

# Resident Evil: Soldiers

By nextguardian

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*A Resident Evil tale set in a unique universe, between Code: Veronica and Resident Evil 5.*

*1st Chapter: "Soldiers"- Some fought the infected. They risk raiding an Umbrella facility for supplies, only to find it isn't abandoned as advertised*

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**Chapter 1 - The Holdouts**

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# 1 - The Holdouts

*Daily Doctrine July 26th*

*The infection that stemmed from the disaster in Raccoon City has continued to spread across the nation. The cleansing, by virtue of a nuclear weapon, failed to clean up the city entirely. The evacuation of Raccoon, overseen by the Raccoon City Police Department, allowed infected to escape despite numerous safety precautions. Some carriers, who may or may not have been aware of their condition at that time, brought the infection to other areas of the United States, and even the world. Areas with lower standards of cleanliness have seen greater numbers of infected.*

*Most have run from this outbreak, but we have reports of some survivors in infected areas exiting cities and setting up self-sustaining communities in the countryside.*

*Text Message:*

*Received: June 21st*

*From: Leon*

*To: Ashley*

*Ashley,*

*Hope you made it out alright. Heading to the capital to consult with other forces. Stay safe. Be in touch soon.*

*-Leon*

Dan Holmes, age twenty-four, looked through his binoculars. He grimaced at the sight of the destruction. Without speaking, he signaled to the rest of his team. They moved with machine-like precision over the ruined terrain, their faces muddy and dirty, but grim with determination. They were those who chose to fight rather than run or beg for help. When the T-Virus and its derivatives hit New York they burrowed into the country side and held on.

Dan was a survivalist, of sorts. He had planned for the outbreak of war for years. Mostly after President Graham's term in office ended and a foolish, incompetent incumbent was elected to his place. War had seemed inevitable. He just couldn't decide who the enemy was going to be. Eventually, he chose 'civil war' as the assumption he would take. He had been right, in a manner of speaking, but that didn't make him happy about it.

Dan's group was comprised of a handful of others. One was his cousin, Paul, who was paramilitary by his own definition. He had stockpiled weapons and ammunition. Dan left most of that to Paul, instead handling food, water, and training.

When the outbreak hit their area, Dan and his crew had raced against infection, hazmat suits and gasmasks on as they drove toward some remote hunting property. Once there, they barricaded

themselves in to an underground bunker, staying hidden as long as their supplies would allow. Hunting was scare. The first time someone brought back a deer, the damn thing came back to life and nearly infected everyone. As it was, the first casualties had been a couple of the martial artists Dan had managed to convince to come with him.

Right now, Dan's parents drove a small SUV in their battered convoy of vehicles. Gas prices no longer being a concern, they had welded snowplows to each side of the vehicles, acting as battering rams as they drove. Scratched marks into the side of the truck beneath where the driver's side mirror used to be marked twenty kills by vehicle so far.

In another vehicle rode Paul, along with Dan's Grandmother and the two medically-trained people Dan had recruited.

With Dan was a twenty-four year old girl. She clung to her rifle, eyes lost in another place and time. Occasionally she would twitch slightly, as if reacting to a bad memory.

**Which she probably is,** Dan reminded himself. **We all are.**

The girl was a very pretty blonde. She had a martial artists build, with tight abs and feminine muscle sculpting her frame. She had her hair drawn into a ponytail, managing to be functional while still looking incredibly beautiful. Somehow, the black jumpsuit she wore with the tall boots suited her, making her look beyond cute and instead outright sexy.

The only downside was the Umbrella logo in the center of the back on the jumpsuit.

Dan had bought Umbrella Corporation surplus from an inside contact- a cousin who worked there, currently riding in the fourth vehicle in their convoy- as it was unquestionably the best gear. Given that Umbrella had caused this, Dan couldn't help but smirk at the twisted irony. Mostly, though, he wanted to say something to the girl next to him.

"Hey. You alright over there, Ashley?"

Ashley's head snapped up, reacting to her name. It took her a moment, but she controlled her breathing and answered. She smiled at Dan in a way that never failed to touch him.

"I'm fine, Dan. Thanks. Listen- are you sure about this? It's only rumors, you know?"

