today we burned the last of the dead in a huge pyre fuelled with gasoline and scraps of wood. The stench was terrible, has been for a few days now, but we had to do it. We have tried to reinforce the fences as much as possible, and they still hold the hordes of undead outside. We try not to go out where they can see us anymore, as it just excites them. We move about at night, and under cover

behind walls and vehicles. The sentries report there are several thousand all along the fences, and more arrive every day. So far no more have gotten inside. I feel very much like a rat trapped in a maze, waiting for the door at the end to open and either escape or perish. I very much want to see Jess. I talked to her on the radio for a few minutes earlier, told her what was going on. She wants me back there. She says the undead population in the area has increased slightly, and there was an attack on a farmhouse three days ago. People in town are skittish, and nervous, and tempers are flaring as winter sets in.

We are heading into the terminal tomorrow, to start clearing it out. 107 and 109, as well as about forty regular troops are going inside starting at the south end, and we are going to clear and hold each room, progressing slowly with silenced weapons. I expect a few of us will die. Maybe even me. I really want to get out of here. Every instinct I have is telling me this is a bad place to be, surrounded like this. They got in once, they can get in again. I miss Jess and Megan and Michael very much right now. I hope they are safe.

We had a suicide earlier today. A young man from CLST 105. He left a note, saying the noise was driving him insane. He shot himself in the head; I guess to ensure he wouldn't rise up and walk around. I know what noise he meant too, the moaning and wailing those damned things go on with whenever they see living people. We hear it almost constantly. The only place we can't hear it is in the tower or when we're sleeping. We use earplugs to sleep, and I set a guard no matter how

safe we are told we are here. The other groups are doing the same. No one wants a repeat of last week.

The Major sent a team out to try to reach the survivors downtown, but they turned back after they ran into a few hundred zombies. They did manage to find a helicopter, but had no pilot with them to bring it back or even tell if it was able to fly.

I think it's the waiting that's driving us all a little crazed. We need certain things, like a clear path out of here, a way downtown that isn't suicide, or just more ammo and food. The salvage teams haven't been able to go do our jobs due to the numbers of walking dead. Waiting for the plane is numbing. Waiting for the undead to come eat us is worse. I'm actually kind of glad we'll be going into the terminal tomorrow. At least it's something to do.

November 2, 2004

We went in early, around 0600 this morning. Look at me using military time. Anyways, fifty-three of us approached the terminal doors on ground level, at the south end. The baggage handling area. Previous inspections had led us to suspect there were only a few undead in there, and we were going in to kill them off. 107 were on the far right side of the group. I had Eric at my shoulder, and Kim and the others spread out in a short line. The soldiers were going in first, and we would follow. All of us had silencers on the Brownings, to keep the mayhem as quiet as possible. A few soldiers carried backup weapons, as did *all* of my crew. I had a pump-action shotgun strapped to my back, and 50 shells for it about my person. We were all wearing

boots with steel toes, thick gloves, and face masks. Close contact, indeed.

A corporal named Meier was the first one in, and the silence that followed after he opened the door and stepped inside was heavy. Within a minute he was back, and opened the cargo doors from inside. Several troops had to manually lift the doors, the power being long off. Inside was a maze of baggage carts, old luggage, and boxes. Three corpses were easily visible, lying frozen in puddles of old blood and gore. Each had been an airport worker, and each was partially devoured. The closest was about my age, and looked like he died in terror, with large bites out of his arms, chest, and throat. His stomach had been torn open, and there was a terrible smell here even with the freezing cold. Why he hadn't reanimated I couldn't say, since his head looked intact. The Corporal apparently had the same thought, since he put a round into the corpses' head just to be sure. The other two bodies were even worse. Both had the skulls opened up, and grey matter missing. It was nauseating to look at, but we couldn't help it.

Soldiers went in teams of three through the dark baggage areas, and within about ten minutes had destroyed four zombies. The first three came at them from the farther depths of the room. The last was found inside a janitors closet, locked inside with all the supplies piled against the doorway. The man had probably been bitten and crawled in there to hide, blocking the way in as best he could. Poor bastard, he's better off now.

My team went through and spot-checked the baggage and cargo loads for anything useful. This amounted to opening the crates and bags and seeing if anything good showed up. Sanctioned looting, basically.

From there we advanced into the building a room at a time. At the far end of the baggage area there was a series of offices, washrooms, and stairs and elevators leading up to the main terminal. We made sure the stairwells were clear first, then sealed the doors shut. We really didn't want anything coming up behind us as we moved on. The offices were empty as we passed through them. Soldiers made a quick but very thorough search, turning up personal effects left behind, a few signs of panicked departure, and the usual half filled coffee cups and half eaten snacks and lunches.

At the other side of the offices there was a series of mechanical and electrical rooms, and by the time we got there they had been cleared out. Three zombies and two half-devoured bodies had been in there, but they had been destroyed quickly. We were all using flashlights now, since the darkness was absolute. Paths of light flickered back and forth as we advanced, and once the generator room was cleared the engineers went in to see about getting the temporary gas-powered units running. My team and I kept going.

After a few hours we had cleared out the south third of the ground floor. It was all baggage areas, service bays, and offices. In total there were only thirty undead, and we suffered no casualties. The extreme care taken in opening every single door, and the

precise shooting of the soldiers made it as safe as possible. I was happy to let them take the lead too.

All at once there was shooting from ahead. Not the silenced 9mm we were all carrying, but a shotgun blast, followed by another. It was very loud, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from. Everyone was under strict orders to use the silenced guns unless they were in danger of being over-run. Suddenly there was a lot of radio traffic as unit commanders asked for information, and the shotgun continued firing. Then, I thought on the other side of a wall I was next to, on my left, someone started screaming. High pitched, going on and on over the shotgun blasts, it sounded like a woman's voice. I turned to Eric and told him to get everyone ready, and drew the shotgun over my shoulder. Everyone else in my team readied the backup weapons of their choice, and we backtracked to a corridor that led left. The shotgun was silent by this time, and the screaming too, replaced by a strangled gurgling. Eric and I led the way, and just as we got to the corner of the corridor a blood-soaked woman staggered around it. She was one of ours, and was grasping a large bite on her left arm, trying to staunch the blood flow. She was pale and probably in shock, and where her weapon was I didn't see. She looked at us and said, "They're right behind me," and then fell on her face. I leaned out and looked, and sure enough there were five of the rotted things walking down the corridor towards me. I raised the shotgun and fired at the first one, hitting in the center of his chest. He sprawled backwards into the others, knocking three of them down with him, and I reached down and grabbed the woman. Eric helped me, and we retreated back

through the rest of the group. Kim and Todd covered us, and then fell back as Jim and Laura covered them. We got to the rooms we had cleared, and the undead came around the corner and started our way. I told Laura and Jim to use pistols, and they switched and started firing. It was over in a few seconds, and Eric and I were able to tend to the woman. She was unconscious, and a quick check showed her pale and shocky. The bite was deep enough it had severed the artery, which explained the massive amounts of blood she'd lost. While Eric tried to pinch the artery shut she gasped and gurgled, and then died. Eric sat back and sighed, then said a few choice words, whose sentiment I shared. By this time other soldiers had shown up, and it was quickly determined that the woman (her nametag said T. Landis) has opened a door into another service bay, and been rushed by seven undead. We found the one that bit her with it's head blown open, and another a few feet behind that one, similarly slain. Shotguns are messy, but quite effective. There was a pool of ice on the floor about five feet across. I walked about ten feet into the room, and looked up at the ceiling over my head. The ice came from a broken pipe, and there was a huge icicle hanging down. It gleamed in the flashlight beams.

We were scanning the area around the door when some more of them staggered and shuffled towards us. These were wearing civilian clothing, there were probably a dozen of them, and they were moving damned quickly for dead folks. As they advanced the smell wafted over us, and I heard someone retching. Man, there were some ripe ones in this group. I gagged, but levelled the shotgun at the

leader, and fired as I backed up. One shot in the face, and he went down. The few behind him stepped over or around the body, and reached for us hungrily as they approached. I could see bullets smacking into them now, as the others fired. Several dropped from headshots, and I fired again at one that was missing half its right arm already, a bloody gruesome wound. It was blown backwards by the thunderous impact of the slug, and its skull popped like a balloon.

I was the last one through the door as the six 'survivors' grasped at it. I fired once more, and grabbed the handle to pull the door shut when several of them grabbed the door frame and started pulling. They stumbled over each other trying to get at me, so I let the door go and turned and ran. I felt a grasping dead hand snag on my belt at the last second, but I tore free and kept going. At the first intersection I passed Laura and Eric, who fired behind me as soon as I dodged through them. I turned, and we all fell back to the next bend, firing as opportunity presented itself. We killed six more this way, but I noticed there were more of them now. Damn, there must be an open stairwell to the upper levels in there. My team, and the several soldiers who were now with us all retreated to some fire doors. We spread out into the offices, and waited for the undead to approach down the hallway. Once they appeared it was a furious battle. We shot until we ran out of bullets, and the dead piled up high in the hallways. Still they came. I ordered everyone back behind the fire doors and then closed them myself. We braced them with an axe between the handles, and waited a few seconds to see if they'd hold. The undead on the other side

pushed hard, and fingers grasped through the gap, but that was all there was. I think we killed over thirty of them, and there were at least that many out there right now. They were hideous. Rotted and hideous, they looked like the caricatures of the people they had been. One soldier had been bitten, a small wound on his hand. We cleaned and wrapped it, but it was sad. He knew he was going to die within the day now. As his friends led him away I watched and wondered if we'd all go that way, if there really was any point to hope now. Sure we had a foothold, but the dead were still there. Every single one of us was on borrowed time.

About this time an officer showed up and told us to head out and grab some food. We were done for a few hours while they brought in fresh troops. I really didn't feel like eating.

November 7, 2004

After days of blood, six hundred undead have been destroyed inside the terminal. I haven't felt like writing. The carnage has been too much. I find myself thinking of Jess, wanting to call her and go home. But I can't.

The survivors downtown, we got that helicopter running, and flew a mission down there to see what was going on. The chopper landed on the roof, and found out what was happening. The people inside were fighting off the undead with baseball bats, crowbars, and torches now. They'd run out of bullets ages ago, and had blocked as many of the stairs and halls as they could. A few thousand undead surrounded the building, there were

hundreds on the lower three floors, and the twenty survivors were running out of food and water. The major said to hell with it, bring them out a few at a time on the chopper. Getting there with a bus or trucks large enough to get everyone was not probable. So for the last few days we've been receiving the survivors a few at a time. I can't imagine what it would be like to be the last ones there. Hoping the avgas lasts in the chopper, that it doesn't have a mechanical failure or crash before you get out. Because if it does, that's all there is. You might as well open the doors and let in the undead at that point.

The stench! God the smell is so bad we have to wear masks when we go in to clear out bodies. We are moving everyone into the terminal in a few days, but right now it's only a few dozen for security. We've been clearing the bodies out and burning them in the open landing strips. Great piles of burning bodies. I have nightmares every night now. I have to get back to Jess.

November 10, 2004

For the last few days the chopper has brought in survivors from downtown three at a time. The last trips today, three of them, will leave at dawn. There will be over one hundred and twenty of us here now. We are in need of water and food, and other basic supplies. Heat isn't a problem in some areas of the terminal, since the engineers managed to get the gas powered backup generators in the basement running yesterday. We still don't run lights at night though. It draws too many of them here.

For two days now there have been teams going through the hotel, clearing it floor by floor, room by room. It was surprisingly unpopulated, and so far they have had only one casualty. My team has not been in on that operation, thank God. Every one of us, myself included, are showing signs of stress and the unit medic told us to take it easy for a few days. I was only too happy to follow those orders.

Tomorrow we head out along Barlow Trail south into the city. We are going on foot before dawn, hopefully under cover of darkness, and we will be looking for supplies. We shouldn't have to go far. There is a group of stores in this area that we can raid, including a big warehouse-style wholesale grocery place, and several strip malls. There are restaurants too, and I even think there was a police station nearby, but I'll have to check that on a map before we leave. If close enough, we'll check it out.

November 17, 2004

14:32 hours. Memory failed on the laptop. It took until today to find more. I looted it out of another laptop I found in the baggage area. It actually doubled my RAM, so I now have 512 Megs inside this beast.

We are about to take off for Cold Lake in a 12-seater passenger jet that came in from Comox. I don't know the pilot or co-pilot, but they seem nice. Terry and Brian by name. They are taking us (us being my team and four of the engineers) back to Cold Lake. It's our time to go back home and relax. The last weeks have been hell, and I missed Jess so much that I thought I was going to go insane.

Darren and I have been talking too. We are hoping that the area around Cold Lake is clear enough that we can get out for a boat trip and go fishing.

Our gear is in the cargo bay except for side arms. We carry those everywhere, even the pilots. Firearms are an essential tool these days. Kim found a relatively decent sword on the last trip out we did. It looks like a katana. Not a real Japanese one, but a decent knock-off. She wears it over her shoulder, and has honed it to a nice razors sharpness. It's anachronistic, but it seems to please her. I have to shut this off now. We are about to take off, and I want to be secured for travel.

19:46 hours. Fifteen minutes after take-off we lost power in the right engine. We had turned from the southern heading we were on and had levelled out at around 15, 000 feet, heading north or north east, I'm not sure, when the pilot came on the intercom and said there was a problem. Then a sound like a basketball being sucked through a turbine came from our right and the plane lurched. Things went flying everywhere, mostly pens and coffee cups, but the laptop went sliding down my legs and I pinned it to the seat ahead of me with my left foot. Within two minutes the plane was only a few hundred feet up. I looked out and we could see houses, farmland, more houses, passing very fast. Terry came on the intercom and said to hang on to something. I looked down and saw pavement. He was trying to land us on a stretch of highway. We passed many cars, parked or crashed or abandoned, and then lurched

downwards. The lights flickered, and then we crashed.

We hit something hard after sliding along for a good while. It felt like forever, but was probably about six seconds. The landing gear worked, I know that, since I heard the skid as they touched down. Then the bang came of the front gear exploding as it smashed into some obstruction, and we slewed sideways. Whatever we hit, a car or a pile of cars, we hit hard. Everything went black right about then.

When I came to there was smoke in the air, and I coughed, then threw up. I was still in my seat, there was a gaping opening in the aircraft's hull to my left, that arched up overhead. The seat ahead of me was missing, and I couldn't see anything for the smoke. I spat out a mouthful of vomit, gasped in some smoke-filled air, and tried to get free of my seat belt. The floor was at an angle, and I could hear someone moaning in the wreckage. Darren had been to my right, and I turned that way to look for him once I had the seatbelt undone. A gust of wind blew the smoke away momentarily, and I saw Darren struggling with his belt as well. He looked dazed, there was a big swelling bruise on his face, and he was bleeding from his nose, which I suspected was broken. I struggled over a seat that was now in the aisle, and grabbed Darren's arm. I realised I couldn't feel my left arm very well. It was numb from the elbow down, and when I looked there was a small sliver of metal sticking out of it. I pulled it out and it turned out to be about 5 centimetres long.

I didn't feel any pain, but it started bleeding right away, a red flow that I clamped my hand on.

Darren got free, and we went looking for the others. I found Todd slumped in his chair with a chunk of the hull in his chest. I checked for vitals, but he was gone. Damnit. I sent Darren towards the back, and I moved forwards. He called up to me that he'd found Laura, and she was unconscious. In the next seat forward I found Kim, looking dazed, but awake and not panicking. She had a burn on her face from something, but I don't know what, there was nothing on fire nearby. I asked her if she was okay, and she said yes, but winced when she spoke. I helped her unbuckle, and she reached for her sword and gun. I moved toward the pilots cabin, and was unable to make the door move. It was jammed on something, and was hot to the touch. Listening, I could hear crackling and sizzling through the door. This must be the source of the fire and smoke, I thought.

Getting Kim standing with me, we moved back towards Darren. He was unhooking Laura from her seat with the help of Eric, who looked less beat up than the rest of us. I didn't see Jim anywhere, and when I asked Eric pointed to the spot on the floor where Jim's seat had been. It was right by the open gash in the hull, and I could see the ripped steel where his chair had been torn away. He was probably outside somewhere behind us on the highway.

The thought of outside reminded me it was cold. I grabbed my parka and motioned for everyone else to do the same. I then checked my weapon, grabbed

my bag with the laptop in it, and saw what supplies I could gather. I found two C7A1's, a shotgun, and our pistols. I found our emergency bags, and slung those on my shoulder. I found my radio, and tried to raise Calgary with it, but there was no response.

Laura had been removed from her seat by now, but she was still out cold. I left her to Eric and Darren, and Kim and I took a look out through the gap in the hull. I remembered passing houses just before we crashed, so we were near a town. And that meant the walking dead. *God damn it!* I did not want to deal with this shit! Outside it was cold, and my breath was visible in the air. Looking around I saw we had slid off the highway and collided with two trucks and a car. Wreckage was spread out over a large area. Flames were coming from the cockpit, and any hope of the pilots' survival vanished. It was only a matter of minutes before the gas leaking from the wings caught on fire, so I leaned back in and told Darren and Eric to get Laura out of there. Kim walked over to the tail section, and said she could see undead coming, fifteen or so, but spread out and a ways off yet.

