

First Blood

by Forsaken

'Time to get our feet wet,' said Tracey 'Macho' McGuire, leader of 4saken's Sarsfield crew.

Their first run in Sars would use all the resources available to them. Their apache, still in its Badlands configuration, a 4.0 phoenix fitted with only an HMG, and all 5 of the crew the gang had in the town, himself included.

The apache, 'Badpache' as they called it, would do most of the work. The phoenix would serve to sew confusion and work the flanks. Simple enough.

In theory anyway.

Five enemies. The terrain seemed easy enough to work with. But somehow the plan never worked out. Just too many of them, too much firepower hitting again and again. Soon enough the pirates had the two vehicles split up, each fighting for their lives.

The apache was a mess. The armor was hardy enough to take another machine gun hit, let alone survive the full onslaught of a fresh antagonist. To make things worse, one of the pirates who had been playing dead to some degree was now intending to use his remaining machine gun to turn the tide of battle.

Meanwhile the phoenix was no better. It had been in a dogfight with two enemy pheonixes and a pickup to boot. Albert Sterns, having only recently qualified for his heavy gunner spec, was on the HMG, and Paula Warren, a new recruit, was behind the wheel.

One of the pirates was down but at the price of the nix's right side armor. And aside from the front, there wasn't much armor left to speak of elsewhere, for that matter. It was all Paula could do to see through the engine smoke and still drive.

'Just keep driving,' said Albert.

'We're dead if we keep driving!' she shouted over the sounds of the engine grinding and unrelenting gunfire behind them. Paula was new but she had already been through hell, having been the first in the gang to traverse the 1100+ miles from Badlands and report back. 'Just let me turn on him! We can take him, front's still in good shape.'

'No, the pickup's too close. He'll tear us to shreds even if we can fight the other one.' It was a hard thing for Albert to admit. His trigger finger was really itching to finish this. And it would only be a matter of time before the pirates' phoenix caught up. If they could just make it a little farther. Maybe he would slide out, or maybe he was out of ammo, or maybe the Badpache could finish up with it's combat and come to the rescue.

Up until now Albert was always the front gunner on the 'pache. It was so safe and inviting, even in the hell of the badlands, compared to this flimsy deathtrap, he thought to himself. All he could do was hope for the best and try to keep himself calm.

McGuire was calling through the radio, his voice barely recognizable over the ever-present distortion of the auroras.

'in real trouble here... you're on your own... get yourselves out of there...'

Just then a good burst flew into them, the bullets slamming into various things on the inside of the cabin. The engine changed pitch again, lower still. The enemy car had just crested a hill, finally getting a clean shot on them. There was nowhere to hide now.

'I'm hit!' called Paula. Albert looked back to her side of the car. Blood was spattered across the inside of the windshield and she had a frightened look on her face. He checked his gun. It hadn't been damaged.

Albert didn't even say anything. He just nodded to her, once, purposefully.

Paula jammed the wheel hard, pulling the car into what was almost a 60mph T-stop. The enemy tried to follow suit but was a hair too late and too fast. Albert jammed the gun as far over as it would go, waiting for the shot. He could see the expression on the other driver's face. Their side was open to them. They had been made.

Paula guided the front of the car like pointing a finger, and Albert laid down on the trigger, tracking the enemy car with its bullets. The phoenix armor was no match for sustained fire from an HMG and it was not long before he could see shrapnel flying around inside their car.

They finally got their fresh rear armor to protect them and Albert risked a glance back towards the pickup. They would have a few seconds more time, it looked like.

Albert steeled his jaw and kept laying into them. 'Just a little more, we almost have them!'

Just then his gun went dry. Reflexively he reached back for the clip from his custom made rig. His hand only met jagged metal.

'Crap, we're out! That's it. Finished. Get us the hell out of here!'

Paula had the perfect kill lined up. They were almost close enough to ram. She cursed then pulled the wheel hard. The enemy Flame riddled them with more bullets from its rear gun, but they somehow managed to get some intervening terrain in the way to save them.

'Circle all the way around this crater,' he said. 'It's the only chance we got.'

'This engine doesn't have much left in it,' she said grimly.

Albert checked up on the other crew. They were in a world of troubles of their own. Albert wished them luck. It was really all he could do.

Paula had done a good bit of clever avoiding to try to minimize the effect of the pickup but the Flame, rather than chase them around the hill, had turned to try to cut them off.

Albert had heard tales of what a car rifle round could do to an exposed crewman but he had never witnessed it firsthand. Just as he heard the impossibly loud Crack! of the gun's report Paula's head flew apart and blood splattered everywhere.

Albert blinked a few times. Paula's body slumped forward and jammed the steering wheel to one side, sending the car into a lazy death-spiral, engine crippled, weaponless, and with almost no armor left and enemies all about.

Albert sat back and sighed. Then, having really nothing better to do, he climbed over and tried to take over driving. He did his best not to look out the windows. Maybe if he covered his eyes, he thought, they would go away.

Some time later that week, or so it seemed, he was behind the wheel. He had been talking with McGuire on the handheld, perhaps. They had managed to outsmart the Antag, and having a rear gun didn't hurt either. So there was still some hope there.

Albert was driving, more or less. Scenery was still moving by. He wasn't alone. There was a pickup and another phoenix along for the ride as well. He would see if he could lose them on this bad spot on the side of the path. It looked nasty. A car could get caught in there and not drive out, he thought to himself. Wonder if I can make it? Let's see if they can follow me.

A machine gun burst to the inside of his vehicle woke up from his daze. It missed him, but ripped into the engine. On the bright side, he actually had ran along the edge of the drop-off, and one of the enemies had already slid down. Now for the other. Just then McGuire came through on the radio.