Dan rolled his eyes in a big, exaggerated way. "Hey, our camp is gone. We can sit around and try to hold out ourselves with dwindling supplies, or we can make a move and join the rest of the fight. We're just as likely to get eaten either way, right?"

Ashley smiled, wondering when she started finding such morbid jokes funny. It had to be because of her past incident with bio weaponry. She very nearly became a bio weapon herself. She also very nearly became dead. If it hadn't been for Leon Kennedy saving her life many times over...

Glancing at the man driving the vehicle she was in now, Ashley knew that she owed her life to yet another person. Dan had found her on the road, just barely inside Pennsylvania. She was tired, wounded, starving, and nearly dehydrated. Dan's camp didn't have enough food for themselves, but

Dan insisted they take her in, even knowing nothing about her.

In time, she had healed and even fought with them, becoming one of the best with a rifle. She had taken hand-to-hand combat training and weapons training after Leon had managed to save her from that religious cult. She had been determined to not be caught without putting up a fight again. She had come in knowing the most basic of basics. Dan and his group had trained her even further. She had learned some medicine as well from the doctor and nurse that Dan had recruited. Dan's cousin, Paul, had taught her more about weapons than she would have thought possible. Dan himself taught her both knife-based and hand-to-hand combat.

There was a reason Dan was in charge of this group, despite being one of the youngest. He and Paul had seen this coming and prepared for it, but Dan was the one who really planned out how far they needed to go to survive. While Paul gathered weapons, Dan recruited people to join them and gradually built up a safe camp, tunneling well underground to protect themselves against T-virus in its airborne stage. Once they had emerged, they had managed to avoid serious combat for the first few months.

But as the available prey dwindled, Dan's group found themselves being attacked more and more frequently. They had planned for that eventuality; what they hadn't planned on was the early gangs of uninfected humans who tried to prey on other humans for food, even resorting to cannibalism.

The first time this happened, Dan invited the group of ten into the camp. Dan's group numbered around thirty at this point, so even if the worst happened they still had a numbers edge. The attack that followed was barbaric and brutal. The cannibalistic herd of 'humans' butchered the sleeping civilians. Dan took personal responsibility for the incident, and personally executed each cannibal with a single shot from his sidearm, only his cousin Dave bearing witness to it. Dave had later remarked that Dan's face had frozen into a stone mask and had not even offered an apology as he shot each one. No one saw him for a week after, and only Ashley and Paul checked on him. They had found him in his makeshift 'commander-in-chief's' office, dried vomit around him. It made Ashley see that Dan was human, and not just a political leader. He couldn't slaughter without paying a toll. But at the same time, he couldn't apologize to those who had caused wanton destruction of his people.

Within the camp, a mini-revolution had started. Dan and Paul, plus Dan's family, took one side. Paul's family, plus the camp's only doctor and one of the nurses, went with the other side. There was a brief 'civil war', but eventually supplies were distributed evenly and the other group went away.

Dan's group heard the distress call on the radio they had given the other group. The other group had been caught in the open and overrun, and they shouted for help. Dan stood up and readied himself to go, but Paul put a hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

"Nothing we could do for them. The fools," he had said. Ashley saw both sides of the argument and didn't like leaving others to die, but Paul was right. It had to be this way. There was no helping them.

With supplies running ever lower, Dan decided on a desperate gamble. That was the plan they were working on right now.

Reaching up, Dan clicked on a radio that would broadcast to the other vehicles in the convoy. The radio was a child's toy, making it nearly impossible for the Umbrella or anyone else to hack. Time to address

the group.

“T-minus twenty minutes and counting. The plan is a go. Vehicle 1, crash the gate. Vehicle 4, break off and make sure Vehicle 1 is mobile. Vehicles 3, you follow Vehicle 2 straight into the compound and hold position. Secure all exit points immediately. This place may be abandoned, but it’s still Umbrella. Ashley and I will take point; David in the center; Paul in the rear. The rest of you watch our backs at the gate. Understood?”

There were answers of “10-4” all around. It proved what a charismatic leader Dan was. These people were going into the local chapter of Umbrella to salvage equipment. It was going to be tough.

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Dan kept his shotgun at the ready as they opened the front doors to the Umbrella Corporation’s local chapter. This place had originally been a hospital, smaller than most of Umbrella’s efforts. But every branch of Umbrella had security in spades, so small or not this was going to be tough. Luckily, they had an edge.