We hauled Laura out as gently as we could. She had a big swelling on her head, left side, above her eye, and was bleeding from a deep cut on her shoulder, but it wasn't fast so we put a bandage on it as fast as we could and looked around for something to carry her with. We ended up with a door off the wrecked car. Her feet hung off the end, but she was movable.

Kim fired two shots, and I turned to check on that situation. She had shot a zombie that was about 25 feet away from the tail. I could see a lot more

coming across fields, and from the nearby town. The road to the town was bare of everything but bits of plane and walking corpses, about twenty now. We had to get out of here right away. If we stayed near the plane we'd die, either when it blew up, or when several dozen hungry dead things descended upon us in a horde. Darren pointed to a car nearby that hadn't been hit in the collision, and ran over to check it out. He said there were keys in it, but it was locked up. I yelled back at him to smash the passenger window and try it. He used the butt of the shotgun to smash the glass, and climbed in. A few tense moments later the car sputtered to life reluctantly, and we all carried Laura on the makeshift litter towards it. We arrived in time to see three undead attempting to navigate the debris behind the tail, and we all piled into the Honda Civic (a hybrid, I noticed) and lay Laura across Eric and Kim in the back seat. I threw the bags into the back, and climbed in the passenger seat. As we backed up along the highway I saw two of the undead climb into the plane, and I remembered that Todd's body was in there. They were going to feed. Fuck.

We were in a car with a quarter tank of gas, on a road somewhere in southern Alberta, with a few weapons, limited food, and five injured people. We had no idea if help was coming, our gear was buried in the storage on the plane (which was on fire), and zombies had arrived looking for a BBQ. Just swell. We drove, and hoped to see a highway sign so we could figure out where we were.

About ten minutes later Laura began having seizures in the back seat. We had to pull over to

treat her, but by the time we stopped she had settled back down. Her breathing was shaky and shallow, and Eric took her pulse, and could barely find it. We talked about what to do, argued about it actually, all of us yelling and shouting on the side of the road. Eric held onto Laura the whole time in case she started seizing again, and within ten minutes she stopped breathing. There was nothing we could do for her. We had no medical supplies but the few things in our emergency bags, and nowhere to take her for treatment. When she stopped breathing we all just sat down with her, and everyone was quiet for a while.

Eventually, the reality of the situation surfaced again. We had to get moving. I stood, letting go of Laura's hand, and took a few deep breaths. As I looked around I could see the smoke rising from the plane in the distance, a lot more now. The wing tanks must have caught on fire. Hopefully the zombies I had seen going to take a bite out of Todd were roasted now. Hopefully...

God, what a fucked up world.

November 18, 2004

We're near Carbon, a small town near the badlands. We found a highway sign last night right before we came into the yard of the house we are in. It's an empty two storey farmhouse. There were no undead inside, and we've been careful to hide the car in the barn. Laura's body we put out there as well, under a tarp. When we leave we'll set a pyre. All of us wanted to be cremated if we died.

We help a small ceremony for Jim, Todd, Laura, and the two pilots Brian and Terry, and then set about making sure we didn't join them. We are staying on the top floor, have barricaded the lower floor as well as possible, and have moved all the essentials we could find upstairs. It's cold in here, so we moved blankets, food, what water we could coax out of the well pump, and the few things we had up here this afternoon. We are all huddled together for warmth, and everyone is sore or has a headache. My arm hurts like hell where the steel sliver went in, I got the feeling back a few hours later. We are all sporting bandages.

We got lucky and found a tank full of purple gas in a truck out back. We couldn't start the truck, so we siphoned into milk jugs and poured what we could into the Civic. We spilled a fair bit of it, but ended up with nearly a tank full.

I interrupted Kim and Darren talking earlier. They were talking about Laura and Todd and Jim, and if we'd make it back to Cold Lake okay. I walked in at that point and told them yes, we would. It's important now to keep a positive attitude. We have to be sure of it. If we slip and get depressed or fatalistic, we might as well kill ourselves and save the undead the effort.

November 19, 2004

At dawn this morning we held a brief funeral service for Laura, as well as the others, even if we had no bodies to cremate. We stacked some very dry lumber and logs in the field behind the barn, and laid Laura on top. We soaked the wood with a

little kerosene, and I threw a flare into the pile once we finished saying our words. We were brief, but it was touching. As soon as we were done we all got into the Civic and set out. The smoke from the fire should draw the undead in the region, covering our escape to less infested areas. I watched for a moment as the flames leapt up, catching easily in the dry wood. We had wrapped her in a bed sheet, and it was just starting to catch when I walked to the Civic. I was the last one in, so I took the passenger seat while Eric drove. Kim and Darren were in back with the few supplies we had salvaged. We drove east on the road that ran by the farm, passing more houses, stands of trees, overgrown lawns and fields, and the occasional walking corpse, who moaned and gaped when they saw us, and lurched our way in a facsimile of life.

We decided last night that going back to Calgary was our best bet. There was too much unknown country between us and Cold Lake to make the attempt. We hadn't been able to contact anyone on the short-range radios we had, and we hadn't seen any sign of a rescue attempt. They probably thought we were all dead. I hoped that the pilots had managed to get a distress call off before we crashed, but if they hadn't I wouldn't be surprised.

Anyhow, our plan is to head east until we find Route 575, then turn south east along it until we enter the badlands and find the town of Drumheller. From there, it's out on the 56 until we reach the Trans-Canada Highway, and we'll take that west back into Calgary. That last part worries us all. The population of the undead in that region will be much higher, and already this car is making

ominous sounds in its innards. I worry that we'll be stranded on foot someplace. Bicycles would be a good idea if we can find four in decent shape. Quicker than walking, and nearly silent. We'll keep that option open if we need to.

November 20, 2004

We drove down the slope into the badlands with the lights off and heat cranked. It was probably -15 this morning when we woke up. We'd parked on a grassy overlook last night, and had sat up watching the stars shine like diamonds. Nowhere around us were there the lights of houses, planes passing overhead, nor the near ever-present sounds of cars passing on the highways that we would have heard or seen this same time a year ago. Human civilisation on this world has ground to a halt. Truly, this is a silent planet now. It never ceases to amaze me just how fragile the society we had built really was. I remember hearing once, back in the days when I was an investment banker, that North American culture was three missed meals away from anarchy. It wasn't quite that way, really. It was more like one meal, and it wasn't a living person eating either.

So we drove into Drumheller just about dawn. The air was crisp and chilly, and we approached from the west. This whole area made its money off the tourist trade, and evidence of that was all along the road once we hit the badlands. Many famous archaeological sites were in the area, including the world famous Royal Tyrell Dinosaur Museum, which I had been to exactly once, the year it opened. We passed the turnoff for it, and I

wondered how it looked now. That lead to unpleasant images in my head, so to distract myself I turned on the car radio. Static. I opened the glove box to see if there were any CD's, and was rewarded with three. The first was Iron Maiden's *Number of the Beast*, which Eric demanded we play instantly, so I slid it in. The next two were Danzig's *Lucifuge* and, wonder of wonders, Gemalte Leiche's *Broken Faith*. I wondered if Amanda had heard this one, and if she was safe and secure up in Athabasca. I slipped the cd into my bag to give to her, if we made it back.

Drumheller was as silent as a grave. Nothing moved, nothing walked, and nothing tried to eat us. It was like those towns in central BC that I had passed so long ago, desolate and still. I had the same creeped out feeling again, so I suggested we pass through there as fast as possible. Strange, but even with no walking dead about I still felt a threat. It grew worse as we passed houses and stores, abandoned trucks and cars, and the bones of the dead lying on the sidewalks or in the yards, wherever they had been when they died. Some had clearly been torn apart, since the bones were scattered. It could have been the work of scavengers after the kills were made, but I suspected it was undead action. We came to a park, and passed a looming water tower that looked ready to fall. An 18-wheeler had collided with one of the support pillars, knocking it into a U-shape. After that we passed a section of burned buildings. There were six of them, an apartment block, some stores, and a single house on the far side. All looked gutted, and I imagine the unchecked fire had swept through them in a matter of hours.

We crossed through the silent town and found our road, the barely legible signs pointing us to the road that led to Calgary. As we drove along we speculated on where the undead might have gone to. Eric suddenly remembered there was a prison nearby, and thought maybe there we might find some answers. We agreed to check it out, but Darren and I both had visions of the Prince George Swarm in our minds, as I could tell when I looked back at him.

We approached the prison turn off with some anxiety, but that changed to curiosity once we saw the signs. Someone had painted large wooden signs and put them next to the turn off for the prison. They read, "Please help! Survivors inside!" and "Approach carefully! There are traps." We advanced slowly down the dusty road.

November 20, 2004

We advanced slowly down the dusty road. There were patches of snow and ice in the shaded parts of the hills where the sun didn't rise high enough to melt them away. The road let us up onto the level of the surrounding prairie again, and we had our first view of the Drumheller Federal Penitentiary, a medium security prison housing up to 585 inmates (so the sign said). Ahead of us was a crowded parking lot, and to the left of that were the administration buildings and a few houses, presumably for the staff who lived on site. To the right of the parking area the prison itself, a huge complex of low structures surrounded by a ring road, then a high chain fence with barbed wire coils

on top. Guard towers could be seen at all four corners, standing high over the buildings and yards.

Traps had been mentioned in the sign down the road, and we saw them easily. They were marked with bright colours and skull-and-crossbones warnings. There was a pit trap set up beneath the main gate into the prison, and several deadfalls made from cars that had been lifted and balanced on wooden posts. Ropes led from the posts to the fence, where they could be pulled to crush undead beneath the cars. The pit trap was a slope down into the gate, about ten feet deep. There were scorch marks in the ground there, so presumably they were using the pit to incinerate zombies that wandered in. Probably using gas for fuel. There were also wooden barricades placed along the inside of the fences, and earth barriers as well as sandbags and stacked barrels. The approaches to the buildings were a maze.

Of more immediate concern to us were the walking dead. They were thick in the parking lot, among the buildings outside the penitentiary, and around the prison fences. I estimated the number of undead at around three hundred that I could see. They were beginning to notice us, and Eric slowed and stopped us about two hundred and fifty meters from the parked cars and busses. The nearest undead were turning our way and starting towards us when there was a commotion inside the fence. A door opened on one of the cell block buildings and several people ran outside, waving and calling to us. They must have seen the car lights and the undead action. One jumped up on a group of barrels and waved, while the others took off running towards a side

gate that we saw. The man on the barrels pointed us that direction, and I waved out the window at him and told Eric to drive us that way.

The nearest fifty undead were closing on us when we got to the side gate. A school bus with sheet metal welded onto the drivers side was parked across the gate, and they started it up and reversed it out of our way. Once it was a wide enough gap Eric drove in, and they drove the bus back, blocking out the undead. We drove into the yard, and ahead of us was a garden. There were a few tanker trucks parked near the south side, and a fire truck as well as a small earthmover. It looked like they had dug up a lot of the concrete in the yard to expose the earth beneath. There was a small greenhouse as well as what looked like a chicken coop. This was confirmed a few moments later when a few chickens came out through the small door to see what was going on.

Eric drove us to a point between the garden and the first building, then stopped. More people were coming out of the buildings, men and women in winter clothing, and a few children. None of them was armed with anything more than knives or clubs, except one man who carried a long pole with a sharp metal point on the end. I told Eric to stay in the car, and the rest of us got out. I checked the gate to see how it looked, and the undead were gathering there, but not able to get through. The smell wasn't too bad, since the wind was blowing towards them.

The group of fifteen or so people coming towards us stopped when they saw our guns, and the way that Darren and Kim and I spread out around the

car. A few of the women grabbed the nearest children and pulled them away, but most of the people held their ground. We waited. Our guns weren't pointed at anyone, they were just being held. We made no hostile moves, and neither did they. After a minute, I walked forward about ten feet.

"Who's in charge here?" I asked.

The spear carrying man stepped forward after looking at his fellows for a moment.

"I suppose I am, mister," he said.

I asked his name, and told him mine. He replied,

"Sam Norton. I used to be a guard here."

I introduced the others, and told Eric to shut off the car. I had a good feeling about Sam, and I didn't think we were in any trouble here. The group came forward a few at a time and Sam introduced them.

There were nine men, five women, and four children. Three of the men were former inmates here, though Sam assured me they were not in for anything violent. The others were either townsfolk from Drumheller or other nearby towns, or survivors who had made it here from parts farther afield.

Kim asked where the other inmates were. Sam told us that many of them had died in the beginning, and after the prison was secured, many more of them had left to seek help outside or to try their luck elsewhere. None had returned so far. The group of survivors here now had not seen anyone else for three months. The last people to arrive were a woman named Rachel and her son Kyle, who had fled from Saskatoon and arrived here in a badly damaged truck that was still outside the gates. At this point Sam asked us if we could continue this

inside, as the walking dead were getting pretty stirred up at the gates. I agreed, and I took Eric aside for a moment to tell him to stay alert. He passed that on to Kim and Darren while I followed Sam and the rest inside. They seemed friendly enough, but we represented a drain of resources to them if we stayed, and we had guns, which I am sure every one of them wanted. So we stayed alert.

I followed Sam inside, and we walked into a cell block. We were in the common room at the end, and I could see defences had been set up in the entrances. These were sheet metal over wooden panels that could be easily fitted into place over the doors. Brackets on the walls allowed 2x4 wooden planks to be slid into place to hold these in place. There was a stockpile of clubs and spears in one corner of the room, but otherwise it was a warm comfortable place. A wood burning stove in one corner provided some heat, and there were high windows for light. I saw candles and lanterns as well. In one corner was a chalkboard with some math notes on it, and there were cups scattered around the room on tables. I smelled coffee.

Sam sat at a table, and I joined him. The others sat around us at various tables, and Eric and Darren and Kim sat down near a window, presumably keeping an eye on the gate and our car. A woman dressed in a blue parka and wearing thick glasses offered us cups of coffee, and we accepted. Coffee was served all around.

Sam asked who we were and how we came to be here. Over several cups of coffee we explained our story. I covered everything from leaving Calgary to returning to it, and how we got here. They were

quite excited to learn about Cold Lake and Athabasca, and asked us many questions about the town and area surrounding it. We in turn asked them many questions about how they had survived and what they had seen.

They told us the whole story. At the start the undead had risen, and no one had believed it. Drumheller had been overrun by walking corpses within a week, and about the same time I was going through Golden the prison guards had all taken off, except the warden and a few others. Sam had stayed on because he had nowhere else to go. The prisoners had rioted, and some zombies had gotten into the population, and pretty soon there were three hundred casualties. The surviving prisoners and guards had joined up and cleaned out the undead, secured the prison, and shut the gates. By this time they were out of ammunition and nearly out of supplies. Most of the remaining prisoners had fled over the next three weeks, and had taken a few weapons and most of the remaining food when they went. The few remaining had stayed, and survivors from the area had drifted in slowly. Eventually they had to either get more supplies or move on, and so the warden had suggested they raid the town for medical supplies, food, seeds, and water, plus whatever else they could get. Forty people went into Drumheller looking for supplies, and thirty-one had returned. With what they got they managed to seed the earth in the yard enough to get a decent crop, and they raided groceries in canned form from the local supermarket. They also got the two tanker trucks outside, each filled with gasoline. The water supply problem they solved with the fire truck. Periodically they would drive it into town to the

water tower and fill it up there, and they had various water gathering projects in the works all over the prison. Snow and rain had provided the majority of the water for a while now.

I looked around and remarked that this little group didn't look like thirty people. I was told that about three and a half months ago they had suffered a break-in. A group of six undead had managed to find a way into the prison through a break in the fence caused by a fallen telephone pole, and had attacked during the night. In the confusion several people were killed outright before the zombies were put down, and nine were bitten. The sixteen survivors were joined by Rachel and Kyle less than two weeks later. And now us.

Eventually talk got around to what to do now. We suggested they could all try to get back to Calgary with us, or we could make the attempt to get all of them to Cold Lake. The other option was that they could stay here, holding the prison against the undead. Given the number of people here, Eric suggested taking everyone in two or three vehicles, minivans or busses, and driving across to Calgary, where we could be assured of help at the airport. We could even call for help once we got close enough, with our radios. Sam asked if his people could have some time to think about it. We agreed that was a good idea.

They have invited us to stay. We have taken a room for ourselves at the end of the block. The cell doors are open all the time now, but they have set up manual systems to close security doors should the undead break in. They have a few people on sentry

duty, but due to the lack of firearms they have very little they can do. Darren and Eric will help out tonight, and Kim and I will aid them tomorrow. Despite the friendliness and lack of any hostility we are not ready to trust them yet. We are keeping a close watch, going everywhere in pairs, and keeping our gear and weapons secure. I don't expect any trouble, but it pays to be prepared.

November 28, 2004

After eight days here, we finally are prepared to move. The undead activity outside dropped off significantly after we stayed inside for three days. They can't see us well through the glass in the windows, so they seem to forget we are here unless someone goes outside. We try to do that only at night, or in groups of two.