`status?`

Albert shook himself alert and answered, `not good, boss.. still alive... car trashed... one more chasing...` He couldn't figure out if he had already told McGuire about Paula's death. The enemy Flame was starting to work its way out of the pit. Albert started looking for a good place to bail out and take up a position with his rifle, like `Macho` McGuire had had to do on the last scout. Albert made it a point to always carry four clips. McGuire had used up two.

The engine lurched on, a cylinder or two firing just enough to keep it rolling. He wasn't sure it would make it to a safe spot for him to bail in time. Still, for the moment at least, it was going faster than he could run, so he held with it a little longer.

The Flame was out. Albert held his breath. There would be no chance of outrunning it. It pulled forwards toward him, then slowed and turned back. They had had enough as well. Their crew could not be feeling good either. He had seen the blood on their windows. They had taken their parting shots, but they didn't have any fight left in them.

Albert called back, `evaded... you guys still there?.. trying to escape...`

`yeah, we're making our way out... try to save the car... [garbled] all we have... can't fight if get jumped again... see you at gates...`

`see you at gates` he called into the mic.

There was a bit of downhill and the car still had its momentum. It looked like he could get far enough away that he could duck somewhere and wait until it was safe to try to carry on.

At least until they got to the Sarsfield gates. Pirates were known to lay in wait there for returning gangs such as his.

But, in the meantime, he was alive.

`You did good, kid,` he said, slapping Paula's corpse on the shoulder. `Real good.`

She was still warm to the touch.

The Old, the Bold and the Dead

By Goat Starer

The two Apaches climbed through the rugged hills between Somerset and Elmsfield, picking their way between the boulders and scrubby vegetation. Perched high in the observation seat of Recent Convert, Dale Zimmerman scanned the area ahead, his keen eyes picking out anything moving in the arid landscape. A large lizard momentarily drew his attention as it scuttled away from the oncoming Apache and into the shade of the brush by the track.

As he turned his attention back to the road he saw the telltale dust cloud of a group of vehicles approaching from the north west. Three taps on the roof and a hand signal to Space Monster and the two vehicles came to an abrupt stop. He raised his binoculars, bringing the cars into sharp relief, and called across to Arnold Ramos in the other vehicle.

'Boss, I'm sorry but they've seen us'

'What in God's name were you doing up there?'

'I said was sorry.' He refocused on the vehicles now turning towards them and accelerating. 'It's not too bad - only four of them, and it looks like Tusk!'

For weeks now Special Circumstances had been hunting Tusk down, reducing them to a rabble of injured vets and raw recruits. It started as a simple moneymaking exercise, collecting the bounties that MADHAT had placed on every Tusk head. Since the death of Kurtis Nation it had become personal.

The opportunity to deal another blow to his arch rivals and the size of the opposition placated Ramos somewhat.

'How long do we have?'

'About thirty seconds, they are a long way off.. Christ!' exclaimed Dale.. 'that's a mean looking bunch -- we have two rocket cars a Phoenix and I think that must be one of those new Marleys.'

'Let's get up the hill' called Ramos, indicating a steep incline to the right.

Salvador Hornbeck gunned the engine and threw the vehicle into a sharp turn. As Space Monster began to power up the slope Ramos looked round for Recent Convert. It was hardly moving - his best driver had stalled and was desperately trying to restart the engine. Monster continued to climb, the 4L struggling against the gradient. Behind it Convert had sprung back to life and was beginning the ascent with a Tusk pickup and a chevalier vectoring in at speed.

Ramos' headset crackled: 'we ain't gonna make the top!' came the voice of Edward Brown the legendary Somerset deathracer, locking target on the pickup and going hard left.

With the slower of his two vehicles squarely in the sights of the Tusk rocket launchers, Arnold could see this was going south fast. Space Monster began to swing round to join the stricken Apache but it was all taking too long.

If time was passing too slowly in Monster, the opposite was true in Convert. Donald Huggins and David Washington opened up heavy machine gun fire on the lead pickup, scoring hits and causing it to slew sharply to the right. The turn opened up a line of sight to the speeding chevalier and the crew watched in horror as the first

rockets streaked into the side of their vehicle. The Tusk phoenix was opening up on Convert with a car rifle and the armour of the exposed side was already buckling.

Gunning Convert down the hill towards the pickup, Edward somehow prevented the blast from tossing the Apache onto its side. Still firing on the pickup he watched as armour panels were ripped from its side and bullets began to penetrate into the cabin. The pickup was once more spun by the impact, bringing both launchers to bear on Edwards' vehicle. Salvos of rockets screamed into both sides of the Apache simultaneously. It was only a matter of time before the weight of fire brought the larger vehicle down.

But Monster had made the turn and had drawn bead on the damaged pickup. A round of car cannon fire into the tattered side of the vehicle left the cabin destroyed, a limp arm dangling from the driver's window.

Arnold was desperately shouting instructions to the other vehicle: 'Keep going straight! Keep that chevalier behind you!'

'They are all over you' came the reply: 'I have to turn. You are going to need us'

'Keep going straight!' Arnold repeated. 'If you can draw off the chevalier we can buy some time.'

By now the Marley and the Phoenix were taking a heavy toll on Monster's side panels. Arnold could see he had only moments to deal with the two smaller irritants before their combined fire broke into the cabin. Salvador swung the Apache into a handbrake turn as rockets slammed into the rear of the retreating Convert.

Drawing bead on the Phoenix the car cannon and gatling guns of Monster fired simultaneously. The front of the car was almost obliterated. Arnold watched in satisfaction as the car rifle barrel cartwheeled into the air. 'One more shot for good measure and then we take the Marley', he thought.

Then the inevitable. The guns of the Marley were finally striking with accuracy and Arnold felt a heavy blow to his side. He heard ribs crack as he was thrown back, stunned in his gunnery position. As he lay gasping for air he saw Salvador reach over and take the gatling gun controls, sustaining fire on the Phoenix.