David, Dave for short, worked on his wrist computer in the center of the group. He had worked for Umbrella as an IT agent, running this chapter’s communication’s division. He was eventually drafted into Umbrella Security, but the area went to hell before he could join up in full. But he learned plenty during the two weeks of training he’d gotten.

“Security System will be down for ten minutes. If it turns back on before we get out, then we’ll need to blow the place to escape.”

“Gotcha covered,” Paul chipped in cheerfully. “If I bite it, make sure to take my pack. If ‘Bertha’ won’t make you an exit, nothing will.

‘Bertha’ was their codename for a homemade explosive. Paul had messed with fireworks since he was a kid, which translated to chemistry, which led to gunpowder, and eventually the medium-yield device he had now. He had a set of two made, literally making him a ‘walking time bomb’.

Ashley had her rifle slung across her back. This tight in she opted to use her pistol. She was a good shot with it, and it worked nicely for close quarters combat. In front of her she could see the two machetes Dan carried on his back. Ashley had learned how to use those, too, among regular knives.

David cradled an M-16 across his shoulder while he tapped on his wrist computer, while Paul brought up the rear with an AR-15. All of them wore some of Umbrella Corp’s ballistics armor. They were as prepared as anyone ever got.

A single security camera clicked off in front of them. With it, one of the overhead lights which had been flickering pathetically died altogether. That pattern continued all the way down the hallway, leaving only red emergency lights near the floor.

“Medical supplies are on this floor; in the basement is the armory. In the sub-basement, there’s the research labs. But we don’t need to go there...”

Dan looked at his team, thinking carefully. “Alright. Paul and Dave, you go for the medical supplies.

Ashley and I will head for the armory. We have nine minutes before the building locks itself down, so let's meet back up in seven minutes."

They all nodded and took off with their partners. Ashley looked over at Dan, who was clearly deep in thought. She had spent plenty of time with him- time enough to know when something was wrong.

"You're going to go to the sub-basement, aren't you?" she asked knowingly. Her voice held no trace of any emotion one way or the other toward the decision.

Dan looked at her, mildly surprised she had seen through him. But he didn't try to bluff her.

"Yeah. I want to find the anti-virus- if there's any left."

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Dave and Paul navigated the corridors quickly, encountering no resistance. They were the most heavily armed of the group. That made sense, given their military training.

"You think Dan is sweet on that girl?" Paul asked, keeping his weapon leveled as he scanned the corridor.

Dave grunted. "A little bit. Can't be too choosy these days, can you? She's at least an eight, anyway."

Paul rolled his eyes. "An eight, huh? Pre or post-apocalyptic 10 scale?"

"Pre. Post, she's easily a 9 plus."

Snorting, Paul glanced around the corridor. The red light on the security camera flickered and died.

"Good. Don't want that dog watching us," Davis murmured, moving quickly down the hall, clearing rooms as fast he dared. "Even I have no idea what would be unleashed..."

The power to the facility had been shut off, so only the alternating white and red emergency lights along the floor provided illumination. Occasionally, the ceiling lights would flicker, as if some backup generator was trying and failing to turn on repeatedly. There was the distant hum of machinery.

Must run off an independent source, Dave thought. There was always the one or two rooms that even security wasn't allowed in to. The top-secret stuff, deny it existed, burn-after-reading sort of thing. This was Umbrella, so nothing good could come of whatever was in those rooms.

"Plant a charge," Dave told Paul, nodding to the door at the end of the hall that held no identifying marks on it. "I don't know what's in there."

Paul nodded, strapping C4 and detonators in place. Twelve seconds to rig. That wasn't his best time, but Paul's instincts were telling him to move fast, and his hands weren't keeping up with the adrenaline boost. He finally snapped the last detonator into place and backed off.

“What do you think is in there?” Paul asked, not really expecting an answer.

“From the company that brought you Tyrant and Nemesis? God only knows,” Dave answered, checking his weapon for the hundredth time. “But I want Dan to hurry up so we can leave without finding out.”

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Dan’s boots clanked more noisily than he would have liked on the industrial steel staircase. He could see through the holes in the metal. The white walls were splattered with blood, and there were a mix of pure human and decaying human corpses lying around.

As long as they stayed lying down, Dan would be content.