I have gotten to know enough of the people here that I no longer feel terribly nervous about them. One of the former inmates, Bob Sneap, is worth keeping an eye on though. He's a bastard, and apparently only stayed around because he had no place else to go, and was too afraid of striking out on his own to risk it. Also, the way he looks at Kim sends alarms to her, and once she pointed it out to me I saw it too. He hasn't tried anything, and doesn't even talk to us very much, but I keep an eye on him. Sam has proved to be a good man. He looks out for everyone here, and makes sure everyone has enough blankets at night, that the laundry gets done, everyone is drinking enough and getting enough exercise.

We spent three days inside, like I said, and in that time we got to know the routine here. Everyone shares in the chores, everyone helps plant and grow the food. They have about twenty chickens they got off a farm nearby, and so we have had eggs a lot since we got here. I missed fresh eggs. It's so nice to have them again. And the vegetables too. Sure, they are preserved now, but potatoes keep well, and the pickled cabbage and frozen peas are wonderful variety after so much canned and packaged food. Darren came to me one day and said he thought they had it fairly good here. Sure, the undead were just outside, but they were fairly secure, and had fresh food. The only real worry was a steady supply of firewood and water.

After five days they decided they wanted to go to Cold Lake. We had explained the risks involved in crossing that much open land, but they seemed less than crossing to Calgary and potentially running into several thousand zombies at once. So we've been outfitting one of the tanker trucks, and the school bus, to make the trip. Sheet metal on the bus sides, storage for food and water, extra fuel on the roof. Also I gave Sam 20 shotgun shells. They have guns here, but ran out of ammo for them months ago. With that, one of the group here is armed, so they feel like they are more on equal footing with us. They've taken to referring to us as the 'Army people', I guess because of the uniforms and such.

Tomorrow, or possibly the next day, we are planning to go into Drumheller to raid for supplies. There is a hardware store I want to go to and see about some propane tanks and a portable barbeque, as well as bottled water and canned goods. The

police station there is likely to have ammunition, so we'll stop there too. Well, we'll try. I am reminded of an old adage; no plan survives contact with the enemy.

November 29, 2004

Just before dawn this morning we started dealing with the situation here. At Eric's suggestion, Sam and a few others got ready for a mass extermination. The swarm outside numbers about three hundred and fifty, and there used to be more of them. The people here managed to lure about a hundred so far into the burning pit, and destroy them that way. They didn't do it more often because they had no way to replace the fuel. We're going to take care of that tomorrow, so today we're going to have a Zombie-que.

Sam, myself, and three others are the bait. It's low risk, but still could be a danger if enough of them get in. Too many and they could climb over each other and get to us. Not enough and it's a waste of fuel. So we walked out just as the sun was rising, and stood at the end of the burning pit behind the second gate. I had my Browning 9mm, but we all had long wooden poles with spiked ends. Eric, Kim, Darren and a man named Shaun were behind us with the guns, just in case. Four others were sent to covered sections of the fence behind the first gate. They pulled back the gates slowly, until they were open about five feet. We then started hollering for the undead, and it was very, very odd trying to actually attract them rather than sneaking quietly by.

We didn't wait long before they started coming into the gap in the gate. Once inside, by twos and threes they followed the slope of the ground down, until they were standing below us inside the fenced area behind the second gate.

Man, they were fucked up. Rot had set in a long time ago for most of them. Blackened puffy flesh was peeling off the bones in places, and some of them were leaking fluids. It was absolutely disgusting. Some were missing limbs, a few had only one eye, or no lower jawbone. Mostly they wore the shredded clothes they died in, and only in a few cases was I able to tell gender at a glance. *And yet still they walked, and reached for us, and moaned and gasped.* Once we had about fifty, the people behind the wooden screens pushed the gates closed. One zombie got caught in the gate, trying to push its way in, and it fell over forward as it made it through. The others behind it pushed or pulled on the gate, but it was much stronger than they were. I didn't fear it breaking.

Sam pointed to one undead I had just spotted myself. The man was much fresher than the rest. His blood was still red where it had stained his clothing, and he still looked almost normal. He had bite marks along his arms and neck, and was missing most of his fingers. He still wore a cowboy hat, a Crosby, Stills, and Nash t-shirt, and some decent shitkickers. God damn. He must have only died recently, and made his way here over the last few weeks. The poor bastard.

We dumped diesel fuel into the pit while the stinking rotted miasma drifted up to us. We sprayed

the poor fucks down with it, and if one managed to climb atop his fellows long enough to grasp the edge of the pit, one of us pushed him or her back in with the spiked pole. Sam tossed in the flare.

Flames leapt up immediately, and within a few seconds the whole pit was engulfed in flames. We stood well back as the fire reached higher than our heads. The undead never made a sound, just kept trying to grab at us, until one by one they fell over, brains destroyed by the heat, and they became the truly dead. The fire burned long afterwards, and we tossed in fuel to keep it going. Eventually all that was left was skeletons and ashes.

December 4, 2004

For four days starting at dawn each day we lured fifty to sixty undead into the burning pit and incinerated them. On the last day there were only thirty. No more have come since then, either because they can't find their way up the road to the prison, or there are no more in the area. I'm betting on the first choice, so I am sure we only have a few days at most before more arrive. The smoke must have been visible for miles and miles. But we've been using the time we have to move supplies from the rest of the facility inside the fence. We emptied out the cars first, and drained as many tanks as we could. We went through the houses and gathered food and clothing, blankets and boots, and then we went to the traps and reset as many as we could. That was nasty, because a few of them had only trapped the undead, not killed them. We used the spears to finish the lingering ones off.

Yesterday, I saw something odd. We drove a few of the working cars to the gas station about 5 km from here, raided it for everything we could carry, and drove back. On the way there we had passed a single zombie standing in a field. It hadn't turned to look at us as we drove by; rather it had stood there gazing at the hills. We ignored it and drove past. It was still there on the way back. It hadn't moved at all. Curious, I told Eric to stop. We waved the others past, and Eric and Kim and I got out of the Civic and walked towards the single standing zombie. There were no others in sight, and all three of us were armed, so we didn't feel any danger. Darren stayed with the car, just in case we needed a quick getaway.

We walked slowly towards the corpse. It was just standing there. We approached from the rear, spread out in a lone, all of us with guns aimed. At ten yards we stopped. I slowly circled around towards the front, and as I moved into its field of view it didn't respond. Normally, no matter how still they are, once they see you they start acting like predators. I still don't know why that is. This one just stared.

It was a male, and possibly an original. Its flesh hung in sagging, oozing black sacks off its limbs. It was dressed in the tattered remnants of a business suit, with one sleeve missing entirely. Bite marks were barely visible along that arm. Its eyes were intact, though. It stood, staring at the distance, unresponsive to obvious prey. We all found this quite odd, and I asked Eric what he thought. The walking corpse didn't even react to my voice. None of us had any idea what to make of it, whether or

not it was a natural progress of whatever caused it to walk in the first place, or something else.

We left it there and returned to the prison, but I was still very curious. It made me think about a lot of what I had seen in the last months. We still didn't know why they walked. We still didn't know how they started to spread. We knew of one sure way for them to increase their numbers, the bite, but beyond that we had no clue how or why some people rose and some didn't. Maybe some scientists somewhere were looking into it, I hoped. But maybe not.

This morning, Kim and Darren and Sam and I got into the Civic and drove back out to have another look at the Standing Zombie. Sam wanted to come to see this anomaly, so we drove back to where it had been. It was still there, unmoving and it's posture the same as yesterday. Light snow had started to fall, and it was covered in an unmelting frosting of white flakes. We walked slowly towards it, Kim staying with the car this time so Darren could come to see the undead.

It stood there, it didn't react to noise, our presence, or even to a rock that we lobbed at it, hitting it in the chest. Sam wondered if it was frozen, so I threw another larger rock at it, hitting it in the shoulder. It moved then, only slightly moving its right leg to avoid falling. That was all. So, it wasn't frozen solid. It had balance, but it wasn't trying to walk around, or eat us. We were all baffled. We left it there, and went back to the car. I sat in the warm car and wondered. Was this a sign of things to come? Would they soon all be reaching this point? Could

we reclaim the planet from them within a few years now?

We drove back to the prison in the falling snow, and I made plans. We almost have the school bus finished. Two days at most. Then we can go back to Cold Lake. I can see Jess again. Megan and Michael. I have been away far too long, and they might even think I am dead...

Now, it gets colder. The snow falls heavier. I see my breath in the air even inside. I'll be moving down the hall now to the common room, where the stove is heating dinner, and the people have gathered for another meal and to talk and plan. We're having roast chicken and pasta tonight.

December 5, 2004

Snow fell through the night, covering everything in a frigid layer of white flakes. The sentries reported this morning that no new walking dead had appeared overnight, so it's still clear out in front of the gates. It's peaceful, and we took advantage of this to dress warmly and take the few children here outside to play. I got into a snowball fight with several others, and the kids made a snowman. A small one, and it didn't hold together well, but it was very good for everyone's morale. The thought of not having to hide inside, even for a little while, was wonderful. What finally drove us back in was the cold. Frozen ears and noses finally prevailed, so we retired inside for some hot chocolate and felt normal again for the first time in ages.

On a more sober note, I want to go look at 'Stan' again. I am calling the standing immobile zombie 'Stan', and it's caught on. Most of the people here think it must be a sign of the end of the undead. If one is doing this, maybe eventually they all will. I just don't know. I hope they all just fall over dead one day, but I doubt that will happen. At any rate, Sam and I are going to go out later and carefully inspect Stan for any changes. When we get back to Cold Lake I want to ask the scientists there if this has been reported anywhere else. I've begun a secondary journal just for Stan, so I can record everything about him. If he's still immobile when we go to leave, I'll destroy him, just to be safe. Plus I feel a certain guilt in leaving someone who used to be alive in this state.

Darren and Kim and I have been playing poker at night recently. We found a stack of chips and cards in the warden's house, and brought them back here. Kim's a natural player, but Darren has too much showing on his face. I beat him every time. Eric says he doesn't play card games. So far though, Darren owes me about twelve grand, and Kim owes me five. How exactly I'll collect I have no idea. It's not like any banks are open.

December 7, 2004 – "Stan"

We are ready to go. We've loaded up the bus and a few cars with all the perishables (pre-cooked so we can eat them cold if need be), as many supplies and weapons as we can get a hold of, and many extra blankets to deal with the chill. It's about -15 outside. I looked at the map and realised that Stettler is about 100 km north of us here on the #56

Highway. The plan then is to take the 56 north, skirt around Stettler and get us onto the path we took back to Cold Lake back in the fall before we went to Calgary. We know the route, and the risks, and should be able to find our way easily. We set out tomorrow morning, with myself and Darren in the Civic, Eric and Kim in the Nissan Pathfinder we have fixed up and fuelled, and Sam driving the bus with everyone else in it. We are going to take a few days to get to Cold Lake, because the days are short and we don't want to travel at night.

Yesterday Sam and Darren and I went out to see Stan again. He was still there. Snow had fallen on him, and he looked rather comical for a rotten animated corpse with cannibalistic tendencies. Again we approached slowly, and I was struck by the stillness of the area. Our breath was a white fog in the air, and the snow was undisturbed except for our footprints. Stan still hadn't moved. He was still staring at the distance, and when I tossed a rock at him he again corrected his balance, but that was the only reaction. We went back to the car, and I got out a digital camera, and took several pictures of him, from various angles. The whole time Darren had his pistol trained on Stan, in case he suddenly decided I was dinner and started acting like a regular zombie again. He didn't react at all. After taking about fifteen or sixteen pictures, I put the camera away. I planned to upload them to the computer later, once we got away from here. Again we went back to the car, got out a thermos of hot coffee, and shared some between the three of us. It was refreshing. Standing there in the snow drinking hot coffee reminded me of times well before this shit started. Ski vacations, camping in the Rockies

in winter, like that. The occasional whiff of decay was more than enough to ruin that illusion, though.

I took my notebook and walked back to Stan, and walked around him, making notes. His stance, condition of his clothing, obvious wounds, and whatever else about him caught my attention. He had no breath. Where I was breathing a fog cloud out with every breath, there was nothing from Stan. I was pondering what that might mean about his internal temperature when I noticed something else. He was looking at me!

This in itself made me jump back and draw my Browning. I had been about four paces from him. Stupid! Never *ever* get that close!

Darren called to me, asking if I was alright. I replied, "Yeah, I'm fine. Stan just started looking at me, though."

Darren and Sam walked over carefully, and when they entered Stan's field of vision he started tracking them too. Just the eyes though. Nothing else moved. It was quite unsettling. We moved around a bit, walking back and forth, and he watched us as much as he was able to. He never once turned his head or body. We tried this for fifteen minutes, and all he did was follow us with his eyes.

Sam spoke up. He suggested that maybe Stan had fallen victim to the undead equivalent of a stroke. His nerves had failed, finally decomposing to the point where he couldn't move his limbs. I responded to this by pointing to the rocks I had bounced off Stan earlier. He'd moved then, but only

to recover his balance. So what was it then? Was his brain even more damaged than that of a 'normal' zombie? Did he have nerve damage from the rot? Was it magic fairy dust that had immobilised him? We just didn't know. We debated this for half an hour, going through many ideas, and believing none of them. We ranged from why Stan couldn't move to why the fucking undead were walking around *at all*, something we still really didn't understand. Darren was just in the middle of a rant about his thoughts that the US government had a big secret lab where they'd created the original zombies, and then deliberately turned them loose in Africa to see what would happen, when Stan groaned.

Instantly, three pistols were out and aimed. Darren and I spread out, covering Stan from the sides with Sam in the middle. Stan was watching Sam, I thought. His groan went on and on. No white fog of living breath, I noticed. Finally, he rasped out the last air in his dead lungs, and fell face first onto the snow. My immediate thought was, *maybe he got tired of listening to us argue*.

We approached with extreme caution. He was finally dead, though. Not undead, just dead. No remote hint of anything in his eyes, just the putrid decay and slow freezing of dead tissues. I put a bullet into his brainpan to be absolutely sure. We drove back in silence, not sure what to make of this.

December 11, 2004 – Throne, AB

A while back I noted that no plan survives contact with the enemy. If I could roll my eyes on here I would.

Last Wednesday, the 8th of December, we left the prison. We locked up the facility, leaving the keys in the doors so if any survivors came along and found the place, they could get in safely. The main gate we closed and tied loosely with a rope. It should be sufficient to keep any stray undead out, but one pull by a live human and it would open right away. The traps we disarmed.

With a sense of hope I led the way out onto the road. With the bus following, and the Pathfinder following that, we drove out and turned towards Drumheller. We had full loads of fuel, lots of warm clothes, and enough food and water to last us all a week. We drove down the hill into the town, and retraced our path through. We passed the water tower, a children's park, and various cars and trucks. There were a few dozen zombies in sight as we drove through, but none were close enough to pose a threat. We wove the bus through the wrecks, disturbing the trash and plants growing up through the pavement cracks, running over a few bones and bodies as we went, though we went around as many of those as possible. Darren started digging in the various packs and things, looking for something. "What are you looking for?" I asked. "A cd. This car had a kick ass system in it, y'know." "It does?" I was surprised. Then I had a thought. "I have the cd I found for Amanda in my bag. Get that."

He dug around a bit, then produced Gemalte Leiche's *Broken Faith*. He opened the cover and put the cd in. Symphonic violin strains began, and I was just thinking that this wasn't so bad when the gargling and howling began. This was followed by

the fastest and most insanely heavy guitar shredding I have ever heard. Then drums! And over all this the violins still wailed. It sounded like the soundtrack to the end of the world. Darren and I looked at each other in horror. I shouted at him over the cacophony, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" He nodded. He reached for the cd player, and turned it up.

Later that day, after driving through the badlands, passing many walking corpses, and climbing up onto the surrounding prairies, we turned north on the #56. It was smooth going for almost an hour. We were going at about 60 kph, and the road was straight and not blocked. There were cars, but they were apart from each other and easy to travel around. We did see a number of undead trapped either in cars, or wandering the overgrown fields and roads. Once we saw a flock of very stupid geese fly overhead. They were heading sort of south-east. I thought about stopping and shooting one for dinner, but I doubted I could hit one by the time we pulled over and got out.

Ahead of us at the intersection of the #56 and the #589 we ran into a problem. The #589 ran into the highway at a T intersection here, leading away to the east. There were a few farms about, but my attention was on the traffic accident at the intersection. We pulled over about half a kilometre from the damage, and I got out the binoculars to have a look. I stepped out into the cold air and had a look, then passed Darren the binoculars and waved for Eric and Kim to come forward. The road was blocked heading north. A Greyhound bus had smashed into a large tractor here, and several cars

were mangled in the wreckage as well. Even worse, there was a fair-sized crowd of the walking dead lurching about the area. I counted twenty. Probably accident victims, farmers from nearby, and random wandering zombies. In any case, there were too many to safely deal with except at a distance, so we got out the rifles, and talked about what to do. Sam came forward from the bus, and we showed him the problem.

Within ten minutes we had decided to drive forward until we had their attention, then back away as they advanced. We'd shoot them as they came toward us, lining up snipers for good headshots. We'd have to clear the road of the bodies, but it was a good plan. Eric and Darren would do the shooting. Kim and I would watch their backs. Some of the others from the prison would watch around as well, since the more eyes we had looking out the better.