The wounded Apache turned sluggishly. Driving, manipulating the gatling and trying to see if Ramos was breathing was distracting Salvador and his first few shots on the Marley were wild. Beside him at the car cannon William Audette prepared to fire his last round. A hit! But not enough to stop the small cars dogged pursuit.

Checking briefly on Arnold's condition, William grabbed for the spare Cannon rounds. Pulling the ammo box forwards he saw the row of neat puncture marks where bullets had slammed into the crate. It was useless. Any of these rounds could be defective and a breach explosion on the car cannon would certainly finish Monster once and for all. He could see the nippy Marley making a fast turn to return to the damaged side of the Apache and watched as gatling rounds from Salvador's gun spattered across its armoured windshield. With the car cannon out of action they were as good as dead.

The Marley was turning again. Running. 'They dont know!' Thought William, 'they are expecting this car cannon to open up at any moment.'

Ahead Convert had finally put some space and a small hill between itself and the chasing chevalier. Realising that its comrades were panicked, the chevalier turned back towards the main fight. It accelerated straight at the Apache firing wild rocket salvos. In Monster Salvador was struggling to keep the Apache head on with the onrushing Tusk vehicle. One side hit and the cabin would surely be breached.

Without Ramos to countermand him Edward was swinging his heavily damaged Apache back towards Monster. With only the gatling firing intermittently the other vehicle stood no chance against the rockets of the Chevalier. He watched in horror as the first of them struck the front of the vehicle containing his friends and the man who had given him his first break on the racing circuits.

At the guns, Donald and David concentrated, waiting for a gap to open in the scrub ahead and allow a clear shot at the Chevalier. They watched as the two cars struck head on, the Apache tossing the Chevalier into the air and into the waiting gun sights. Both machine guns opened up, through the lightly armoured roof of the rocket car and shrapnel tore into the terrified crew.

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In the back of Space Monster, William bandaged the wound in his leader's side. Blood stained the cloth crimson and Ramos winced with pain as his shattered ribs grated. Behind them the Tusk Phoenix still burned, sending plumes of oily black smoke into the dusty evening sky.

'That was pretty tough' he said, 'sometimes I think we are getting to old for this!'

Ramos turned his weather beaten face to his friend. At 28 he was considered an old man by many of his crew. The near misses were becoming more frequent, the niggling injuries building up over time.

Something he had once heard rose briefly, half remembered in Arnold's mind 'there are old deathracers and there are bold deathracers... but there are no old bold deathracers'.

'Perhaps we are, Will,.. perhaps we are.'

The Immortal Mister Kinlaw and the Dirty Liars

By Badger

When the not-so-famous, almost dangerous, slightly-close-but-not-actually-cool gang Dead Celebrity loses a few members and has to initiate new fodder, we go to Dexter's or wherever just like everyone else does to find them.

I always bring Scraggly along as a technical advisor, because he has extensive experience with picking up guys in bars. But that isn't what I am here to talk about.

I am here to talk about the dirty liars.

You know the ones.

You head into Dexter's bar looking for some decent new recruits, maybe feeling a little vulnerable because you just spent 15 minutes after the last Death Race picking chunks of your best friend's lung out of your beard and mustache. You are optimistic though, because you see so many promising new faces!

So you walk around asking if anyone has any seat time behind some certain type of enormous vehicle-mounted weapon, and maybe one guy in the back pipes up...

Yeah, mister! I've been around the block a few times on a Heavy Machine Gun! In fact, I used to dismantle my old one every night, and sleep in a pile of its parts! Sure, it was anatomically difficult to make sweet, sweet love to each individual part, and sure it was a pain putting it all back together in the morning, but I really got to KNOW the weapon! Did I mention that I love heavy machine guns so much, I exclusively drink gun lubricant as a refreshment?

So, needless to say, he talks a good game. You hire him spontaneously and without another word. He jumps in the back of the looted Marauder like a day worker, and you take him back to the secret clubhouse or wherever it is we all live.

It is not until later, after the paperwork has been signed and you have explained the dental plan, that you realize that he is not the Mister Hot-Sex-With-HMG that he said he was, but that he actually is an amateur cyclist that has no thumbs and talks to an imaginary pet hamster named Frankie.

So I come to the origin of The Dirty Liar Club. The DLC is a small subgroup of the gang Dead Celebrity, filled with members who have lied to me about their skills. I am sure some of you have a similar group with a different name, or maybe I am the only vengeful bastard around. Mine has also been expanded to include people, from back in the old days, who do not have a name that fits with my gang theme. Their mission is simple: DIE! DIE! DIE!

But make me as much money as you can before you go.

Diabolically, I try to enter them into as many events as I can. If they win, I get money. If they die, I get revenge. It is a win-win solution for me that has worked wonderfully.

Until I hired the invincible James Kinlaw.

He heads my Chapter of Dirty Liars Club for two good reasons. One, he told me he had experience with Large Guns but turned out to be a medic. Two, his name does not fit my theme of famous dead people.

There is a Minister of Creation Science named James Kinlaw in the state of Florida. BLAH. Another James Kinlaw owns a chain of funeral homes in Alabama. NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME. There is an accountant James Kinlaw in New Jersey. YAWN .

No James Kinlaw ever invented Velcro, led the Mongols as they sacked a city, starred in a string of slasher films, or sacrificed virgins atop a Mayan altar. It is a dead name, overlooked by history, and cursed with anonymity. It would be my pleasure to see him die, preferably in a huge fireball of melting metal, just after crossing the finish line in first place.

Unfortunately, though, like James Bond, this man WILL SIMPLY NOT DIE .

Bullets bounce near him, but rarely through. Direct rocket hits leave him with a smile and clothes smelling vaguely of smoke. Grenades bounce into his lap and he peels them like a hardboiled egg. I believe he only lost his eye because Scraggly scorched him with a flamethrower.