Ashley brought up the rear, turning her head and body constantly. A few bodies twitched, though that was just normal nerve action that followed death. She’d never seen this kind of virus activity until the ‘apocalypse’. Before that, she had seen living people injected with a parasite that enslaved them to a controller’s whims. For her money, the religious fanatics were scarier- they KNEW they’d be pawns. These people had been innocent.

She shook her head. Not all of them. Some of the Umbrella scientists lying on the floor, identifiable through their white lab coats, had caused this- at least the zombie part. To be fair, they couldn’t be blamed for the civil war. That burden laid squarely on a combination of stupid politicians and idiot voters. It was a wonder that the entire country hadn’t dissolved yet.

The basement seemed clear of any motion, but Dan and Ashley both knew better. If this area held the antiviral- or used to- then there were experiments of the virus itself going on. Most likely, the experiments had continued into the civil war. Dan wouldn’t put it past the current government to use bio warfare on its own people. It smacked of the hypocrisy that was the hallmark of the current administration.

As if on cue, a woman staggered into sight. Dan and Ashley both snapped their weapons up. The woman was an umbrella scientist, blonde hair gone red with blood and allowed to go straggly with neglect. She had a shapely figure, accented by her smart business suit and skirt beneath her lab coat. She kept moving toward them, her head down. Dan looked at her for injuries- any bite; any scratch- but found none. Then there was a chance she wasn’t infected.

“Hey, stop right there,” Dan called out. “Hands up. If you can understand me, do what I say. Come closer and I shoot.”

The woman stopped, her legs spread like a newborn fawn as she fought to keep her balance. She didn’t move.

Ashley glanced over her shoulder, but saw only a dancing shadow. It was probably nothing, but she narrowed her eyes and looked closer-

A hand grabbed her ankle. Ashley yelped and pulled away, kicking instinctively. Her foot connected with the undead’s head. The sound was akin to tapping a rotting melon- bone and brain gave way far too

easily.

Not good, Ashley thought. The whole corridor had begun to stir.

“Dan-” she started, before realizing what was going on.

The woman Dan had been giving instructions to had been complying. Dan had instructed her to get on her knees, hands behind her head, fingers locked, and ankles crossed. It was this posture that gave her away. Blood was dripping from below her arms.

Her head snapped up, and her eyes had gone milky. Worse, she opened her mouth, and teeth that gleamed with blood greeted Dan’s vision. Her teeth had been sharpened, he realized. And she could also obey commands. If he hadn’t been so thorough with his commands, anyway. Still, this woman was some kind of upgrade when it came to zombies.

Ashley’s voice cut through the tension, bringing Dan back to reality. “Dan, we need to go. They’re coming.”

Sure enough, the corridor had begun to move. The undead rose to their feet, all of their heads looking toward the two living humans. Their expressions didn’t change, but their body language made their intentions clear.

Their prey was here, and it was time to eat.

Dan blasted at the woman without hesitation. A scream died inside his throat when she shrugged the shotgun blast off. He had hit her center mass- and nothing. The shot barely penetrated her skin, lodging itself just below the epidermal layer but going no further. Ashley’s shotgun had begun to boom steadily behind him. She seemed to be having better luck against the other walking corpses.

Switching tactics, Dan aimed for the knees of the bio-weapon as it ran toward him. He fired, hitting the knee and quadriceps. She woman fell down face-first, alive but incapacitated for the moment. Until she began to crawl forward with surprising speed, pulling herself with only her arms, legs dragging uselessly behind her.

“Run!” Dan called to Ashley. She fired one more shot before turning and leaping over the woman on the ground.

A pale hand shot up and caught Ashley’s ankle, upsetting her leap and turning it into a head-first dive. She hit the ground hard, just bracing herself in time with her hands. The woman began to reel her in by her ankle. Ashley’s free foot kicked out repeatedly, but nothing was happening. She just got closer and closer to the bite that would turn her into one of them.

Dan’s booted foot snapped down onto the woman’s neck. With one hand, he fired his pistol into the oncoming group of zombies. The lead zombie fell down, tripping up the others whose brains didn’t work fast enough to react to a sudden change in pace. Dan’s other hand plunged a knife into the base of the woman’s neck. Her fingers released Ashley’s ankle, allowing her to scramble backward. Dan turned to follow her, and they both ran full-tilt for the room at the end of the corridor, not knowing or caring if that



was their target room. Anywhere was better than that corridor.