Kim and I got into the Civic while the other two set up a sniping spot across the hood of the Pathfinder. We drove forward, and when we got close enough that they started noticing us I honked the horn a few times. *That* got the attention of all the dead bastards, and they started enthusiastically following us as we backed down the road. I turned and drove slowly to the position Eric and Darren had set up, and pulled off to the side to be away from the field of fire. We got out just as Eric fired the first shot. We grabbed our guns and stood sentry while they fired. The cordite smell that has become so familiar to me drifted to us, and I watched behind and to the sides. I didn't pay much attention to the road ahead, that was their problem. When the shooting finally stopped I turned and saw twenty corpses in various

poses, lying on the pavement. One was still wriggling a bit, but that ended fast. Eric put another bullet into its head, and it was still. They were good shooters. The closest corpse was twenty yards away.

We spent the next thirty minutes dragging the bodies from the road. We piled them up in a ditch. There was talk of burning them, but I was worried about fuel. We'd need it, so I didn't want it wasted on these former undead. We threw the gloves we'd used on top of the pile after we hauled the last one down. They were filthy and gore-encrusted, and we all washed our hands and faces with soapy water.

Continuing on, we found there was no way to get through to the north. The bus had created such a mess that the only clear path was to the east. We took a moment to check the inside of the bus, but found nothing useful. The gas tank had long ago drained out onto the ground, and what food we found was long spoiled.

So we turned east on the #589, and drove another dozen kilometers until we were just south of Gough Lake. The land was empty here, so we stopped and parked, and had lunch. Spirits were high, as the day was warming up. Birds could be seen on the lake north of us, and Eric spotted some deer through the binoculars. They seemed unconcerned that human civilisation had collapsed into roving bands of survivors fleeing from cannibalistic corpses. They actually seemed pretty happy, completely at ease by the lake.

We drove on, eventually passing two small towns and turning north on the #855, best described now as a rude track overgrown with weeds, ice and rubble. Progress was slow, since we had to dodge far more cars here than I had thought. We could see another lake to the east, and the map said it was Sullivan Lake. North we slowly wove our way, until we reached the town of Halkirk. It was on the road to Stettler, west of us, and we had been though here in the fall. It was a little more desolate now. Snow, ice, and the walking dead. We turned east again, on the road to Consort, which was about 100 km away. The snow on the road here was undisturbed except for the tracks of animals, and we made good time. By late afternoon we were just outside Throne, and had to slow down to steer around a wreck. I drove past in the Civic with the bus on our tail, and just as I passed a Suburban turned on its side, a zombie staggered out and made a grab for the car. It missed, but lurched right into the path of the bus. There was a sickening wet crunch we heard even in the Civic, and the zombie ceased to be a problem as it went under the front tire of the bus. We continued on, but after a minute the bus pulled over. This was right in the middle of the town of Throne, so something serious must be up. Concerned, we stopped and Darren took the wheel as I got out. I heard the hissing as I walked to the bus. The tire was going flat. *Damn.* A bone must have punctured the tire as the zombie was crushed. Sam jumped out, looked at the tire, and swore like a sailor. There was no spare.

I heard a groaning sound, and looked around. We had stopped near a gas station with a shattered front window, and a pair of hungry looking undead were trying to climb through the missing pane to get to

us. Across the street was a neighbourhood, and I could see several walking dead coming down the streets towards us. Not too many, thanks God, but enough to be a problem. I grabbed my shotgun, and walked towards the two making their way through the window of the gas station. I called to Eric, "Get that bus moving, whatever it takes!"

Darren backed the Civic up to near where I was standing, and I raised the shotgun up to my shoulder. I heard the bus start moving again. It wouldn't get far, but it could get away from here. We'd have to find another tire or a new vehicle. The two undead approaching me were really badly decomposed. I saw bone, rotten black tissue, and torn clothing. Gender was simply beyond me, but one had longer hair, so it was either a hippy or a female. At this point I didn't care. I shot the closest one in the face, and it went down, missing most of its skull now. The other, the long haired one, was a little quicker than its companion, and stepped over a fallen gas hose. It came, arms outstretched, and I pulled the trigger again. A little low this time. The blast severed the head completely, and body and head rolled in different directions.

I retreated to the Civic, and Darren drove us out after the bus, which was slowly making its way through the town. It was a struggle to drive, apparently, since Sam drove it into the corner of a truck, took out a stop sign, and clipped a car as well. It was evident that the bus was fucked. I called Eric on the radio, and told him to look for a defensible structure. We were going to have to abandon the bus. He said there was a school ahead. We drove that way, and it looked pretty good. The doors to the school were open, and I imagined there would be

undead inside. Still, better we get in there than be out here in the open with a town full of walking dead to deal with. The bus pulled up and people started getting out. I yelled at Eric and Kim to check the school out, and they headed inside. I grabbed Sam and told him to have everyone grab either a bag of food, a bag of water, or some other supplies. One bag only, and everyone takes something. Then inside, and into the first secure room they see. He nodded and started giving directions, and Darren and I stepped out towards the street to see what was going on. Fifteen or so undead were coming. I checked the shotgun, making sure it was fully loaded, and shot at the closest one I saw. Darren, taking careful aim, dropped the next closest two with very clean headshots. He's a good shot, and I sometimes forget he's only 16 still. I shot another one in the head, and turned to check on the others. They were gathering things still. Too slow! I shouted at them to hurry, and heard shooting from inside the school. Three shots, then one more. I turned around again, and ten feet from me was a huge, incredibly tall corpse, lurching along with great speed. He must have been 6'6", and was probably a body builder in life. I got the shotgun up, and fired, hitting him in the chest. He went down, but then got up again. His ruined torso wasn't bleeding, just a black ooze that looked like tar. I pumped another round in, and fired again, higher. This time the pellets tore a large chunk from his face, ruined an eye, and tore his left ear cleanly off. Nothing in his brain, though. Damn it! He charged, and I ducked low on his blind side, and lifted as he ran into me. He went over my back and hit the ground face first, and I pumped my last round into the shotgun and fired at the back of his head. His

skull burst, splashing grey matter across the street, and I realised I was out. Too many more were too close, so I slung the shotgun rather than fumble for more ammo, and drew the Browning. I checked Darren, and there were a few dead at his feet. The other people were inside now, so I ran to Darren and grabbed his arm and started towards the school. Somehow an undead had managed to get between us and the school, and I was raising my arm to shoot it when Kim came outside, holding her katana. She stepped up, holding the sword like she knew exactly what she was doing, and swung at the zombie. It was facing us, so it didn't see her. She took a good horizontal swing, and cut the top half of its head cleanly off. It flopped down, and that was that.

We ran past her, and she followed us inside. We closed the doors, barricaded them with chairs, filing cabinets and boxes, and retreated to the inner hallway as the undead arrived at the doors. I spent a few moments to reload the shotgun, then checked on everyone. There had been a few undead inside, but Eric and Kim had taken them out. We had some supplies, but not all. We were low on ammo, but if we could get to the cars we could get more. Water was a problem. So was the tire on the bus. Food we seemed to have plenty of.

So for the last three days we have been here, in the fortified school. A total of forty-one undead have come here, hoping for a meal. Tomorrow morning we are going to get out of here one way or another. We only waited this long to see how many there would be. No new ones have shown up since yesterday, so we feel confident that this is it. The people are scared, wondering if we have traded one

prison for another, so tomorrow cannot come soon enough.

December 13, 2004

Three dead. That's our count from our escape attempt. There is good news, but I'll get to that.

We started the morning of the 12th, with our tried-and-true diversion tactics of making a whole lot of noise at one end of the building and drawing the undead over there so we could get to the vehicles unimpaired. In the school music room we found drums, cymbals, and a few French horns. This was more than sufficient for an impromptu jam session, and we hauled the gear to the far end classroom. It was the end away from the town, and was formerly a science lab, by the look of it. A table of elements was posted on one wall, and various jars of preserved animal parts were on shelves. Broken beakers littered the floor, and an ominous blackened bloodstain was splashed along the wall closest the door.

We set up the instruments and went back to the other room, where everyone was gathered, and went over the plan another time. It never fails; someone will second guess the plan at some point and try to screw things up. They'll mean well, but it'll happen anyways. In this case it was Bernard, one of the former cons. A break-and-enter man from Montréal, he'd been doing five years, and was into his fourth when the dead rose. He was full of great ideas, and in fact he happily shared them with anyone who'd let him talk for a minute or more. The problem was, his great ideas had landed him in jail. Applying

them to a survival situation when the threat of zombie attack was just outside the fucking door was impractical.

So the plan was we made as much noise as possible at the far end, drew all the undead out there to that end, and then opened the main doors to get outside. We had found car keys in the teachers lounge for a Toyota Corolla and a Dodge Grand Caravan. They were still in the parking lot, and I had hopes they would start. The bus was still sitting on a flat, and we had no way to change it with the undead all outside ready to feed. We didn't even have a spare tire, so it was a lost cause anyways. We'd probably have to abandon the food and supplies in the bus. That meant we had to find transport for all of us. Five sedans or four minivans should do it. We planned to head outside, Sam, Richard (a mechanic who'd lived in Drumheller) and myself going for the cars, and Kim, Darren and Eric covering us and destroying as many undead as they could until we got to the cars. If the Corolla and Caravan started, we had some vehicles right away. We'd move them near the doors and get back inside. Such was the plan.

We had twenty-two here, and the available seating in all the vehicles (assuming the two out in the lot even turn over) was twenty-two. So, no room for error. We would get everyone back inside, gather supplies, make noise, and flee for the cars. If the cars turned over we'd leave them open and running.

We made for the door while a few volunteers made a hell of a racket back in the science room. Everyone else moved back three rooms and set up

barricades, except for two people who stayed to man the doors. One of them had my shotgun, the other had Sam's. I had my Browning, full and clean and an extra clip ready. Sam had Eric's pistol, and the others had their various rifles and pistols. Richard had a pistol too, but he claimed no real knowledge of firearms. I told him to stick by me, and if we had to shoot anything, to follow my lead. A few minutes crawled by, and finally they called to us. Darren was waiting near a window, and looked outside quickly. He called back, it was clear. I had the keys in one hand, and my gun in the other, and they opened the front doors.

We were out and had a few seconds to look around. I peered around the corner towards the back of the school. The crowd of walking corpses was battering the windows, trying to shatter the glass to get inside where the noise was. We had reinforced the windows with furniture and sheets of wood, so they should be safe. There were no undead in front of the school. It looked like all of them had gone to investigate the sounds. So we ran. I went for the Corolla. Richard stayed at my side, and we ran. The car was covered in grime and dust, a little unmelted ice, and some leaves from the fall. We stopped at the car, and Richard looked back the way we had come, while I tried the key in the lock. It went in, but I couldn't get it to turn. Must have been frozen, or grit had gotten inside and fouled the mechanism. I pulled it out and ran to the other side of the car, trying the other door. Again it went in, and again it wouldn't turn. Too long outside, I guessed, unprotected from rain and snow and sun. I could still hear the drumming and French horns over the slight wind that was blowing.

I took the key out and checked on Sam and the others. He was inside the Caravan, trying the ignition. I heard it cough. Turning back to the Corolla I gave the lock a smack with my hand, twice. That had always worked on my Explorer when it froze up in an ice storm, back before. And sure enough, it worked here too. The key went in and turned. The doors unlocked, and we got in. I ended up on the passenger side, and I handed Richard the keys. He fit the key into the ignition, and I heard two things. First was the sound of the Caravan roaring to life, and the second was the shattering sound of breaking glass. The drums and horns stopped, and I saw Eric run back inside. Darren and Kim stayed outside, but the zombies were coming back our way. They stepped back out around the corner, and opened fire. There was no way they could get them all, they were too close to the swarm to deal with every one of them before they were swamped. The Caravan was driving back towards the front doors, and Eric reappeared pushing people ahead of him. He must have realised we had to go now, and I agreed. I looked at Richard, who was still trying the ignition. "Have you got this?"

"I got it," he said, "It'll start in a minute."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes! Go on, help them," he said, waving at the front doors.

The motor coughed twice then, but still didn't start. I got out and ran to help. Undead were advancing around the corner, and Darren and Kim were being forced back to keep out of their reach. I ran forward and aimed the Browning, and fired at one that had stepped around the corner towards the nearest living

people. My shot missed, and I fired again, this one hitting it in the neck. It fell, but started up again. More of them were coming now, and the people were getting into the vehicles as fast as they could.

Darren was still firing, but Kim clicked empty. She threw me her rifle and drew her sword, cutting rotten limbs off, severing undead heads and yelling banshee-like the whole time. Darren stopped firing and ran towards me. I was busy shooting at an advancing teenaged girl who was missing both hands at the wrists. I dropped her, and three more took her place, and I was running low on ammo. Eric suddenly showed up at the front doors, and yelled at me, "That's the last! Get out!"

We ran. The Caravan was pulling out already, and the Civic too. Kim ran to the Pathfinder, and Sam was waiting there in the drivers seat. I looked for the Corolla, and saw Richard and two others, a farmer named Greg and a nurse from the prison, Gladys, fighting hand to hand with five or so undead. All three had been bitten. *Fuck!*

The horde was advancing on us. Eric dove into the back of the Pathfinder, Kim followed, and Darren ran up and turned at the door. He shot once at the leader of the advancing swarm, and climbed in. They had cut us off. There was no way to get to Richard and the others. Already they were screaming, and more and more of the twenty or so zombies left were turning to them. The leader of the pack was about ten feet from me when I shot him between the eyes, and I climbed into the passenger seat. All four of them in the Pathfinder had been yelling at me to hurry, and we drove away with the final screams of the three echoing in our ears.

The only good news from this is that we got away and kept away. We always knew we could lose people. We knew the risk, everyone did. It is my regret that I didn't make sure they were dead and not returning. I have failed them. At this very moment they could be up again, walking about, seeking warm flesh to feast on. God help me, I hope not.

December 15, 2004

We ran east until we hit the highway north, the #41 North at the town of Consort, leading us straight to Wainright. CFB Wainright, about 100 km away from Consort, should have been a safe haven. Last we had heard there was a detachment of 350 Army troops there, holding the roads open and rescuing periodic survivors. As of December 13th, that was what we believed to be true. The reality was something else.

Right now we have fled the ruins of the base. It wasn't destroyed by the undead, that much we could tell. It looks like it was looted and ransacked by the troops who were based here before they took off. We found the corpses of several officers and about two dozen soldiers in one of the barracks, and it looked like a fire had erupted in the yard outside. The vehicles were all gone, fuel tanks were empty, and the gates were open. We looked around, stayed the night, and left on the morning of the 15th. We had found no undead inside the base, and we closed the gates when we left. We searched around for a radio more powerful than what we had,

but didn't find one. Eric thought that the mutineers (he was sure that the battle here had been a mutiny) had taken or destroyed all the radios. Where they had gone was anyone's guess.

Still heading north. We reached Vermilion, a small college town, and passed around it without incident. We saw many undead on the streets there, and a few on the roads around the town. They tried to follow us, but it did them no good. Cold Lake is about 175 km from Vermilion, with only a few towns and a lot of trees between. We should be there tomorrow, if all goes well.

December 26, 2004

Three days. That's how long it took us to get back here to Cold Lake from Vermilion. We arrived on the morning of the 18th, our battered and cold survivors extremely relieved to be surrounded by other living humans, offered food and medical attention, and warm places to rest. The ordeal was over, but I have to record it here.

We drove through areas familiar to my team, finally arriving at the farm of Colin and Betty Dawson. This was the 16th, and we'd seen numerous undead in the fields, on roads, and around farms, their numbers increasing slightly as we moved on. When we were a few kilometers from the Dawson farm we noticed the barricades across the road ahead. They were placed at a 'Texas gate', where two series of fences came right up to the road. This was all new, with fresh lumber and recently dug earth. We saw the pile of soil nearby, and the horizontal metal pipes looked reasonably new. There was a

burned pile of corpses about 50 meters from the gate, on our side, but there was nobody living around. A few undead were standing at the gate, and one was actually trapped in the gate itself, his legs wedged between the pipes where he had tried to walk over them. It was a simple matter to deal with the three mobile undead here, and then to destroy and remove the trapped one. I had a look around the gate while the others removed the bodies, and in a wooden box I found a notebook and a pencil. The book appeared to be a log of activity near the gate, and on the last page I found a note;

To any survivors reading this, I'm sorry there's nobody here to greet you. We were forced to abandon this area due to increased activity by the zombies. It's December 1st, and we are making the trip to Cold Lake, which is populated and safe. We hope to be back in the spring, with soldiers and supplies. In the meantime, there's a farmhouse ahead that is secure, surrounded by fences, and there's a radio and supplies there. Call us on Channel 5, and we'll come get you. Good luck, C. Dawson.