At point blank.

At 70 mph.

With all his side armor stripped away.

As the two cars crashed together repeatedly in an orgy of metal.

He doesn't always win the event, and he may not come back with the same number of body parts, but he is almost guaranteed to survive any combat I plunge him into.

I used to fantasize about sending him out in a shopping cart with a lawnmower engine that has half a roll of duct tape for armor and a rolled-up newspaper as the only weapon, but I know how that would end.

Thirty minutes later, like so many times before, he will be knocking on my door to request a replacement jumpsuit:

The old one is full of bullet holes and is badly charred around the ankles, he will tell me.

Why are you still alive? I will ask him...

Oh, and the helmet is a little dented from when I was thrown from the cliff and the Apache fell on my forehead... he will answer.

WHY. ARE. YOU. STILL. ALIVE? What manner of demon are you? Go back to your fiery pit and taunt me no more...

Oh, and is it alright if I come in late Monday morning? I am going to see the chiropractor. My back has been achy ever since that lorry ran me over. Twice. While I was on fire.

Good day, to you, Mister Kinlaw! I will say, quite perturbed.

As he turns to leave my office, he does not hear the large caliber pistol slide from my holster. He does not hear the hammer cock back. He takes no notice of my huffing, excited breath.

He does not seem to even hear the explosion as the pistol misfires in my hand.

Good night, boss, he says as he shuts the door.

Scorpions on the Rise

by J.D. Basher

Gregs` well exercised caution and scouting ability served him well. The dust plumes he saw leaving Badlands were members of the Badlands Rudeboys. He needed to get past the last of the Pirates surrounding the Truckstop.

Greg stopped on top of a rocky outcrop and watched them through his binoculars as they stitched their way past him, running the `lows` of the dunes looking for any possible vehicular prey. These were `Fast movers` meant to kill.

They made it to a large cliff and were stopped side by side, nose to tail. The drivers obviously talking... possibly planning their next travels.

The movement in the cliff was what drew Gregs` eye first. He swiveled the binocs on the movement and let out a `HEY!` before he realized the drivers of the Rudeboys could not hear him.

There were 2 caves in the side of the cliffs next to where they stopped. One closer, within 20 meters of the pirate patrol and the other farther, at least 50 meters from them.

The near cave literally erupted with `insect` like creatures scabbling over each other to get out.

The two drivers of the Rudeboys didnt even see them until there were at least eight of the six legged monsters on them, each one as long as their Phoenixes. The `insects` Greg saw were scorpions like he saw in the school books, but different.

One of them reached into the driver window of the farthest car, with a 1.5 meter claw and pulled the poor driver out. His seat harness held him until his right arm was ripped free of his torso. The screams could be heard from here, where Greg watched. Not the low guttural moans of a fast death. These were the high pitched, screeching sounds of an agonized, delayed, wrenching of life from the living.

The second car moved with a start... and stopped. The driver could be seen hitting the dash as he tried to find the starter button. The seven other unoccupied `scorpions` surrounded the stalled Phoenix.

Greg saw the movement before he heard it. Two rooster-tails of dirt sprayed the two `insects` behind the stalled driver. Then the sound of a well tuned V8 motor roaring. The driver turned hard right, directly into and under one of the scorpions. This scorpion sidestepped the Phoenix while raising its tail over its back. Just a sparkle was all Greg could see. Then the sound, `Ponk-----Ponk`

The car kept moving away from the six-legged monsters until it got about 15 meters away. ALL of the scorpions had regained composure and aimed their tails at him..Their tail tips opened in wide three way clamps.

Greg saw two ground flares where two projectiles hit. One, 1 meter from the car and one directly underneath the bumper. He saw the others etch a dotted line up the trunk, over the roof and off the hood to the ground in front of the car. The car swerved, hit a small dune, and rolled on its top and stopped moving save for its tires.

He couldn`t watch any more....

The high scream filled his ears until he fired the engine and turned back toward the Badlands Truckstop.

Greg looked at the bright blue color of the Aurora. 'Good GOD! Where the hell did these monsters come from?!' He thought to himself.

'Goodness had nothing to do with it.... HOPEFULLY, God didn't either!'

Mike Lefave looked sheepishly around the crumpled hulk of his Apache, the Badlands were a BAD place to be on foot.

A movement caught his eye and he focused on it.

'Sue... Is that you?' ... 'Yeah' came her reply grunting softly as she crawled out from the inside of the overturned SUV. Susan Mayer swiped her arm across her eyes to wipe the sweat and grime from her tearing, salt stained, dust covered face.

'What the hell happened Mike?'

'We got our asses kicked is what happened 'Captain Obvious!'... I TOLD you not to slide off the ridge of that dune!'

She took two steps toward and pointing at him said, 'DON'T go there right now 'ya freakin weenie!..... We have more to worry about than who is at fault dammit!' She dropped to her belly trying to work her way back into the overturned Apache. Mike watched her crawl into the wreck then stood up and looked around at the bleak landscape looking for signs of the 'Rudeboys' who recently put them in their current situation... Nothing now.

He looked at Sues' feet, her boot toes digging into the sand. Toes jiggled left..... then right..... then turned toes up.... 'HEY!...gim..my feet a pull... lets get outta here.'

He grabbed her legs above the ankle and slowly pulled Sue out of the wreck. She was dragging two sub-machineguns and one rifle with a 'musette' bag of ammo for the handguns over her head as her dusty smiling face emerged from the upside-down back window of the wrecked Apache.

'Bingo' She puffed, waving her hand in front of her face.

Sue slung the rifle on her shoulder while handing an SMG and the ammo bag to Mike Lefave, she slung the remaining SMG upside-down under her left arm. 'Lemme get an SMG and rifle reload mike... You hang on to the rest.'

'Wait a minute! Why do you get the rifle?!?!' He complained.