They ran, the zombies hot on their heels. The two of them made it to the room at about the same time, Ashley just in the lead. She zipped through the door, clearing the room as Dan shut the door and locked it. It was a simple double-tumbler lock, but it would confuse the zombie horde. He looked out through the narrow window at the female zombie he'd just killed.

Her head spun all the way around and looked back at him.

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Dave and Paul made their way through the corridors as rapidly as possible. It seemed like someone in security had the good sense to lock all the doors. Pale, rotting undead reached arms out through small square windows in solid steel fire doors that blocked off patients rooms. Their moans made Paul's skin crawl, and Dave was no more comfortable as he plowed forward, keeping his eyes straight ahead. The scenery was typical hospital- Endless white corridors, interrupted only by thick grey doors and signs marking exits or naming the patient in the room in question.

There was a steel door at the end of the corridor- the only one not painted white or red. It was a natural steel gray color, with a sophisticated keypad and retinal scanner.

"frack. I forgot about the retinal scanner," Dave cursed. He looked down the right corridor of the T-junction. He got an odd gleam in his eyes, and even chuckled a little. "You know, I saw this in a movie once. They needed the eye of a certain person--"

"-So they killed the person, took the eye, and got what they needed," Paul finished. "Good movie. Except for the ending- you know, where the person who took the eye got dismembered and eaten by zombies?"

Dave was already heading that way. "We blow that door, the noise will bring every sort-of-living thing down on us. If we quietly kill one nurse, then we can hurry up and get out of here."

Paul agreed that was a good plan. Besides, in the movies people didn't pay attention. They got arrogant. Paul wouldn't get that way. He planned to get through this, and was armed to the teeth so he could make it. All the time and money he put into amassing guns and ammunition would NOT be wasted by dying here.

Taking his largest knife out, he stalked behind Dave, aiming for the nurses' station. There was no one at the desk, but the door behind it was ajar. Shadows flickered inside. Paul nodded, and Dave turned on a flashlight.

The zombie flew out of the room, aiming for the light, moving surprisingly fast. Dave swung with the heavy metal flashlight on instinct, hitting the nurse in the temple and knocking her backward into the wall. Paul's knife was already plunging into her chest. He punched the nurse in the throat to squelch the scream and hurry up the final dying process. The impact spun her, and he jammed the knife into the back of her head. The enormous knife managed to pierce the skull. A quick spasm, little blood, and the zombie was finished.

“I killed her. You get the eye,” Paul quipped, wiping his knife off on the nurse’s scrubs. He sheathed it and got his gun back into his hand. He felt better for the heavy metal in his arms, ready for action.

There was a squelching sound, and after a quick tug Dave held the eye up triumphantly. He looked at it, seeing through the milky yolk covering it that it had once been blue. The nurse’s hair was a tattered blond mess. Going from her figure, she had been attractive, and relatively young.

Given her white coat, she must have been relatively evil, too.

“Good to see the White Umbrella scientists got what they deserved. Bastards,” said Dave, holding the eye up to the retinal scanner. He pulled a small wire out from his wrist computer, plugging it into the electronic keypad. “Cover me while this cracks the code.”

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Dan and Ashley pushed together, moving the heavy desk in front of the door. The ‘woman’ was still out there, and she was scratching at the door with her long nails, although she couldn’t stand- yet. Dan’s knife strike should have killed her, or at least paralyzed her. But he and Ashley had watched her arch her back in such a way that she got up to her knees while leaning backward. She crawled to the door that way, a fixed smile on her face. The sound of nails on the door was maddening.

Barricading themselves in to buy time was their best idea, so they worked as quickly as they could. The thick wood and metal desk would give them a little bit of cover. It was only after they’d move the desk that they stopped to look at their surroundings. Dan immediately kicked himself for breaking a basic but very important training habit.

They were in a boiler room, or some kind of control room. There was an old style freight elevator gate that pushed to one side. Past that were steps leading down, where heavy machinery that was still working clanged and made a thrumming sound loudly. The room was arranged with two ‘aisles’, separated in the center by what looked like an elevator shaft, and book ended by a water heater, a set of pipes, and three tanks whose function Dan couldn’t even guess at. There were gauges on them that maybe indicated pressure or temperature, but that still didn’t say much about their function.