I showed Eric and Kim the note, and then put the book back in the box. It was relieving to know that the Dawson's were probably alright; they were decent people, and I liked them a lot. We all got back in the vehicles and drove over the gate, and a few kilometers later we arrived at the farm. There were new chain link fences surrounding the main yard, reinforcing what had been there before. The gate was closed, but with a manual lock that was easy to move if you were alive and had a functioning brain. I got out and opened the gate, and

the cars all drove in. I noticed the Pathfinder was making a ticking noise as it went passed. We'd have to check that out. I closed the gate behind the last car, and secured it again. Then we went to check out the house.

As promised in the note, there was a supply of wood for the stove, canned and preserved food, several cases of bottled water, blankets, and cots for ten people. There was also, in the upstairs room (the one with the balcony) a small generator, instructions for fuelling it and starting it, and a radio capable of reaching several hundred kilometers. We also found four boxes of 9mm ammo for our Brownings, and two boxes of 12-guage shotgun shells. These were very welcome.

I detailed Kim and Sam to get the survivors settled here, and Eric and Darren and I went outside to do a check of the area. As the sun was setting we entered the barns and made sure they were clear. The outbuildings were beyond the fences, but looked closed up and secure. There were no undead within sight, and our search revealed no walkers anywhere. Feeling safer, we returned to the house to find dinner being made, the stove heating the house, and many very relieved people. Eric and I went upstairs to the generator and radio, and worked on getting it going. As the smell of hot food began wafting through the house, making us salivate and become aware of hunger, we started the generator. I plugged in the radio set and started a check on it. It appeared to be fine, so I dialled Channel 5 and said hello. "Cold Lake, this is CLST 107, come in please. Over. The surprised reply was a moment later. "CLST

107, this is CFB Cold Lake. What's your situation? Over."

"We have arrived at the Dawson farm, our number is nineteen, say again, nineteen survivors. The farm is still secure and we are safe, over."

There was a pause, and then the woman came back on. "CLST 107, we will dispatch vehicles in the morning to retrieve you. Good to hear from you. Over."

I asked her then if she could get word to Jess that I was alive, and told her my name, and all our names. She told me she would see it was done, and that we should wait at the radio in case anyone wanted to talk to us. I said we'd be sure to listen for it.

Kim brought us both some hot food, and she sat down with us by the radio. Darren was outside checking the perimeter with one of the prison survivors, she told us. I told her the good news from Cold Lake, and she went back downstairs to tell the people. There was an excited cheer from below, and a few minutes later Sam came up looking pleased and relieved. We bedded down for the night, set sentries, and left the generator on so we could have the radio running. About two hours later, with many of the people asleep on cots, hot coffee on the stove, and three sentries outside walking the fence, Sam and I were sitting in the radio room when it squawked. Cold Lake was calling. The operator told me some people wanted to talk to me, and a moment later I heard Jessica's voice!

"Brian! Are you there? It's me, honey!" I talked to her for a few minutes, and then Sarah was on too. I didn't notice until later, but Sam had left the room, leaving me to talk to Jess and my sister in privacy. It felt so good to hear them. A weight seemed to

vanish from me, and I realised I had been worrying about both of them for so long I no longer noticed it until it was gone. We talked for about ten minutes. I told them roughly what had happened, who we had lost. I asked about Michael and Megan, and was told they were fine. Sarah also told me she'd tell Mandy that Darren was okay. Mandy was apparently Darren's girlfriend who he never talked about, but she'd been hanging around with Jess since our plane went down, hoping for news. We had to sign off then. There was too much to talk about, and not nearly enough time on the radio to do it. I signed off, and sat down in the quiet, empty room and cried with relief for a few minutes. Finally, I found a cot, and went to sleep. It was one of the best sleeps I had in months.

The next day was cold. We stayed inside most of the day, except to go to the outhouse or check the perimeter. We had coffee and hot chocolate, pickled eggs and canned soups, and we gathered enough snow to melt for a bucket or two of wash water. We waited. We talked to Cold Lake once more, and they told us the relief vehicles were on the way already, due in a few hours.

Around 3 p.m. they arrived, four vans with a dozen soldiers. And Jess. She got out of the lead van as they pulled up, and ran to me. She was wearing fatigues, a black jacket, and carrying her rifle. I didn't see any of that, though, at first. I was too busy looking at her hair. She'd cut it shorter, and it was dyed red now. She crashed into my arms, and we stood there holding each other, her saying she had thought I was dead, and then we kissed each other, and the world went away.

Someone was standing nearby clearing his throat. I looked up and Captain Couper held out his hand, which I took. He looked pleased, and said, "Good to have you back, son. We'd feared the worst when your plane went down."

We went inside, and over tea and hot soup and fresh bread the soldiers had brought with them we told our story. Sam interjected a few points, and Couper and Jess both had a lot of questions to ask, particularly about Stan. We talked about that for a few minutes, and then Couper told me that a few other Stan-like zombies had been noticed. Not many, just three since October, all separated widely and unconnected. The theory was that the last of the brain functions in the oldest ones were failing now, and that we'd be seeing much more of this kind of case by spring. I felt some hope in me again. I grasped Jess' hand on the table, and squeezed it.

The next morning we had an early breakfast, and then killed the fire in the stove. We packed everything up, leaving more supplies at the house, and replenishing the woodpile. If any other survivors came in we wanted them to have a chance too. We shut off the radio and generator, and closed up the house. Everyone piled into the various vehicles, much more spread out now, and we departed the farmhouse. Several hours later, and a few zombie sightings past, we came within sight of Cold Lake. The perimeter had been extended around large parts of the town, and three new towers were visible. We all had to stop at the gates and go through checks, but I was so happy to be sitting there with Jess that I didn't care.

Perhaps another hour later and we were all cleared. Sam and I parted ways with a hug and a handshake, and Darren and Jess, Kim, Eric, and myself all went home. Sarah met me at the door when we pulled up, and that was another tearful reunion. She'd grown her hair a bit, and looked good. Inside, Michael and Megan came running over, and jumped on me. They'd both grown so much. I'd been away only a few months, but they both had shot up so much. I got introduced to Mandy, who dragged Darren away to her place at the first opportunity. Kim stayed with us, and Eric went back to the base after dinner. For the next few days we all rested, reported to the base for interviews and reports, and caught up with the situation here.

Now, it's the 26th, the day after Christmas. The population gathered in churches and halls last night to sing and dance and generally celebrate the season, and Jess and I took the kids out to see the lights and trees and hear the songs. Then we came home, as it started to snow, a pure white fall of crystals larger than my fingernails. It snowed through the night, and got colder. Today the sun is out, the air is freezing cold, and we are staying inside to drink warm cider and enjoy each others company. Darren and Mandy came by, and Kim and Eric showed up together, with Couper. We are taking the kids outside to build snowmen in a few minutes. We talked about the situation with the town a little, but I want to find something right now to make the snowmen's noses and eyes with. More later.

December 30, 2004

President Rumsfield, from Hawaii, has announced his plan to “retake North America from the undead hordes” and “reclaim our American way of life”... the broadcast was intercepted by the Cold Lake communications station, and relayed to the town with some amusement. Rumsfield seemed to be implying that the islands of Hawaii were the sole remaining bastions of freedom and civilisation, and that all of North America was an infested wilderness of barbarians and undead legions. Certainly the States seem to be far worse off than Canada. While I was away Cold Lake established contact with several towns across the north and another base, CFB Shilo in Manitoba, an Army unit that has held out and gathered a few thousand survivors. Cold Lake has already sent a few flights there to maintain contact, and to transfer a few personnel. Also there was a brief radio contact with a US base in Montana in early December, but they haven’t been heard from since.

Apparently the few Navy ships we have in service have joined up with a number of US Naval ships and a few stray British and Russian ships in the Atlantic, and have maintained contact with Europe. The British government has surfaced again, as well as the French, but Germany is silent, and so is most of Russia. A few local areas have managed to hold out against the undead, but the severe population levels of zombies in Europe means they outnumber the living survivors by a huge amount. No one has heard anything from China, Japan, or most of Asia, since before I left. There are several US ships in the Pacific, but we have heard little about them. Most appear to be based at Hawaii.

In Cold Lake there was a murder a few weeks ago. A survivor brought in with a group got into a fight in town with a local, and ended up killing the man. The military took custody of the killer, and after a short trial they shot him. Apparently there was a protest by some who were upset that the military shot the man, but the base CO told them to stick it up their ass. Most people I have talked to about this agreed with the actions of the military. I do too.

Jess and I have had regular visitors. Sarah is staying with us, and Darren and the Coupers have been by often. Mrs Couper, Anna to her friends, is a very nice lady. She and Jess hit it off well, and Anna likes Michael and Megan a lot. Sanji came by the other day and we caught up. He's been off in the north with a small unit doing exploration, and is in town to gather supplies and more personnel. He's doing well, and it was good to catch up with him. Jay is apparently still very busy, being one of three dentists in the area. Lots of problems getting dental amalgam, apparently. I'm glad my teeth have always been good.

The Major wants to talk about replacements for the team members I have lost. I am not up for that yet. The memory is too fresh still. I told him in a few days. I admit it's something I'll have to explore soon.

Truth be told, I don't want to leave again. I want to stay here with Jess and the kids and get old. I want to go out for dinner, to the movies, and eventually take the kids to Disneyworld. I want things to be normal again. I miss my cat. Weird, but I haven't thought about my cat in ages. I wonder what

happened to her. Her name was Fuzz, and she was a tabby that used to dig up my plants and crap in the garden. I left her behind without a thought when Sarah and I fled Calgary back in May. I hope she survived.

It's fucking cold out today. Probably around -20. Most houses here have heat, either due to a limited amount of gas they have secured, or due to having electric heat or fireplaces. It's not as warm as we were used to a year ago, but we'll live through it. Everyone dresses in layers, and we all have thick blankets on the beds. Humanity lived in these conditions for thousands of years, so I imagine we'll live through this too. And if the theories are right, this time next year we'll have far less undead to worry about as well. One thing they've noticed, the undead seem to maintain a body temperature of about 4 degrees C in the winter. Somehow they are avoiding freezing solid, even with no insulating clothing, and often very little more than rotten flesh. How the brains up at the Base figured this out I'll never know.

Again, this brings up some questions. How? Why? It makes no sense, and a biologist I spoke to yesterday agreed. The zombies don't adhere to the basic biological laws, and from what the scientists understand there is no apparent reason for them to be animated. As can be imagined, church attendance is a lot higher now than it was before. People are turning to God to help them understand this nightmare. Somehow, I don't think that we'll ever really know what happened.

January 1, 2005 – New Years Day

The cries of “Happy New Year” last night were muted and somehow reluctant, as if nobody wanted to say the words, for fear of the spreading tragedy of our times taking notice and crushing all our hopes. So it was quiet celebrations and small gatherings, rather than a large group. Here at our place we had Darren and Mandy, Eric and his friend Samantha (girlfriend or not? It was hard to tell.), my sister Sarah, and the Coupers stopped by on the way to the base New Year function. All the officers got told to come to that, so they were only here temporarily. I imagine Sanji was there too.

The group of us talked this morning about what’s happening here. It’s freezing outside, snowing, and there’s a grey overcast extending to a blue curve on the western horizon. We sat inside while the kids ran around playing, and drank tea and hot chocolate and talked about the future. The main thing we talked about was the cold. There are over nine thousand people here now, and that many people create supply problems. Food is rationed, and fuel for heating and power is in short supply. A lot of houses have been fitted with wood burning stoves, and a lot of wood has to be burned to keep a house warm. Something that some people have been doing is establishing small groups on farms, with fenced in areas like what the Dawson’s have. Several of these groups have moved out of Cold Lake into the nearby countryside. It’s easier to gather firewood for a smaller group, and foraging for food could be simpler as well. We talked about this for a while, and we might try it. Finding an appropriate place would be simple enough, and gathering the supplies a pretty straightforward thing. The base CO will provide chain link fencing. We’d still have to forage

for supplies for the town, but we could do that from whatever place we find. This group here will be the foundation, I think. I have to give this some thought.

Jess has asked Sarah to stay on here with us. She's agreed to stay, and she can find work at the hospital here in town easily. If we move on to a farmhouse and set up a communal project, she'll come with us as our medical expert. Darren and Jess and Eric and Kim and I will be the core of the scrounging and salvaging team, CLST 107 reborn in a slightly different form. That reminds me to ask Kim about this, since she wasn't here last night or today. I'm sure she'll be interested. Any others we need will be easy enough to find, but this is the group I think we need to start with.

January 4, 2005

Cholera. It was bound to happen eventually. Fourteen cases of cholera in town here, and the water utilities got cut off this morning. So now the *vibrio cholerae* bacterium is in our drinking water. The base is telling everyone not to panic. Fat chance of that. As soon as they announced it yesterday people started freaking out. That dimmed a bit when they explained how you get it and how to treat it. The good news for us, we already boiled ALL of our water. Habit we picked up on the road. The base is telling people, boil it all for ten minutes, sterilise with bleach, and above all don't panic. How the cholera got into the water we haven't heard. I suspect there's a zombie that wandered into the lake someplace near the water reclamation plant.

So the sick have been isolated and are being treated. They say they will be turning the water back on later today. I asked Sarah if there was anything else we could do, and she said we would be okay, since we already treated our water. This just lit the fire under my ass, though. I'll be organising our little expedition soon now to go out and look for a farm to take over. I have a very bad feeling about this.

January 8, 2005

More news from overseas and the US got released today. The Americans have made a lot of noise about landing an 'Expeditionary Force' in California. Ten thousand troops from Hawaii were apparently landed south of Los Angeles, and were to make a push for the city. Good luck to them. In Europe, the French have managed to clear a few thousand square miles of territory of the undead, and are working towards getting the entire country cleared out. They claim it will take years. I agree.

An American aircraft carrier reported that it stopped at Okinawa to see what the situation was there. They were greeted with thousands of survivors who pleaded for help. The islands were completely over run except for a few areas where survivors had managed to erect barricades and shelters. Several thousand had gathered at the naval base there. This was last month, and the news just made it to us today. The trickling of news is slow. We have sent word out that we are here, both to Europe and the US in Hawaii, and they've been in touch with the base CO. We still haven't heard anything from Ottawa, so we don't really know who's in command of Canada right now. There might be a Prime

Minister, or there might be a bunch of undead politicians sitting in parliament passing undead laws and spending undead taxpayer money to go on trips to undead vacation resorts.

It's still bloody cold outside. We've had snow, and then some more snow. We huddle inside except for a few minutes to shovel the snow off the sidewalks, or to go to the base to help transfer supplies around. Sarah's been up to the hospital to help out a fair bit. Something she told me the other day stayed with me. The cholera victims were transferred to the base the day after they were diagnosed. That didn't make sense, since the hospital here in town could better treat them.

I talked to Kim about going with us on our farmstead plan. She's interested, and wants to bring along someone. She's apparently found herself a boyfriend amongst the population here, and wants to bring him too. Jess was instantly all over her for details. I left them to the girl-talk and took Michael and Megan out for a walk around the area. The people I passed said hello, and I have gotten to know them fairly well. Everyone but the children was armed. It's become so commonplace we don't even notice anymore.

Once the weather clears and warms a little we are going to take a vehicle and go look around. I think east is the direction to go. There are plenty of good houses along the road east, and some of them have access to forested areas for hunting. A lot of our meat these days comes from hunting. I have eaten more moose and deer meat recently than ever in my life.

January 12, 2005

It's brutally cold today. We are in Athabasca, Darren and I, and a bush pilot named Reggie. We flew up with a load of supplies, mostly medical stuff that the town here desperately needed. We were called last second to go as escorts, due to a lack of able bodies. Too much going on, with the burning and the large numbers of undead near Cold Lake right now. So Darren and I volunteered, and took our gear and weapons. We are along purely to safeguard Reggie, since he's one of the best small plane pilots we have left. Once we arrived at Athabasca, landing in a field levelled and cleared for small planes, we helped unload medical supplies and then got a ride into town. I went to see Amanda, and met up with her at the hospital here. She was excited to see us, and was even more excited when I gave her the cd Darren and I found. Apparently she hadn't known that *Broken Faith* had even been released before the undead got up. I guess this one was just off the shelf when the shit hit the fan, and she was ecstatic to have a copy. She's doing well, and asked about Sarah and Megan and Jess, and asked me how I was liking married life. She gave me some lollipops for Michael and Megan, but then had to get back to work. She promised she and Adam would be coming to Cold Lake eventually, and we'd be able to get together then and catch up. She hugged us both as we left, and we went outside to find the guy who was supposed to show us where we were sleeping tonight.

The Calgary mission was still ongoing, I discovered. Talking to Reggie on the way to Athabasca, he told us he'd been down there after we

had gone missing. The airport is secured now and a staging area for local missions. More survivors had been found inside the city, and three major “attacks” by the undead repulsed. Apparently they seem to come in waves. No one knows why. One thing they are trying to do is get a safe zone at the University of Calgary. There are important things there, Reggie told us, but he didn’t know what they were. Research maybe? Or chemicals and medicines? I don’t know. The population up at the airport is around 500 now. Living population, that is. The zombies number in the tens of thousands still.

We fly back tomorrow with a passenger. I don’t know who yet, Captain Grant from the force here will tell us in the morning. Probably a doctor or an engineer or something. If one of those comes in they seem to get rapid transit to Cold Lake right away. They are in short demand, after all.