Sue walked back to the overturned Apache and put a large rock on the main chassis rail and backed off 30 feet. 'OK Mike, lets see you take that rock off the car!' Sue chided, tossing the rifle to Mike. He shouldered the weapon and breathed. 'Exhale-hold-fire'.

The bullet hit half a meter right and high passing through the destroyed rear tire of the Apache and whistled off into the distance.

'Fine' Mike said handing the rifle back to Sue, his head hanging. 'Hey!! No big deal Mike, you got a nice bullet sprayer there, you'll be fine with that SMG.'

'Lets get moving' she said slapping him on the shoulder. The sky was a ruddy red as the sun set. 'I saw some cliffs about 5 clicks from here, looked like there were some caves too. We better head there and hunker down

till morning, we can get there by nightfall.' Mike said nothing as they both re-arranged their gear for a long walk.

The cliffs now dominated the horizon as their boots slipped and sunk into the endless sand dunes they crossed getting here. Mike huffed, 'can we stop.... forabit?'

They stopped on top of the dune and turned to face the cliffs.

No more than 1 klick distance, but they looked SO far away!

The sun had set an hour ago but it was already pitch dark out here in no-mans land. The cooling breeze in their faces was coming from the cliffside area ahead. The lowering temperature was rejuvenating but.... There was something in the air.

Sue settled on one knee next to Mike. He sat with legs extended leaning back on his arms. 'You OK?!' 'Yeah' Mike said exhaling the cooler breeze. 'Good' Sue replied, 'We only have a 30 minute walk to the cliffs, we can wait another 15 here then get over there, right?' Mike sat up and began searching his rucksack. 'You bet, Sue' Mike said as he breathed heavily sucking on his canteen. Sue put her hand on his, holding the upturned container and lowered it. 'Go easy on the water... too much will slow you down'

She gazed at the cliffs, the image shifted back and forth in the heat emanating from the dunes.

The terrain changed as they approached the cliffs. Endless dunes gave way to Rocky, hard-pan soil. Broiled by the sun and baked hard. 'Look' Sue said as she pointed to the face of the cliff. 'There, under that overhanging bush, that cave's got good cover' Mike was leaning over with his hands on his knees huffing for breath as she moved to the cave warily readying the SMG in her hands.

Mike unconsciously held his breath as Sue stuck the muzzle of her SMG through the hanging vegetation in front of the cave. She deftly swept the dry, hanging vines and leaves to one side and stepped from his view. He remembered to breathe when he turned his head to look along the cliffside. The sound was a bit closer when he heard it next... a sound like fingernails clicking on eachother....

No sound now..... Just the cooling breeze following the cliffside. He moved to the opening of the cave and whispered, 'Sue....' No answer.

He moved to the edge of the cave opening and leaned in to whisper.... 'Sue... Are you ..'

An arm appeared from the veil of vegetation and grabbed the straps of Mikes backpack and pulled him into the cave behind the leafy cover. A hand cupped his mouth as he was about to go into a tirade. 'SHUT-up'... 'Don't say a word' Sue said as she pulled Mike deeper into the cave pointing with her free hand at the entrance. That peculiar 'nail-clicking' sound became louder..... Sue loosened her grip on Mike when he started breathing slower... 'Watch out there' she whispered in his ear. 'Stop moving and watch.....'

Sue released her hand from Mikes mouth, he inhaled slowly looking where her hand pointed.

That insidious 'clicking' sound was louder than ever making Mike unconsciously move backward away from the sound. He backed up into Sue stepping on her toe. She gripped his shoulder and whispered.... 'Easy Mike.....'

They sat and listened until the leafy vines covering their hide-away moved.

They both shuffled back into the cave as the leaves rustled. Only 3 meters from the cave entrance they found the wall. This was as far as they could go and they were making themselves as small as possible in the cramped space.

Mike unslung his SMG as he squatted on his heels. 'What the hell is that' he asked outloud to himself.

Sue patted him on the shoulder and said, 'Keep your finger OFF the trigger 'Rambo', we might get out of this one.'

Sue slowly pulled her SMG in front of her and moved to the cave entrance. No vine movement now. Mike's hand was 'glued' to her backpack gripping the 'hold-down' straps..... Where she went he followed.

The 'clicking' sound was still radiating from everywhere but not so intense as it was. Sue knelt down next to the vegetation covering their hideout and set the SMG on her knee. She turned to Mike and gave him the 'one-finger-over-mouth' 'Shhhhhh' then reached out with one hand and moved the vines apart to get a better look.

Hard packed soil and sand dunes greeted her gaze from their cave. 'Nothing out there now' she said. The 'clicking' sound went faint in the darkness.

Sue stood up and turned to go to the back of the cave and tripped over Mike. She fell hard. 'DAMMIT mike!' she whispered trying to catch her breath. That was IT!.....She had had enough of his wimpy attitude!

She knelt next to Mike and grabbed him by the front of his coat and pointed her finger in his face. 'LOOK, 'Weenie-boy' I'm not getting killed trying to teach you to survive in the wilderness.....GOT IT?' A hard poke in his chest emphasized her point. Mike winced when her finger hit him and he raised his hands in a mock surrender 'Got it---- You bet, Sue!'

'This isn't a GAME my friend!... We could DIE out here!' she hissed, looking him in the eye. Sue looked back at the veil of leaves covering the cave entrance. 'We have about 6 hours till daylight.....' she said softening her voice, 'Curl up and have a snooze till then!'

He did. Knowing Sue was there helped him get the best sleep he had ever remembered until the nightmares rushed on him.

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The sand was too close to his mouth..... His arms swiped the sand away in wide arcs from his buried torso. 'No' he gargled... The sand flowed over his arms and filled his nostrils, opening his mouth for breath, sand filled his throat.....and then..... He was looking at Sue's face, not knowing where he was, gasping for breath.