Ashley nudged Dan, pointing. “There’s a door over there. Maybe we should check it out- at least clear it, so nothing sneaks up on us.”

Dan agreed. “You stay here. I’ll check it out.”

Ashley put her back to the wall next to the door they had barricaded. Dan moved across the room, trying to pretend that he didn’t notice how beautiful she looked in the pale light- how strong and graceful she had been this whole time. His mind was set to process those emotions, but he forced himself to remember there would be time for that later. More time with Ashley was a luxury, and if he wanted that luxury he had to work for it.

That meant opening the door in front of him, and trusting that Ashley had his back.

Dan's gloved hand rested on the cool metal of the door handle. He pushed the handle down, his pistol at the ready. One last breath, and he opened the door and stepped in fast.

"Clear," Dan murmured, a chuckle in his voice. "I walked into the control panel for these tanks, whatever they are. Looks like some kind of water treatment."

Ashley breathed a sigh of relief. "That's good. At least we've got our backs to something solid, if that she-demon out there breaks down the door.

A strange sound reached the two at the same time. It was a gurgling noise, and it got progressively louder. The scratching against the door continued, creating an unholy symphony of sounds. It was unnerving, but Dan and Ashley stayed calm.

"Let's see if there's anything in here we can use as a weapon, since bullets don't work."

Ashley agreed, and began to look around. They had water to work with- pressurized tanks of it. If they could introduce some chemical irritant, at least. Something to ruin her skin. Dan was already looking in the control room.

"Damn. Nothing stronger than glass cleaner," he called out, shutting the door.

"Wait a minute," Ashley said. "This tank is labeled: 150 degrees F. It has to be a temperature. Is there anything in the control room that can-"

UWWWWAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

The sound hit Ashley not so much in the ears but in the chest. It stuck there, making her heart beat faster and tightened up her breathing. It felt like some invisible hand was squeezing her diaphragm impossibly tight.

"What the hell was that?" she managed, once the siren-like wail died.

Dan held up a hand, silencing her. "Listen. The scratching..."

Ashley strained her ears, her chest loosening after a few deep breaths. "It's stopped. Did she...it...die?"

BAM! BAM! BAM!

The heavy metal door began to cave in. An eye peeked in. Then another. Then four more smaller eyes. The door gave way, and the desk crumbled into so much scrap metal. The woman had forced her way in, still not on her feet. But the wail from before, and the squelching sounds were suddenly explained.

Two grotesque babies, each one horribly disfigured, toddled toward the metal grate. Their tiny hands gripped the metal, squeezing it until the metal strained in protest, then crunched like tin. They were coming down the stairs, two naked, genderless infants born with muscles and bone, but only patches of skin. One had a diagonal patch of skin across its face and neck; the other's only skin was on its chest. Tufts of hair stuck out of the sides of their heads. Their eyes were pupil-less white marbles. When

their mouths opened, you could see full sets of adult-sized teeth.

“Jesus...” Dan whispered. “What the hell? Can these things have children?”

Ashley was gulping down bile, but held her gun at the ready. “Dan...we’ve got to do this. Whatever those are, they aren’t human children. They’ll kill us.”

Dan’s face stiffened, and he nodded. “You’re right. Whatever those things are, their existence isn’t going to help us any.”

The two infants began to crawl through the holes their powerful little hands had made. They moved slowly down the stairs at first, dragging something behind them.

“What do you think that is?” Dan asked Ashley, lining up to take a shot. “Behind them.”

“It looks like an umbilical cord...” Ashley said, completely revolted by the thought. “They’re still attached to their...mother.”

One infant had reached the bottom of the stairs. Dan took a shot, hitting it full in the face. This one had the patch of skin on it’s face- or rather, it did. The skin was gone, but the baby kept coming forward, hardly deterred by the shotgun blast.

“shoot! Looks like they’ve got mommy’s Kevlar skin!”

The ‘mother’ roared from above, distracting Dan and Ashley for just a split second. But in that split second, the two children made a break for Ashley. They leapt high in the air, one covering Ashley’s face and holding her neck in a death grip; the other stomped down on her chest, driving her to the ground. Ashley grunted in pain and tried to move, but the one that had stomped on her chest held her arms down while the infant on her face kept her mouth and nose covered.