January 18, 2005

After five days of bodyguarding VIP’s back and forth between here and Athabasca, we finally have free time. Today the group of us took a few vehicles out to look for an empty house to take over outside town. My sister was watching the children, so Jess, Kim, Darren, Eric, Mandy (newly checked out on the Browning and certified to drive too) and I drove out east, signing out as we went, and well stocked with food, water, weapons and ammo, fuel, and various other supplies. We have a claim marker to leave at whatever farm we decide to take over, and a list of the ones that belong to someone in town who might want it back one day.

We drove south first, to the road which turned east into the town of Cherry Grove. It had been cleared out a few weeks ago, and we saw no undead along the route. There were a few people out and about, waving to us as we passed from the vehicles they drove. We saw a few horsemen, armed with rifles, patrolling a forested area. We passed through Cherry Grove and saw evidence of the recent clearing of the town. Bulldozers and fire had been used to good effect, but the town was badly damaged and in need of a lot of work. Fortunately people were now living there, taking care of the place. The fences around the town were strong and the checkpoint well manned.

About 10 km past Cherry Grove we came to the rural road we had selected to check out. It wound north towards the forest and the actual lake called Cold Lake, and we had marked several likely plots on it. This whole area was considered 'infested' by the military at the base, so we were on our own. We had to deal with any trouble ourselves, unless we found something that warranted an extraction, like survivors, a fuel truck, or a few tons of food. So we proceeded with extreme caution. Looking around as we began the trek up the road, I was struck with *deja-vu*. Jess had been sitting in the passenger seat, in an almost identical pose, back when we had first approached Prince George back in BC. Our clothes were different, and our weapons and gear too, but still I was struck by it. She caught me looking, and smiled at me.

We ran into the first zombie about ten minutes later. It was a well-preserved male, though its age was hard to tell. It was standing in the road, and hadn't

moved for some time. We could tell this due to the lack of footprints in the snow. It happened to be facing us, and as we slowed down it started towards us, arms moving for probably the first time in weeks. We had decided earlier that we didn't want any of these bastards left near us once we'd established ourselves. So that meant taking them out as they appeared. We had brought a supply of body bags and orange triangle markers for just this purpose. I stopped the truck about 100 feet from the slowly approaching corpse, and got out. I took out the special weapon I had requisitioned, and leaned across the hood, loading carefully. I aimed and pulled the trigger when the walking flesh-eater was about 30 feet away, and the crossbow bolt *twanged* forth like a bullet. My aim was pretty good. It struck the zombie firmly in the forehead, and the special head we had loaded onto the bolt blew up once inside the brain, scrambling everything into a fine goo. Some bright boy in the R&D section at the base had come up with this as a sniper weapon that was quiet and effective, and I loved it. The zombie fell forward, and that was that. We loaded him into a body bag, stuck a triangle onto the bag for visibility, and tossed him into the ditch. Ten minutes after that we approached the first house we wanted to check out.

In practised formation we approached quietly. It looked abandoned, but undead inside wouldn't make a noise unless they spotted us. Jess was on my left, then Kim, and to my right it was Darren and then Eric. Mandy stayed in the lead truck at the wheel in case we needed her there. We spread out a little as we approached, and Jess and Eric were far enough apart to be able to see around the corners of

the house. It was a single floor ranch-style house, probably six bedrooms. The front drive was crowded with vehicles, but as we passed them we saw that all the tires were flat, and the vehicles were in bad shape. We each had silencers on our Brownings, and all of us but Eric and Jess had them drawn. Jess was holding a 12 gauge, and Eric had his C7. The plan was that if any undead came at us from the house we could destroy them quickly with silenced weapons, but if we were attacked from the flanks the heavy firepower would be more useful there. The property had once been cleared all the way back from the house to the tree line, probably about a hundred feet away. Over the summer this had overgrown with tall grass and weeds, and now the snow had buried it all in a huge pile. I was busy scanning the overgrown lawn as we passed the cars in the driveway, and so nearly missed the undead in the car nearest to me. It didn't miss me though, and it lunged at me from the seat it was trapped in. I saw the motion, and whirled around as Kim yelled out a warning. The window was open, and its dead fingers clutched at me as I backpedalled. It made a gargling noise, and I could see its left eye, but there was a cavernous hole where the right one should have been. Male or female, I didn't care and couldn't tell. It stank horribly and made further disgusting noises as it flopped and writhed, trying to get out of the car. The seatbelt was my saviour. Gathering myself, I checked the others. They were all watching the area like professionals, so I stepped a little closer and put a bullet through the undead skull. I got a brief sight of a suit and a nametag on the breast over the heart. I leaned closer, holding my breath. It read *Elder Simmons*. Huh, a Mormon zombie. We resumed our approach, and I had an

odd thought. I had two kills on this trip so far. I wondered how many I'd have before we got back to Cold Lake.

The house turned out to be empty of living or undead people, but we had a few nervous moments when we heard something rustling inside. Feral cats that we had disturbed took off into the brush. They had gotten in the back door, which was knocked off the hinges. Snow and leaves had been blown in across the floor, giving the place a desolate look that was tinged with the smell of cat shit. We decided to look elsewhere.

Further down the road were more homes we had decided to look at. We got back in the vehicles and set out, driving along slowly in case there were fallen trees or unexpected blockages on the road. Something was tickling my brain about the road here, but I couldn't see what it was, since we had passed a turnoff a kilometre back. I looked at Jess and asked her if there was anything funny about the road here. She looked, and told me to stop the truck. I pulled up, and we got out to take a look. The others got out too, and soon all of us were looking at the road ahead of us, unbroken snow marred only by animal tracks and wind-blown leaves. It was Eric that spotted it. He knelt down and pointed out two parallel lines in the snow, about car-tire width apart. They were under the snow of the last fall, and nearly completely hidden now. A car had passed here within a few weeks. We couldn't tell what direction it had gone, or anything else. There had been no activity in this area from the base, as far as I knew.

The possibility of more survivors in the area excited us, and we decided to try to follow the tracks back to whatever house they had come from, or been going to. The trail was very faint, and we had to stop a few times to see the tracks again, and at one point they faded to nothing. We elected to keep going, and sure enough, about another kilometer down the road, we picked the tracks up again. Another three driveways were passed, and then we saw the snow-covered vehicle in the ditch. It was a big SUV, one of the big Toyota Sequoia's, faded green in colour, and half buried in snow and ice. The tracks ended here.

We pulled up well back from it, and scanned the area before we got out. The SUV looked like it had been driven in slowly, and hadn't crashed. It was undamaged as far as we could see. Eric and I approached it slowly, while the others spread out and covered us. He came up on the passenger side, and I approached the drivers side, both of us with Brownings drawn and held ready in front of us. We checked under the SUV as well, and it was clear. Eric reached the rear door and looked in carefully. It was empty, and I moved up to the drivers door and had a look as well. The glove box on his side was open, and there was some debris on the seat, candy bar wrappers and wadded up newsprint, badly faded. A plastic bag was on the floor by the gas pedal. I tried the door, and it was open. The light didn't come on inside, so the battery was probably well and truly expired. I reached in around the steering column and found keys in the ignition. I'd be willing to bet there was no gas at all left in the tank. We searched the vehicle, and all we found was a spent .303 casing in the back seat, some trash, and

some old insurance papers in the glove box. Otherwise, it was totally empty. It was in good shape though, and probably worth salvaging once we were secure in the area.

Eric and I stepped back up from the ditch and looked around. There was no way to tell how many people had been in the SUV, how long it was abandoned for with any certainty, or where any occupants had gone. We were talking to the others about it when a distant shot rang out. There was only one, and from the way it echoed we couldn't tell direction, but it meant there were people around us somewhere. We'd have to go looking for them.

We backed the vehicles up and turned around, heading back to check out some more houses. The second one we checked was the one we decided to keep. A two level house with a three car garage, it had eight bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a generator in a shed. There were trees all around it, though cleared back a good seventy feet, and it had a large garden that we could plant in. Nearby there were fields, that with a little work we could fence in. The house was not empty though. There was a group of three undead in the yard, standing there until we pulled up in their line of sight. Two of them were children, and they had real trouble pushing through the snow towards us. The adult sized walking corpse made better attempts to close with us, but the crossbow took care of it before it got too close. The zombie children were a simple matter once they got close enough. Eric took out one, Jess took out the other. I got three body bags out, and we carefully moved the bodies away from the road.

Inside the house was a mess. Dirty, cold, and trash everywhere. Unwashed dishes were covered in frozen food, overflowing trash containers were stacked near the back door, and filthy blankets were laid about the living room. What a mess. I was glad it was so cold. This place would stink in the warmth. We took an hour and cleared out most of the crap, while Mandy and Jess stood guard outside. There was lots to salvage here, it just needed some cleaning and some work. We traded off each hour, and by the time sundown came, we had cleaned and cleared the living room and kitchen well enough that we could use them. Eric and Darren went to see about the generator, and Kim and Jess took a look around the property. Mandy and I started cooking some food in the kitchen with our portable propane stove, and made hot tea for everyone. We bedded down and set guards, and thought about tomorrow.

January 30, 2005

The last twelve days have been a trip to hell. We are back in Cold Lake and the hospital staff have let me have my computer to update. They say my wounds will heal, and I'll be fine. Jess is another story. She should live, if the gunshot wound doesn't get infected. Whether she'll keep her left hand, they don't know.

I suppose I should start at the beginning. That would be the 19th of January. I was on guard duty outside, walking around in the cold, listening to the wind, and wishing I was still tucked in nice and warm in bed with Jess. I had my rifle over my shoulder, and the Browning was in my right hand, silenced. I had been walking a slow circle around

the house for an hour, and hadn't seen anything but some deer across the field, a family of six of them. A few birds were up and about at this time, right on dawn, and I was expecting that Darren or Jess would be out with me in a few minutes with some hot coffee or something. I walked around to a point where I was out of sight of the house, behind the garage, and was looking up into the trees when a man stood up out of the ditch beside me. Before I could even blink he swung a rifle at me, and caught me in the stomach with the stock end. I doubled over and fell, and he stepped on the Browning, pinning it to the ground with my fingers. I started to struggle, but by this time he had the rifle turned around and was pointing it at my head. I stopped struggling.

"Good idea, you just relax," he said.

I looked at him. He was wearing winter camouflage, all white and brown, and military style boots and a face mask with a full hood. I could see his eyes, but the rest was covered. His rifle was the same as mine, military issue. There were no rank badges or name tags that I could see, and I got a very cold feeling in my gut. A few moments passed, and I saw another man, similarly dressed and armed, approach through the trees. He took my weapons, and the two of them stepped back and motioned for me to stand. Expecting to be shot at any second, I stood up. They walked me into the trees, and motioned me to sit down on a log, and then one of them tied some rope around my wrists while the other covered me with his rifle. A third man, shorter than the first two but also dressed in winter camo and carrying a shotgun, appeared out of the woods, and he and the first one went off a short way and had a whispered

conversation. This left me to look over #2. He was about my height and weight, though I couldn't see his face behind the mask. His gear looked well used, and his boots were just about done. His clothes looked like they had seen some repairs, and he was fairly dirty. Not filthy, but dirty. The gun was in good condition though, and he had extra clips easily at hand, as well as a very big knife, handle down, on his chest. The feeling in my guts was stronger than ever.

They came back, and the first one squatted down near me. He was so close I could smell him, like unwashed body, sweat, and cigarettes. He leaned in closer, and said to me, "How many more are inside the house?"

"Five, all well armed and not likely to take your shit. Who are you guys?" I asked.

"Shut your fuckin' mouth," he snarled. He sounded like a bad action movie villain.

"Seriously, who are you?" I asked. "We'd have been happy to see you if you'd just-."

He smacked me in the face with his fist then, and I stopped talking as I went over backwards. Great, a bunch of fucking thugs had caught me. I got really scared for us then. The last thing we needed here was *people* shooting at other people.

They pulled me up and sat me on the log again, and I contemplated kicking the first guy in the nuts. It would be an easy shot from here. The way he was squatting there made me think he wasn't military, but probably some asshole raider like the bastards that had torn up Westlock after the rise. The happy thought forming in my head right then was that my friends would notice I was gone before long, and

then come looking for me. These three would really be no match for Eric and Kim and Jessica, especially if Jess had a line on them and was pissed off.

“What kind of supplies you got in there?” he asked. I didn’t reply. I just stared at him while blood from my lip ran down my chin.

My silence pissed him off. He drew the knife and waved it at me. Amateur. Honestly, though, I was more worried he’d accidentally stick me with it than intentionally.

“Tell me what you got in there, and no one will get killed, alright?” I spit blood and saliva in the snow, but otherwise just stared at him.

“C’mon man, you don’t want to get hurt, do you? You got food in there? Ammo for the guns? Women?”

I guess something in my eyes must have shown, because he smiled at me, and looked up at his fellows. I showed him then why it was a bad idea to tie my hands in front of me. I kicked him with a pointed boot, square in the testicles. There wasn’t a lot of power behind it, but he curled up and groaned. His buddies looked like stunned deer as I jumped up and ran for the house. I heard a shot behind me, and threw myself down, thanking God they were idiots who didn’t think about giving away their position. I rolled up, and just as the second one appeared between the trees I started running again, trying to weave as much as I could. Again there was a shot from behind, and a tree beside me took the bullet, spraying bark and splintered wood. I ran, and when I got to the garage I dove around the corner yelling loudly. I ran headlong into Darren, and we both went down. Behind him, Eric was coming up,

and Jess was with him. They looked surprised to see me, unarmed and tied. I yelled at them to get down, and they dropped to the ground. #2 came around the corner, and raised his gun, but Eric was far faster. A semi-auto burst caught #2 in the chest, and he fell backwards like he'd been kicked by a horse. We stayed down in case any more came around the corner, and Darren grabbed my wrists and untied me.

"What the hell is going on?" asked Eric. He was scanning the trees as he asked me this.

"Raiders, as far as I can tell," I replied, and I reached back and grabbed #2's boot, pulling him towards me. Once he was close enough I grabbed his rifle, and aimed it back the way I had come from. Nobody showed themselves, so I motioned everyone back and we retreated carefully into the house.

Once inside we left the door open and Darren stayed put just inside to guard it. He went to close it when we came in, but I stopped him. I wanted an exit. Staying put with an unknown number of hostiles outside was pretty much suicide. The radio that had range to reach Cold Lake was outside in the SUV, and we needed to call in right away.

Amid the clamour of questions, and my less than informative responses I told them the details of what happened out in the woods. To their credit, nobody panicked. Honestly we had been through enough with the undead sieges, constant running, and just surviving day to day that we had very little panic left in us. So now it was raiders. We knew they were out there. We'd seen the aftermath of a

raider visit in Westlock, and I suspected it was raiders that had looted Wainright. I know some groups had been found by Army units, and driven farther south of us. The Army SOP for raiders was to treat them as looters. If they fired on the military though, or messed with salvage teams, all bets were off. The Army had tracked down two raider bands so far that had fired on our people, and destroyed them completely.

None of this helped us now. While I was explaining to everyone what had happened, Eric and Jess were checking the view outside from all the windows. Jess had assembled her sniper rifle, and was loading as she checked the view out the master bedroom windows. I started grabbing the gear with Kim, throwing it all together in our packs, and Darren kept watching the door. Five minutes later we were all ready to go, and we had decided to make a try for the vehicles and the radios. We had our short range sets on our clothing, but they were only good for six or seven kilometers. Less in these hills, probably.

I told them I'd be the one running first, to draw fire if there were raiders already outside. Then Darren, Jess, Kim, Mandy and Eric last. I went to the open door, and chanced a quick look outside. It seemed clear. I could see the vehicles in the snow, a clear line back to the road, the tracks in the driveway and the brush on the side of the overgrown lawn. No sign of the raiders, but that could change. *No time like the present*, I thought. I ran for it.

I made it fifteen feet, basically down the steps, onto the stepping stones, and halfway to the cars when

dirt at my feet leapt up and splattered me. Where the shot came from I have no idea, because at that point I threw myself flat behind a water barrel. I heard shooting from the house, it sounded like either Darren or Eric. Probably firing at whoever was shooting at me. I leapt up and ran again, for the nearest SUV. I grabbed the door handle while trying to keep myself as low as possible, while bullets *pinged* off the hood and shattered the windows. I dimly heard Eric yelling at me, and when I looked back he waved his hands to indicate direction of hostiles. One at nine o'clock from him, two at eleven o'clock, and another at twelve o'clock. I stuck my head up for a second to check that, and nearly had it shot off. I crouched back down, and thought about what I should do. The jeep was covering me, but it was taking a pounding, and I didn't like my chances if the shooter at twelve o'clock moved around to the lawn across the driveway. Anyone there would have a clear line on me, and I'm sure whoever it was knew that. Opening the door to get at the radio would be a risk, since I'd then have less armour between my precious body and any incoming rounds. *Aw, to hell with it*, I thought, and wrenched open the door and reached in for the radio.