'Easy... Take it easy, Mike... I'm here...' Sue whispered.

She knelt next to him cradling his head and tried to hold his arms as still as possible. His eyes focused on Sue... 'That was a dream.....right?' He asked.....

She giggled.... 'The lights are burning bright...' she softly slapped his cheek..... 'Is anybody HOME?'

Mike grabbed her hand and took a deep breath..... 'Yeah Sue..... Thanks' he said, pushing her away and rolling to a kneeling position in the tight confines of the small cave.....

'I'm ok now ...' He said, looking around. He could see the small 'crevice' they were holed up in, a thin veil of vines between them and whatever made those sounds last night..

They slept, spooned. For a short while.

Beyond the vegetation Mike could see the shimmering black carapace of a giant scorpion.

He wasn't sure what he'd seen through sleepy eyes but it kept moving.

It had just come over the ridge and was looking directly at them with, what he thought to be, a thousand black little soul-less eyes. Mike tapped Sue's arm and pointed, breathless, not believing what he was seeing. Sue followed his gaze and every muscle in her body stiffened.

Sue pulled him deeper into the cave. the chittering clatter followed. They stopped only when it became absolutely pitch black and they could only feel the walls, the dampness...the hard shell of that which was about to devour them. Mike let loose a blast from his machine gun, lighting up the cave in a strobe of cartoon images.

Bang, bang, bang, BOOM!

The scorpion was right there, right next to them, and thousands of gleaming eyes were just behind. The horde of massive insects were only steps away...they both fired a dozen times, their shells bouncing across the cave and ricocheting away...needles from flared tails with anxious quills sought their blood, Sue gave a yelp and clawed at her leg. ...Then it was silent.

She blinked several times, but Sue couldn't erase the after-image she was sure she'd seen. This cave was a garage... That scorpion with a thousand eyes, that was a Sunrise...wasn't it?

There was a mad clattering and scraping and the real horde was approaching...she climbed into the car and tried the key...hoping that poor inept Mike was right behind her...the car was warm and welcoming...she was being pulled into its sweet embrace...

'You leave Sue alone!' She heard from the back seat. 'Silly boy, yelling at their new car,' She thought. She wondered if it would fit in the garage back home?... Would they need a car seat for their kids? Suddenly she had a moment of clarity.. she was in love... and possibly being eaten alive from the feet up.

'Oh my...' she said. Sue could feel the cold, alien claw around her neck, pushing her down. She reached out, her breath came in gasps. 'Mike' was her last word as she passed out.

Mike couldn't open fire the way he wanted to with his SMG, he might hit Sue. Mike was certain, however, that he'd seen a well preserved car hidden in this cave just behind them, so he scrambled back, further...sickened by the crunching and moaning sounds he heard.

The familiar form of a Sunrise was under his fingers then...and with a practiced ease he loosed the bonnet and connected the terminals...to be sure. Someone had tucked this bird away for another day. There was a spark...my God... It still had juice... He pushed the cables in place. Without a thought he jumped through the driver's window behind the wheel...and...searching for the spot... 'YES!' ...the keys were actually in the ignition.

The car roared to life, the V8 quickly warmed up and slowed to a smooth idle. The scorpion hovering over Sue stopped for a few seconds, raised its body high over her stretching, then dropped and continued gnawing on her leg.

Mike threw it into gear with one hand as he flicked the toggle for the headlights with the other. The lights enveloped a horror of gore.

There were chunks of giant Scorpion everywhere, entrails coating the floor and oozing off of the walls with sick plops as they hit the ground. The shadows of frightened bugs running away slithered down the walls and away from the light. The windshield clattered as oozing darts bounced across it from the one remaining bug.

It stood up again when the lights came on, staring indignantly into the headlights, Its tail standing straight up high. 3 wide 'clamps' flared open from the tip with new darts dripping with venom pushing out of it's tail into

the light. It's many eyes reflecting the headlights, it leaned back down and the bloody mandibles continued chewing on Sue's left thigh...

The bug twitched as Mike gave the Sunrise a jump on the throttle. Mike gave the V8 another punch and the car growled as it lurched forward while he held the brakes. The scorpion quickly switched its hold on Sue, moving her body like a rag doll with the two forward legs till it could get hold of her shoulder with its' mouth. It sat there holding her till Mike screamed in anger. The bug backed up taking Sue with it, It's tail 'blinked' with a bright 'light'.

The V8 roared as the last dart the scorpion fired penetrated the windscreen only halfway. It was directly in front of Mikes vision. If the armored 'clearshield' had not been there it would have hit him. Venom dripped on the dash as he punched the throttle hard enough to leave a dent in the floorboards.

Mike drove after the scorpion, it's pointed, crab-like legs cutting flakes of stone off of the rock of the cave as it backed up holding Sues shoulder in it's mandibles. Her body bounced off the floor and sides of the cave as it retreated in the advancing headlights. The creature ran backwards almost faster than he could drive forward in the confined space, dragging her flailing body after it, too hungry to let go.

Mike leaned into the horn, startling the beast at last so that it gave up dragging Sue away. It spun around, chittering, clicking and moved away from Sue, seeking it's own escape. It had had enough of these Bi-ped Meatsacks, it was running away.

The H.U.D. 'beeped' and locked on the moving target. Mike focused on the target reticle and pressed the drivers' wheel gun trigger and twin MMG's erupted fire from the grille of the Sunrise.

The staccato sound of the guns reverbrated in the closed space of the cave. The strobe light effect showed individual bullets impacting and passing through the scorpion's carapace from back to front, dropping it dead where it stood.

He pulled alongside Sue's still form and opened the driver door. The backpack she wore made it easier to pull her 90 pound weight over his lap and into the empty seat to his right. 'I got you Sue', she moaned in reply. Her left leg was gone just above the knee and dripping blood...