I grabbed the handset and pulled it towards me, then reached up with my right hand to stick the key in the ignition of the Jeep. Behind me, I could hear Eric yelling something to Darren, and more shooting. Bullets kept *pinging* off the metal around me, but thankfully nothing struck me. I turned the key while trying to keep my head as low as I could, and then reached for the radio power switch. Once it was on, and I saw the dim red light glowing, I

closed the microphone switch and started yelling for help from Cold Lake. I can't remember what I said, exactly, but it got attention fast. Within ten seconds I was talking to a Corporal Chen, who asked me the details. I happily supplied them, and then Darren yelled a warning at me. I looked up to just see the back of a man scrambling across the driveway into cover on the far side. From anywhere there he'd have a clear shot at me if I stayed where I was. Dropping the radio, I swung my rifle around and fired a short three round burst into where I'd seen him go last, and then ran like hell back towards the house. As I was running something feeling like a baseball thrown by Andre the Giant hit the back of my left calf. I crashed to the ground, and when I tried to get up searing pain dropped me again. I looked down and saw that a bullet had gone through my calf at a point just halfway between ankle and knee. I could see blood flowing out the entry and exit points. It didn't even hurt now, but I knew it was trouble. I clamped my hands over the wounds to staunch the blood flowing, and turned to look at the others. Darren was shooting at someone, and I heard the distinct and unmistakable sound of Jess' rifle firing single shots. I heard four shots, and then silence. The shooters had stopped, and with the quiet my leg started to hurt. It hurt *a lot!*

Eric and Darren were there suddenly, and then Jess. Kim walked past us with her pistol out, and I watched her cautiously approach the brush where the raiders had been hiding. Eric was talking to me, but I couldn't focus on him. All my attention seemed to be limited to Kim and the bushes she was approaching. I was dimly aware of Eric and Jess examining my bloody leg, and cutting away my

trouser leg and pushing bandages and antiseptics onto the wounds, but it was Kim I could see clearly. She walked to where I thought the shooters had been, and I saw her looking down at something in the snow. She took a step forward and raised her Browning, and shot once more. Then she walked along to the next shooters, the two I had seen behind a fallen tree, and did the same thing again. She walked across the driveway, and looked at the last one, and she bent down and touched something I couldn't see. Then she stood and came back again, a look of concern on her face.

Somehow, they had stood me up. I didn't remember standing, and my vision was going grey at the edges. Eric shone a light in my eyes, and I heard him say, though hollowly, like he was far away, "He's going into shock." They took me inside, and I heard dim chunks of conversation. "Two were still alive," I heard Kim tell Jessica. "Christ, it's still bleeding," Eric said, though I wasn't sure who he was talking to. "We should be watching for more," said Darren. "Check the vehicles, see if they'll start," Eric again, talking to Kim. "We have to get him to the hospital..." "The radio's fucked. Took a slug right through it," Darren reported to Eric.

I never lost awareness, though it went grey for a little bit, and I had trouble focusing on things. I was cold, and they put blankets on me. When I was able to focus again, my leg was numb, I could feel the morphine creeping through me, and there was a clean white bandage on my lower leg. Jess never

moved from my side, though she had her rifle in hand, and she looked very pissed.

Both vehicles had multiple flat tires, shattered windows, and more bullet holes than I wanted to think about. Eric took over once I was injured, and he said we were leaving, vehicles or no vehicles. Since these two were screwed he told Kim to grab a gas can and lug it along. We'd walk back to the SUV we'd seen abandoned and try that. It was several hours away now, with me limping and partially stoned. Darren grabbed a ski pole from the basement of the house, and I used that as a makeshift crutch.

Eric figured we had about half an hour or less to get clear of the area. We didn't know where the raiders were based out here, but the shooting would surely have brought more of them, and they could even now be coming to look for us. Since both vehicles were too damaged to drive now, we walked. Putting weight on my leg was painful, but numbed by the morphine I could stand it. We walked, me limping and supported by the ski pole and Jess, and Kim, Eric and Darren spread out around us. Mandy looked scared, but held up well. She hadn't had the training the rest of us had, but she put on her brave face and walked along with us. We left easily followed footprints in the snow, so tried to walk in the tire tracks we had left there when we arrived. Not that it mattered, as only a completely blind tracker would miss us.

We walked. My leg started to throb, but I didn't say anything. The bandage got red with blood, slowly staining the clean white cotton. Still we walked. An

hour and a bit later, we paused, and I was grateful to lean against a fallen tree and sit for a minute. Jess checked the bandage, and seeing the blood all through it, replaced it. We sat in the quiet, listening to the wind, alert for sounds of pursuit or approaching undead, until I had a new bandage in place. Watching Jess work I saw sutures in my leg wounds, and wondered when they had done them. I guess I might have blacked out for a few minutes after all.

All too soon we got up again, and staggered onwards. Okay, it was just me staggering, the others were fine. About fifteen minutes later we heard a car coming up the road behind us, a thumping rhythm loud even in the distance. It was really very quiet out here with no ambient noise other than wind and the odd bird singing, so the car was audible from a long way off. We fled off the road into the shrubbery and trees, and hid as best we could. Once I lay down I took out my rifle and checked it hastily, and aimed back up towards the road. The car came into sight while we lurked in ambush, waiting to see if they spotted our tracks. It was a grey and rusted Impala, with snow chains on the tires, and it blew smoke out the back end I a small stinking haze. Four people were visible inside, all apparently men, all apparently armed. They drove past us without stopping, and vanished down the road.

February 1, 2005

The doc let me see Jess today. Her surgery went ok, he said, despite the lack of medicines and antibiotics. Plenty of painkillers though. She was

groggy, but recognised me and Michael when I brought him in. Her hand is a mess, but it looks like she'll keep all of it but the tip of her index finger to the first joint. It won't look pretty, but she'll be able to use it.

I'm getting ahead of myself again, I see. We spent the night of the 19th in the woods avoiding raiders. We gave up on the abandoned SUV after the first car went past us. Others followed. We struck out towards the west, across wooded hills, but with me limping along we made terrible progress. Dusk found us in a small valley with a creek, frozen and obviously being used as a game trail. Eric and Kim went out scouting the area, while Darren and Jess threw up a tent, and I rested my leg. It was starting to hurt again at this point, the numbness wearing off, but I really didn't want to say anything. I checked it, and the bandage was bloody. Not as much as the last time, but apparently my walking around had kept it from stopping the bleeding.

Once a tent was set up, I sat quietly while Jess checked my leg for herself, and changed the bandage again. Eric and Kim returned, telling us the area was clear of both undead and raiders. We opted for no fire. It would be a cold night, but we'd be safer. I volunteered for first watch, but they all politely told me to stuff it. I was to rest. I didn't argue. So it was I bedded down for the night fairly early, with some hot tea in me, cold dinner, and a few extra layers of clothes. Jess took first watch, then came and snuggled right in with me. I was asleep before she was.

In the morning, we got moving as soon as we could. We had a map of the area, but it was a road map. It was not what I would rely on for topography or terrain details. Eric got out his compass and was able to tell us where we were headed, and we had a discussion while we packed about where to go. We decided to head west again, and try for a rural road on the other side of the hills here. From a peak we might be able to reach someone on our small radios, but the chance was slim. Better to go for a road and try to find an abandoned car that we could get working.

We set out, my leg stiff and hurting where the bullet had torn through the muscle. I had to take another shot of morphine after about ten minutes, the pain was just too much. I don't remember a lot about the walk, other than the dull pain in my leg. It kept me from moving fast, and I got tired easily.

Around supper time on the 20th we hit a road. We'd crested a hill, and on the far side was a gravel road winding down out of sight amongst the trees. We followed it for a while, and I have to admit it was far easier going on a nearly level surface. We wound south through the hills, crossing a small creek again (maybe the same one?) and ended up beside a clearing where we made camp. On the morning of the 21st we found a truck, an old Ford, sky blue and rust, maybe new in the late seventies. It was sitting abandoned by the side of the road, and looked like it had been there for a long while. I leaned on the tailgate while the others did a quick survey of the area, and then Eric started checking out the engine, to see if we could start it. Mandy broke out a chocolate bar she must have had for

months, and gave me half of it. Oh, the sweet taste of chocolate, I had forgotten it's allure.

"I was saving it for a special occasion," she told me. Ten minutes later Eric was ready to try the truck. He hotwired it, and it coughed once, but that was it. Repeated attempts failed to start it. Eric muttered that the gas might have gone bad, or the battery was totally dead. Either way, we weren't getting this truck going. I tried to hide the disappointment, since I really wasn't looking forward to walking any more. We were down to the last two morphine shots, and I didn't want them. We might need them for something else, so I refused to take them, even though my leg ached and throbbed. It felt a little hot sometimes too, but when I had Jess look at it, it didn't seem infected.

We rested for half an hour, then moved on. Leaving the sky blue pick-up was something of a downer, and I sank into a mellow feeling for the rest of the day. We saw no one else until nearly three in the afternoon, and then, lucky or not, they saw us too.

February 2, 2005

There's a shortage of painkillers, antibiotics, and pretty much everything else here at the hospital. The antibiotics they are working on making themselves, but the painkillers are a thing of the past, I believe. So they have to ration them out sparingly, and they have a couple of people who come around to help people adapt to the recovery from surgery. There's even a native medicine man who comes in to talk to some of the patients about alternatives to the drugs. This is all great, but I still

have to see Jess in pain, and it isn't good. She says it isn't too bad, but I know she's lying. I remember what my leg felt like. Her injuries are worse.

January 21, 2005 – East of Cold Lake

It was the smell that told us what they were. We saw them on the road ahead, standing and staring at the hills and trees. One was thigh deep in snow in the shadow of a hill, and seven or eight others were standing nearby, a loose group spread out across maybe forty feet. We stopped dead in our tracks when Darren spotted them and waved us to a halt. Bad luck was with us that day though. One of them was facing us, and it's eyes must have been more or less intact, because it groaned and flailed about in sudden animation, and began lurching towards us at a good pace. This naturally attracted the attention of the others, and they began pushing through the snow in an almost comical parade. One fell down, a woman with no arms, just rotted stumps, and it took her a long time to get upright again. We barely noticed. We were already screwing silencers onto our pistols, and finding places to cover each other from as the walking dead approached. A gust of breeze carried the odour to us, and we all gagged a bit. Mandy turned green and looked ready to puke, but managed to hold it in. There were nine of them, and Eric shot the first one in the face at ten yards. It toppled without a sound, and the rest kept coming. Darren shot the next one, his pistol making a soft coughing sound that didn't carry. Jess, Mandy, and I were at the back of the group, watching behind us and around the sides, hoping there were only nine, but ready if there were more. It was left to Kim, Eric and Darren to take out the nine we had met on

the road, and they did it quietly and quickly. It took eleven rounds and three minutes. We inspected the dead once it was over, not touching them, and holding shirts and hands over our faces. They were a mixture of genders and ages, and they were so decayed it was hard to tell what they might have looked like anymore. Now, in final death, they might get some rest. If they were original victims of the rise, they might have been walking about for eight or nine months. After a few moments we walked on.

Later that evening we heard a plane. It sounded like a small engine aircraft, but by this time clouds were hanging low over the hills, and we couldn't see anything. The sound persisted for a few minutes and faded away, and attempts to call the plane on our radios failed. The sound gave us hope, however. A plane meant Cold Lake was looking for us. If the raiders were smart they'd fuck off now and leave us alone before they were descended upon by the wrath of the military, who did not look kindly on "parasites upon the human species", as I had heard them called a time or two.

By the time we settled in to camp we had gone several kilometers, and hadn't seen any houses or other vehicles. We wondered aloud why the group of undead had been there, with no prey nearby, no buildings, and no reason.

January 22, 2005

That morning we woke to the sound of gunfire. It wasn't nearby, and we heard about a dozen shots, all coming from somewhere ahead of us along the

road. Eric and Jess both thought about three kilometers off, and I believed them. We packed up quickly, and got on our way. We kept following the road towards where we had heard the shots, or that general direction, at least. We thought about heading into the brush and avoiding the whole area, but decided to approach and see if we could grab a vehicle or determine what they had been shooting at. The road ran out of the hills here, and started a long gradual downhill slope. The snow was quite deep, but the day was looking like a warm one, despite the heavy clouds and slight breeze.

An hour passed, and we came close to where we estimated the shooting had been going on this morning. We stopped, and concealed ourselves in some brush about 100 yards off the road. We had a short conference, and then Kim and Eric went off to scout. They left a lot of gear behind, taking only the basics, and traveling as light as they could. Eric because he's done this before. He was in Afghanistan after the World Trade Center attacks, and knows how to get around without being seen. Kim was going as backup, and she's just about as sneaky as Eric.

We sat there the rest of the day waiting. We had agreed to radio silence, unless they had an emergency, and Eric had warned us it could take hours to get where they were going and back again. So we sat and kept a lookout and stayed quiet. We had a quiet, cold lunch, and stayed warm by huddling together. We had to stay out of the sunlight as much as possible, but there was almost none to speak of, so it was easy. During the afternoon, as I was getting worried about them, a

family of deer walked right past us. They sniffed the air, but didn't appear too disturbed by our presence. I guess the lack of hunting has made them less skittish of people. The largest one looked at us, and snorted loudly, then walked on. We watched them go quietly, and kept our post. Darren asked me if I thought the animals were being preyed on by the undead as well, and I couldn't remember if anything had been said about it in survival briefings. I don't remember anything about the undead eating animals. They seem to be a specifically human predator. We talked about this for a few hours, the others joining in with opinions and speculation. Around supper time we gave it up, having talked it into the ground. Kim and Eric still were not back.

February 4, 2005

I sat with Jess all yesterday, and was too tired to write anything more about what happened. Sarah came up to say hello and visit for a bit, and Darren too. The doctors say Jess is looking better. I have to agree. For a while I was very scared for her. If she hadn't come through her surgery...

Mandy took Michael out for a trip to the playground today, and he needed the sunshine and distraction of other kids to play with. Doctor Lange took me aside in the afternoon and told me she's going to be in here for another few days, but after that they don't have the resources to keep her in the hospital. So it looks like I get to take her home and look after her there until she's healed. It may be easier that way, since we'll be in a familiar place with people we know and love nearby. God knows I want to get her home.

January 23, 2005 – before dawn

Kim and Eric made it back to us intact in the darkness before the sun rose. I was on watch, and heard a rustling on the trail that passed nearby. The clouds were still thick overhead, so there was no moon to see by, and honestly I couldn't have said what phase it was in right then if money was involved. I raised my pistol up, checked the silencer, and nudged Darren with my boot. He came awake, and I whispered to him that I had heard noises down the trail. He sat up and woke Jess and Mandy as I turned back to the trail. Watching in silence, the tension building over the seconds, was turmoil. Was it a bear? Some sheep? Or was it a couple of walking dead out hunting for flesh and a midnight stroll? Turned out it was none of the above. I dimly made out a human silhouette against the cloudy sky, and was raising the gun, just in case, when I heard Eric whispering, "Don't shoot me, you fucker!"

Kim and Eric slid down into our shelter beneath the trees, and let out sighs of relief. We let them get some food and water in them, and then they told us what they had seen.

"About six kilometers west by southwest," Eric told us, "the raiders have a camp. Kim and I parked our butts on a hillside about a kilometre away, and watched them for several hours. The camp is centered on a house, but they have too many people to all be inside. There are tents, a camper trailer, trucks, motorcycles, and a police van."

Eric sketched us a quick map of the site, and went on. "We counted forty-seven people. There were only four women that I could make out, unless there

are more inside the tents or house. We spotted three sentries, and those were so badly deployed that I could have snuck up on two of 'em without the third knowing anything was wrong."

I asked if they looked like they were settling in, and Eric replied, "Settling in? Hell no, they've settled in. They have fire pits with benches around them, and looks like they have latrines over behind the house. Also, I know it's the group that ambushed us. I spotted that car that passed us. These are definitely the same assholes."

We talked about it, and decided we'd avoid them. Sneaking around them sounded like the best idea, and once we were back to civilised areas we could have the Cold Lake military pay them a visit to see if they could be convinced of the error of their ways. The plane we had heard the other day was almost certainly one of ours, looking for us. Hopefully we would see it again and get in touch. This was a big area, though, and I doubt Cold Lake had much in the way of resources to spare looking for us.

We waited until an hour after sunrise, so that Kim and Eric could have some rest, some food, and a little water. Our food situation is getting bad. We have plenty of water though, from streams that criss-cross the area. Eric says he can feed us easily, even at this time of year, but we might not like our diet for a few days.

We set out, me limping along and wishing I dared use the last of the morphine. Kim and Eric both looked tired, but they seemed alert. After a few hours we rested again, all the while winding closer to the camp. Our plan was to pass through the

valley a few kilometers behind the house, close enough to spit on them, but out of sight. We would follow that route down to the next road, and see if we could find a vehicle there.

Several boring hours passed, and we managed to make it to the valley without detection. This close to the camp I doubt they expected any trouble. This was probably where they hunted deer and moose to feed everyone. I wondered where they were getting vegetables from. Probably they were raiding houses in the area for canned goods. I asked Eric and he said they didn't have a greenhouse set up. Anyways, we ended up making camp in the valley. We all huddled under some blankets as light snow fell on us. Cold supper. My leg ached terribly. We slept as well as we could

January 24

We ran into a trio of hunters only an hour after setting out. We were walking through some muskeg and trying to avoid getting our feet wet, and very glad there were no mosquitoes this time of year, when Eric suddenly waved us all down. We all crouched low and fell silent, listening. Eric motioned to me after a few minutes that he was going to go have a look for whatever he had heard, and the rest of us should take cover. Eric vanished into the woods, and we all sought out cover as quietly as we could. I ended up behind a fallen tree, under some branches that I wished had leaves on them. I checked and couldn't see any of the others, not even Mandy, who had the least experience of all of us. Good for her.

Shots rang out a few minutes later. First it was two rifle shots, sounding like hunting rifles, and then a short burst of a C7, followed by another one. Someone screamed. Another rifle shot followed a few moments later, and I had a good fix on direction. They sounded close. I started to belly-crawl forward, to see if I could help out Eric, and heard Darren moving, and possibly Kim as well. I heard running feet, someone crashing through the forest towards us, and I stopped and brought up my rifle, aiming in the direction I thought the runner was coming from. Sure enough, there he came, making no effort to be quiet, and obviously not seeing us at all. He had a ball cap on his head, a hunting rifle in his hands, and was wearing a camo jacket and black jeans. I felt no sympathy at all for this asshole, and lined up and shot at the same time that Darren and Jess did. Bullets from three directions tore him up, and he looked quite surprised as he toppled face first in the dirt. Seconds later Eric showed up, and looked down at the body as he stopped. He grinned at me as I stood up. The man at his feet gurgled a last breath, and Eric looked down at him, and said, "You're going to be okay. I know first aid. Don't try to move, now." And then he burst out laughing. It turned out to be infectious. I started chuckling a few seconds later, then the others were all laughing. Within moments I had tears streaming down my face, and we were all gasping for breath.

Minutes later, when we had all calmed down somewhat, and could see again, Eric looked at us and wiped his eyes. "God, I needed a good laugh," he said. He took a few steps towards us, and kept talking. "The other two are back that way," he

gestured over his shoulder, “and they won’t be needing any first aid either.” He started chuckling again, and I would have joined him, except that behind Eric the raider we had shot twitched, pushed himself up on his arms, and said, “Uuuuuuuuuugh.”

I’d never seen one rise before. Always, they’d either been dead bodies or already moving zombies. It made the hair on my neck all stand up, and it looked right at me. Where the living man had something in his eyes, the animated corpse that was left had nothing. It stood up, and I shouted something, some warning, to Eric, and reached for my gun. Fortunately, the newly risen corpse had forgotten the gun it had been carrying when alive. Its instinct to feed kicked in instantly, though. It lunged at Eric, moving far quicker than any other undead I had seen since the early days of the rise. He wasn’t fast enough to shoot it, so dropped his rifle and pulled a knife. What followed was brutal. Eric took the zombie apart. He cut its tendons, severed muscles, and blinded it in about as long as it took me to draw three breaths. He followed up this butchery with a smashing blow to the things temple with his knife, driving the blade into the brain. It had grabbed him once during the fight, and he had destroyed it before it got another hand on him. He jumped back, now covered in the things blood, and swore loudly and long. He was very creative, too. I’d never heard some of the things he said.

We took the rifles, some water bottles, and some other supplies from the bodies of the raiders. The other two didn’t rise. After that, we moved on, my leg aching more and more as time passed.

January 26

My memory of the next few days is fragmented. I know that I developed a fever and infection in my leg some time on the 24th, and by the evening I was sweating, running a high temperature, and lethargic. Without antibiotics I had to fight the infection as well as I could, so I really don't remember anything of those few days. I just remember waking up in the dark, Jess curled next to me in the tent, and being very cold. I could hear wind blowing the tent, and wondered where I was. My leg hurt and burned, and I had a terrible urge to scratch it, but I could barely move. I fell asleep after that again, and woke up another time in daylight. Still in the tent, but Mandy was there instead of Jess. She looked relieved, and told me I was going to be fine. I had the strangest feeling of dislocation, though. She called Jess, and moments later she was there, and I managed to have a conversation with her, though I can't recall it now.

They knocked me out, I was told, with the last of the morphine and some painkillers that we had brought along. When I came around, mid-morning on the 26th, there was a stillness in the air that told me the weather was warmer. I felt tired, but not terrible, and my leg was only a throb as opposed to the excruciating agony it had been. I was lying alone on my back inside my sleeping bag, in the tent, and I stank. I hadn't changed clothes in several days, and I had sweated out a fever. It was daytime, and I found a fresh bottle of cold water next to me. I drank most of it down, and tried to sit up. I was weak, and felt like I had lost about ten pounds. I threw the sleeping bag open, and had a look at my leg. My calf was heavily bandaged and stung when

I touched it, but it didn't end in a stump. They fortunately hadn't amputated my foot and lower leg in my sleep. I lay back down, and closed my eyes for a few moments. I was very relieved to have my leg still attached to me. I sat up again and looked around, finding my bag, clothes, and weapons. I reached for my Browning first, checked it, and then put it down again. I was about to start getting out of my foul clothing when the tent flap opened, and Darren looked in. He grinned at me, said, "Man, am I ever glad you're okay!" and vanished again. Seconds later Jess was there, coming into the tent to hug me and check up on my leg. She helped me get changed, and even managed to get me a towel and some water so I could have a quick wash.

She told me our situation was sort of good, sort of bad. We'd moved only a few kilometers from where we ran into the hunter trio of raiders several days ago. A search plane had gone over yesterday, and Eric had managed to contact them. There was apparently a unit of the PPCLI on its way to help us, expected within a day or so. The raiders had moved camp, but were still in the area, and we were out of food. Eric had been gathering "nature's bounty" for us for the last few days, but it consisted of weeds, roots, and a rabbit. Slim pickings. Jess told me that the plane had also seen the raiders, and they had fired at it. The pilot hadn't been hurt, but the plane had taken a few hits. We'd been told to sit tight and wait for rescue. They knew our position, so Eric and Kim and Jess and Darren and Mandy had spent the last few days fortifying us. I saw what that meant when I got outside and breathed fresh air. The tent was surrounded by a small log wall on three sides, and covered with camouflage in the form of

branches and leaves. There was a fire pit, and the clearing we were in also had many other small log barricades and shelters. There was lots of cover available if we needed it.

February 6, 2005

We moved Jess home so she can begin her recovery here in some better comfort than the hospital could provide. Thank God the power is still working, we have heat, and that there is enough food coming in. Everyone in town is getting quite sick of canned goods, though we have been supplementing with some cattle, what the greenhouses can produce, and fish. Still, next winter is going to be quite bad if we can't get this community farming extensively. We have more news from farther south. Apparently the military forces of the USA made a glorious attempt to secure various points on the west coast of California, but overwhelming undead presence drove them back, and they were forced to abandon the landing zones with high casualties. Add to that the news of a zombie outbreak in Hawaii, and things look pretty bad for the Americans. President Rumsfeld is still "dedicated to reclaiming the continental US, and securing the American way of life again." Whatever. Here in Canada, we have a Prime Minister again. News seeped in yesterday that Belinda Stromich, some billionaire industrialist before all this, is our new PM, and is based in some military facility in Ontario. I don't remember her, if she was even in government before this all started. Like it matters to us out here. She might as well be on the moon.

January 28

After a solid day of waiting, they found us. Our first indication was when Kim came back to camp and told us there was a group of about fifteen raiders half a kilometre away and moving in our general direction. She spotted them when she was out scouting, and came back to warn us. She thought she might have been spotted, but wasn't pursued as far as she could tell. Immediately Eric began directing defences and assigning us to positions. I was still weak, though a lot better, and my leg wasn't burning anymore. I found myself, along with Mandy, with a C7, my Browning, and a bottle with gas and a rag in it, behind two fallen trees. Mandy had a shotgun and a Browning as well. Darren and Eric went west, to set up at a position nearby, Kim went east, and Jess took her sniper rifle and went up behind us into the brush along a hillside. I couldn't see her at all, and I guess that was the idea. She stopped on her way out to kiss me. Eric told us radio silence was essential, we were trying to avoid contact if at all possible, and only to shoot if they discovered us. We were pretty well hidden, though the campsite was very evident if anyone happened to stumble into it.

And so we waited. I had a chance to quietly reassure Mandy that we should be alright. We had heard from Captain Tepper earlier this morning, indicating he and his unit were about ten kilometers from us to the west, and should be at our position soon. Another unit had encountered the main group of raiders, and after a short firefight had captured most of them. The raiders had caved like a house of cards once real soldiers had surrounded them.

Fifteen minutes later we heard them coming through the trees, making enough noise to (forgive the pun) wake the dead. By our standards, anyway. They were walking in a line, about fifty meters away when I spotted them, coming towards us at about a thirty degree angle. They were a mixture of older and younger men, all armed with rifles or shotguns., most in the civilian version of winter camouflage. I spotted smoke from a few cigarettes (what a precious commodity *that* must have been!) and heard quiet talking as they got closer. A young man on one end spotted our campsite suddenly, and said, “Hey, over here,” to his companions. They all turned and started walking into the clearing, looking around at all our tracks and the stumps we’d used as seats, and the tent, which we’d left as a distraction.

Eric called out, “This is Corporal Eric Craig of the Canadian Armed Forces! You are surrounded! Drop your weapons and surrender immediately!”

They scattered, dove for cover, or opened fire. Several of them nearly shot each other. They were a totally undisciplined bunch of idiots, but they had guns and were dangerous. Mandy and I ducked as they shot the first volley towards where they suspected Eric was, and then we rose up and opened fire ourselves. I leaned over the tree trunk with my C7, and picked a target. Three rounds into his chest and he keeled over, blood flecking the snow and branches. I heard distant sniper shots, and two men dropped in four seconds, both with bullets through the skull. Thank you Jess! Darren and Eric opened up from cover as well, and Kim from about twenty meters to my right. Four more of them went down. The survivors of the initial few seconds were the

ones who took cover initially, or the ones who ran as soon as Eric started yelling. Two of the ones in cover shot at Mandy and I, and we were forced to duck and hope none of them could shoot through the trees we were hiding behind. I heard screams, yelling, curses, and rifle shots. After a second I rolled over to my left a few feet, got up on my knees, and shot a few rounds at the trio I could see behind some brush at the far side of the camp. There was a shriek, so I probably hit one of them. Mandy fired the shotgun at them too, and dove back into cover as soon as she had. I waved at her to move over a few feet now, and I rolled again, back towards her. I heard Jess' rifle again, and somewhere I couldn't see something made a *splat* sound, followed by a falling body. God, she's a great shot!

After that, a few more shots were fired at us, and we returned fire. I had to stay down for almost half a minute, and roll away from my position, because the raiders in the brush across from me had zeroed in and were taking turns shooting at me. Darren and Kim put a stop to that, Kim by taking an insane risk and sneaking along behind another fallen tree that was parallel to them, and then standing up and shooting at them on full auto, and then Darren shot at them when they dove out of cover. Ten seconds later it was all over. The last two raiders surrendered, threw away their guns and held up their hands. Nine of their companions were dead or dying around them, and four had fled. When we came out of the brush the two survivors looked terrified. Darren told me that Eric had gone after the ones who fled, and while Mandy and I tied their hands together behind their backs, Kim and Darren

stood guard. We then checked out the wounded. Three were dying, five already dead, and one was only slightly hurt where a bullet had grazed his skull. He would be fine, but would wake up with a nasty headache. Of the five dead, three were headshots. We weren't worried about them rising. I took out my Browning and put the silencer on it, and while the captives watched in terrified silence, I shot the two others in the heads, just to make sure. The three dying captives we made comfortable, and as they each passed on we planned to shoot them in the skulls as well.

We heard shooting from back the other direction just then. Sounded like a shotgun, then a few seconds later a Browning. Several more shots. Then silence. Then after a moment I heard Jess rifle fire once, and then my radio was buzzing. I heard Jess' voice over the speaker, "Ahh, shit! I'm shot. Fuck!"

I was off running before I knew it. My leg let me know it wasn't going to put up with this for long, but adrenalin is a wonderful thing. I made it up the hill towards the sounds of the shots, and almost to where Jess was before my leg failed. Darren was there almost right away, picking me up, and I was calling for my wife, not caring if the raiders were still there, or if anything else heard us. I spotted her through the trees, and another figure. Both lying down. Jess was clutching at her side, blood running through her hands, and she was gasping, her legs kicking at the snow and leaves. The other figure was crawling away from her, towards us, and getting closer to a rifle that lay on the ground. He was bleeding from a shoulder wound and a shot almost exactly like mine, through his calf. I shot

him in the back of the skull as we passed, and then I was with Jessica. She clutched her left hand to her side, but her right hand was a mess. She had taken a bullet to her hand as well, and one finger looked nearly severed, I could see bones through the skin, and it was bleeding terribly.

"What happened?" I asked. I started checking her while Darren broke out what first aid supplies we had.

"He was over there," she pointed with her chin, "when I came down the path here to our camp." She was bleeding badly, and when I cut and tore away the cloth over her wound I saw two bullet holes in her side. Blood was pouring out, and Darren and I got a pressure bandage onto her as fast as we could. We bandaged her hand up in what cotton we had, taped it solid, and then she fainted, mercifully, and we got on the radio. I called Eric, but he didn't answer. Kim did, and I told her what had happened. She packed up what medical supplies we had left at camp, and she and Mandy marched the prisoners up the hill to us. We used what we had, Jess stayed unconscious, and I nearly died of fright myself.

Looking back on it now, I was out of my head. I had no idea if she'd die. I was thinking, can I shoot her if I have to? I didn't want her to rise up, she didn't want it to happen, and we had talked about it. She wasn't bitten, but I had seen people rise who weren't. I had seen people who should have risen stay down. It made no sense. I couldn't see the pattern. All I knew at the time was I was terrified of losing my wife, terrified of what I'd tell her son, and how as he got older he'd realise that it must have been me who'd had to shoot her in the head to prevent her from reanimating. She was very pale,

and I sat for a long time holding her hand. An hour later Eric showed up. He came up, told us he'd followed the other four and taken them down. He was hurt too, mostly cuts and bruises, but he went straight to Jess and talked while he checked her. She was in shock, he said, but we'd done the right things for her so far. He checked her bandages, and went off to talk to Kim and Darren. I overheard. He didn't think she'd live. He was sure she'd die here of her wounds unless we could get her to medical aid fast. I couldn't see it happening, but then I had forgotten about the Army unit that was searching for us.

About ten minutes after noon we heard from them on the radio. Captain Tepper called us, and asked our condition and whereabouts. Eric told him, and they were with us in about another fifteen minutes. Seventeen men and women arrived on foot with full military gear and weapons. They had a medic with them who was very young, but seemed to know what she was doing. They got Jess onto a stretcher, and the Captain called for medical evacuation from Cold Lake. Twenty minutes after that a helicopter arrived at the clearing, which had been expanded through the careful use of det cord and wood axes. Five minutes later, Jess, Eric and I were flying back towards Cold Lake. The chopper was a new one. It was a STARS helicopter from Edmonton, the pilot told us, salvaged a few weeks ago, and being used quite a lot recently. Darren, Many and Kim stayed with the unit, and were taken out on foot along with the three surviving raider prisoners. We caught up with them later.

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Eric's wounds were mostly cuts and scrapes. He was fine within a few days. My own leg wound will leave me with a hell of a scar, some missing tissue in my calf, and an ache when I get older. Jess was shot three times. Twice in nearly the same place on her side, both bullets passing cleanly through her, missing her spleen, liver, and lungs, but one shattered a rib, the other clipped her upper intestines. Her hand they saved. Her finger is reattached, though she'll never be as good a shot again as she was. She will spend weeks recovering.

The three captured raiders, as well as the ones caught by the other unit nearby, were sentenced to ten years of hard labour, military style, working around town under armed supervision. Once spring hits they'll be moved to farms to grow food to feed the town. They are not being used as zombie bait, as some people suggested.

Now we have to decide what to do. Reports coming in suggest we might see the end of this... plague, curse, whatever it is, sometime soon. More and more of the undead spotted have been acting the way "Stan" did, losing motor functions and the ability to attack. More of them are just toppling over, falling down dead, finally dead. Does this mean it is nearly over? The long nightmare finally finished and we get to wake up? I doubt it. The dead are walking, and I suspect the damned things will be for years to come. If some few of them point the way, showing us how the rest will eventually go, good. It gives us something to hope for.

Meanwhile, survivors are still out there. We hear about a new town or group every few weeks, and

hear news from Europe and Asia when it can reach us. The human race is not dead, not consumed by the walking corpses. We've taken a hard blow, but we're not done. The undead outnumber us still, but we'll keep on going, finding a way to survive.

I have decided to finish this journal now. It helped me a lot during the long months we struggled to survive. It was something to focus on, to look forward to at the end of a day, to write and record what we had done, what we had lived through. But now I think I need to focus on my family. I need to be here for Jess and Michael, Sarah, Darren and Mandy, Kim, Eric, and all the others. I need to focus on them and all the other living. I might get back to this one day, or start another journal if events warrant. God help us all, I hope that events *never* warrant this kind of journal again. Now I have to go. I need to make some lunch.

The End

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