'DAMN' Mike said aloud..... he closed the door and stomped on the throttle. 'DAMN!'

'I may suck with a rifle, hon, but I'm one hell of driver.' Mike plowed through their ranks, their hard shells breaking windows and denting armor.

Ponk...Ponk..... 'Overhead shots' he thought. Ponk.....CRASH..... Driver window gone. 'WOW'STING!

When he finally stopped to look at his gas gauge, Mike realized it was time to turn home. He left behind him only a pool of scorpion blood and pulverized chitin exo-skeleton.

When the Badlands scouts finally found Mike, days later, he was sitting in the car holding his beloved. He was strangely silent. Sue was dead in his arms and both of their voices would stay silent forever, She, given to the silence of the dust from whence she came.

Mikes silence, from monsters he could only scribble on rough paper. The scribbles looked like spiders.

Most of Mikes time was spent hiding, but when he did come out from the alleys of Somerset he would run from imagined creatures as he foraged for food to bring back to his hole behind Dexter's. When he died they found he had dug a hole under the building and had fashioned himself a cave. He had drawn pictures of giant

scorpions chasing a Sunrise on every surface. The only recognizable words in the artwork was this, 'The razors took my beloved by the head. Now I'm silent, and she is dead.'

That particular setup used on Mike's Sunrise has, since then, been known as the Scorpion, and those hard-shelled projectile-firing poisonous beasts of the desert are forever known from the poem as 'Razors'.

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Excerpt from the Evan Library:

Razor: Reports on this elusive creature are patchy at best. Mainly because anyone encountering it does not survive, or any survivor suffers from a type of walking coma. Survivors are found to have been penetrated by some kind of dart resembling a Flechette. With intensive care and copious amounts of drugs, survivors seem to be curable, although loss of speech seems to be a permanent condition. Drawings made by semi-conscious survivors indicate this denizen of the badlands to be extremely large, resembling huge scorpions.

Treachery

By JS

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust. Sometimes it seemed the whole world was dust. Blowing, shifting, swirling dust. Dust burned by the scorching sun, blasted by the howling wind. Dust. Dirt. Grime. A tired world rusting, crumbling and dying under the oppressive weight of heat and decay. Death stalked Evan at every turn, the death of civilization, and it's calling card was dust.

Paul "Mall" Averill, newly minted leader of the HTI Somerset training squad took a long drag on his cigarette, taking it down to a nub. He absently flicked the ashes off and crushed the remaining ember between his calloused fingers, wiping the tobacco remains on his leather duster he tossed it aside. Just more dust for Evan he thought, pulling out his tattered box of cigarettes and fishing one more out. His nickname was "Mall", a play on his name and the fact that he carried his cigarettes in old "Pall Mall" boxes. Hard packs as they used to be called. Of course his cigarettes were rolled by him, there weren't any real Pall Malls left in the world, mores' the pity he thought, they had apparently been much better than the mostly grass and stunted, mostly flavorless, tobacco they passed off as cigs these days. At least that is what the oldsters said. Producing a match from a front pocket he lit it on his hip and began burning another of his ever present cigs. Taking a puff he considered dust and ashes, and his two friends laying in the dirt on the floor in front of him.

Ashes and dust, that would soon be all that remained of them. Beautiful Lorraine "Tina" Turner, beloved Somerset training leader for 6 years. Only one of two HTI personnel who ever stayed on after being unable to pass the qualification tests for full membership. While she was a passingly good gunner, her real talent was leading new personnel in Somerset. Next to her was what remained of Stumpy Stumpf. Not a large fella in life he was even more diminished now, especially considering he was missing a majority of his pieces and parts. The burning wreck of the Desert Tank he had been in had started the job of turning him back to ashes, and dust. Two good friends murdered in an arena combat. A dangerous business to be sure, but one that had an honor code of sorts. Of course things got out of hand on occasion, and his friends had paid the price.

Mall heard shuffling steps coming from behind him, dust blowing in the wind over the corpses as the newcomer walked up, stirring the damnable stuff up. He knew it was Dallas "Zombie" Rios without looking. The mutant walked like a zombie, shuffling along, and he looked like one, and most of the time he even smelled like one. People had taken to dousing his clothes with cologne surreptitiously but it did not always hide the smell. He was the gangs unofficial coroner cum gravedigger cum mortician. Zombie was a good sort, starting to show some promise and one of the best lorry drivers in the outfit. He had recently transferred to Somerset to finish his training and attempt to pass the membership tests. Mall figured the odd, smelly creature would make it, but time would tell. Without looking at Zombie he spoke after exhaling his latest puff. The smoke dissipating and joining the dust and dirt, just another nail in this old worlds coffin.

"Well, Zombie lad, give em a good burial, couple of great friends. Although, I'm not too happy with old Tina leaving me holding the bag for piss sake".

Zombie didn't reply, he rarely did, a fact that creeped many out, but he only spoke when it was required. A mutant in Somerset learned that was the best plan of action pretty quickly even if he belonged to a powerful gang. One could not always watch their back. Well, Mall supposed some of the mutants with eyes actually in the back of their head could. Mall shook his head slightly, he might have said he'd like to kill her for leaving him in charge, but that would be a bit redundant at this point. The "Fearsome Tigers", whoever they were, had already taken care of that little detail. After Tina and Stumpy had resigned, they had snuck in behind them and opened fire. It was made worse by the fact that Tina had accepted their resignation not moments before that, and had honored it. Of course, men with no honor as these had proven to lack, cannot be trusted, or abided for that matter. Somehow she had missed their intent, and paid for it. He'd done some checking with his contacts at the Death Race Mafia, and those gents were none too happy with the Tigers act. A quick reconnaissance of their camp in town had shown a group of hard scrabble toughs, although the majority of them were bandaged and

beat up. It appeared they were looking to make a name, and fast. Mall took a drag, thinking. He supposed of all the ways one could try to make a name for themselves, well, that was one of them. Bout the best he could say for that. It was certainly not the safest way. Then, nothing was safe in Evan.

He watched Zombie busy himself with moving the corpses to the small utility truck for the drive to the cemetery. He supposed a kick to Tina's head for leaving him in this spot would be frowned upon by his new charges as well, so he resisted. anyway, he wasn't sure which bit was her head truth be told. He supposed it was near the piece of blond hair he saw sticking out from under the tarp. Turning on his heel he walked away, he flipped his cigarette into the dust, there to join all the other cursed dust, and started making his plans. First a bounty, then the hunt.

Living Dead

By Sam

'Wildeye' Josh Williams, a well-known local merchant and small-time bountyhunter stormed into Dex's. In the early afternoon, the tavern is a quiet place: a few scattered bunches of weary revellers who have been drinking since the previous evening, and one or two drunks passed out in the corners.

'Zombies!' shouted Josh. A few drunken faces turned towards him.

'That's right, out there in the desert, shambling towards our cars, arms outstretched.'

'Well, I guess they're probably mutants. Some especially degenerate 'pussbags' maybe. But maaaaan, even those guys don't usually walk around covered in blood do they? I swear I saw tattered flesh hanging off a few of them. But I wasn't hanging around to check, lemme tell ya. Stamped on the gas pedal and got my Phoenix back to town pretty sharpish.'

Not much response from the denizens of Dexters. Everyone around here is quite used to the mad ramblings of loons whose brains have been fried from over-exposure to the aurora and too many bad experiences of death in the desert. 'Sun shock', they call it.

JS responds... .

"Silver" Manuel Sterling listened to Wildeye carry on. When he was done talking silver sat thoughtfully for a moment then spoke to his companion Lorraine "Tina" Turner. "Tina, get them thar stakes we got, round up some dem silver bullets and send dat new guy Felipe Mackey out ta git sum garlic. Member, its head shots Tiner, dats how dey die easy".

Silver paused and grimaced. "It's hates da livin ded, dey worsen a durn Red".

Bastielle replies.....

After 'Wildeye's exclamation, and the ensuing reaction by 'Silver' a loud roar of laughter picks up at the Bastille table.

"Check out that Sterling, He actually fell for that old gag!" Chester howls loudly.

The table continue laughing uncontrollably with contempt at the Hitman's apparent foolishness.

Chester "Long Weight" Mason, Ashley 'Dredge' Klinger and Sandra 'Saki' Li spent most of their spare time swillin' down mugs of whatever brew was available. Otis 'Redding' Zamora had been sucked into a drinking game, one he could never win. Alcohol and 46-y's was a bad mix.

"Your drink 'Redding'. Come on, I bet ya ya can't down that jug there in one go." Belched 'Dredge' at the Scavengers trucker.

"Nah guys, I gotta take a slash outside, this air in here is thick with the smell Dexter's fermenter. Stinks of yeast in 'ere, I need fresh air." Otis staggers outside, giggling and mumbling something about seeing something outside. A few minutes after he leaves, theres a scream.

"I bet that was 'Redding' the fool, betya he fell in the s####hole again." The table continues there hysterical laughter and heavy drinking.

Another table drew attention.

Edmond "Blackadder" Gladden stumbled in his haste to get the news to the rest of the gang and jostled The Terror's arm, spilling his beer.

The look he got in return made it quite clear how Theodore had gotten that name.

"Slow, the damn, down Blackie before I spill something of yours. What's the rush kid?"

Edmond blanched and managed to stutter, "Zombies! There's zombies outside town! What the hell is going on? It's not enough that we got mutants and.....ggaaacckkk!"

His rant came an abrupt halt as Theodore's hand closed on his throat, faster than a striking snake.

"What's wrong with mutants Blackie? Think you're better than us? We're the damn future you little creep, you norms are old news, yesterday's man.....dinosaurs!"

Blackadder pulled away, fire in his eyes, he squared up to Theodore, his hand creeping towards the gun holstered at his side. He knew how fast The Terror was but his blood was boiling and his brain had fried. Both logic and rationality had left the building.

Just as his hand twitched downwards he grunted and slumped forward, collapsing on the floor by the table.

Elva "The Boss" stepped past his unconscious form and dropped the remains of the chair she'd broken over the back of his head, giving the body a disgusted kick.

"What's going on?" she spat, her cold eyes raking the table.

Theodore smiled back with his customary open grin.

"Zombies boss lady. Apparently there's zombies attacking the town."

Elva stared at him like he'd just suggested she might like to try gargling with razor blades while trying to juggle a dozen sharp knives, all the while walking on hot coals.

"And? What are you so damn happy about? Ok, so they don't shoot back but..." and she started to count the points off on her fingers,

"First. It costs us in ammo to kill em and there'll be no loot.

Second. Not only no loot but probably no damn bounties neither.

Third. They don't even scream when you set fire to them and drag them behind your car, not like the damn Manhunters.

So why so happy?"

Theodore grinned even wider, he was getting used to Elva's psychotic tendencies these days.

"It means I can do bad jokes ALL day boss lady. I mean, I just bet that these zombies will be unDEAD easy to kill."

Elva stared unblinkingly at Theodore, "You're riding with me for the next few weeks Terror. I get bored of your jokes and you get to walk home. Got it?"

Theodore felt the good cheer of the last few minutes drain away to be replaced with a cold foreboding.

"Uhh sure thing boss."

Elva nodded abruptly and waved at the doors, "Well then, get your lazy asses out of these chairs and into your rides. Get scouting and find out if there's any truth in these rumours. If you can take one safely, bring it back here, I want to see if they DO scream when you burn them. I'd hate to be unDEAD wrong about that."

She was chuckling as she strode out.