Dan’s foot connected with the infant that was smothering Ashley. It felt like he kicked a brick, but the tiny terror was sent flying into the one of the water tanks, denting it hard enough for steam to escape through cracks. The gauge on the tank began to register a decrease- whether it was indicating a fall in pressure or temperature, Dan wasn’t sure. He moved to kick the next one, but suddenly sensed something beside him. He reached for his knife and began to spin, only to come face to face with the ‘mother’. She backhanded him, sending him spinning across the room. He hit the metal door to the control room hard back-first. He slumped to the floor and didn’t move, save for taking in a painful breath and realizing that his knife and shotgun had been flung across the room.

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“Six minutes until we have to blow our way out,” John said calmly, watching Dave crack the codes. “You figure Dan went downstairs to get the anti-virus?”

Dave rolled his eyes, finally cracking the last security code needed to break into the apothecary. “Yeah, I do. Can’t blame him. We’ve lost a lot of battles, and that anti-virus is about the only thing that can turn things around. Not to mention that we can’t afford to lose any more people.”

The metal door clicked, the locking mechanism detached. Dave grinned, his gloved hand on the door handle.

"I'll open; you cover me. On my mark...mark!"

Dave flung the door open, his sidearm snaking around the edge. When nothing ran out at them, Paul moved in, moving his rifle and his head in tandem. After a moment, he lowered the rifle.

"Clear."

Dave entered the room, holstering his pistol and reaching for his tactical pack. Inside were a bunch of smaller cases and bags- clean garbage bags, even. Anything that could transport the emergency supplies they needed. The heavier canvas bags and suitcases had gone with Dan and Ashley for the weapons that they hoped would still be available for use downstairs.

The room wasn't huge- maybe fifty feet by fifty feet, with one exit. The walls were painted a mint green while the floors were tiled white, making for a very sterile environment. There was a small microwave in one corner, and around it were various medical devices used for sample analysis. There were some vials that were half-full of blood, and some sealed containers that seemed to contain urine. The half-empty coffee mug and the cup of instant noodles wouldn't have been appetizing in this room, even before mold had grown on them.

"Okay, painkillers...bandages...alcohol...all the staples of a basic first aid kit," Paul noted, sweeping shelf after shelf clean. He had his garbage bag half-full already. This was a good haul. So far, it had been worth the risk.

"We've got heavier stuff down here. Prescription stuff. Vicodin, Codeine, and even some of anti-depressants."

Paul couldn't resist. "shoot. In a world full of zombies and civil wars, who the hell needs anti-depressants?"

Dave chuckled, but took the bottles, adding seriously: "This could be good for bartering. There are drug addicts even now, and some of them have things we need. Bottled water, clothes. We should be able to find some of those things here, come to think of it."

A more thorough check of the room led to finding blankets, flashlights, and even a handful of hazmat suits, gloves, and masks. Two canvas containers on wheels held laundry- one was full of clean, neatly folded light green scrubs, the other full of crumpled and bloodied scrubs. Dave stuffed some of the clean scrubs into a canvas satchel.

"This trip was worth it, easy."

Paul's voice was light, but his eyes looked to the door. Dave was already following suit, bending down to reach for the pistol concealed at his ankle, making it look like he was tying his boot lace. "Yeah. Hang on a sec, would you? Damned shoelace again-"

Dave spun, his pistol drawn, and he fired. Then he leapt to the side, because he was being charged at

by a man no less than eight feet tall.

“shoot! They let the Nemesis II out!” he called, rolling to his feet and firing again. Paul had already put a clip full of ammunition into the monstrosity. It reached out and ripped the gun from his hand, throwing it across the room and into the wall barrel-first. Paul had time to throw his arms in front of his chest as a hand the size of human head smacked into him. He caved with the blow, exhaling to take the impact.

Dave’s pistol barked again and again, striking multiple vitals in the back, head, and neck. He knew it wouldn’t kill the abomination; he just needed to get it off Paul. They had to get out of this room.

They had four minutes left before the security lockdown was triggered.

“Bullets will only piss it off; got anything better?” Dave called out, aiming for an eye. Maybe that would slow the behemoth down. A near miss, and Nemesis II was flying toward him. A leap saved Dave’s skin as the giant crashed into the wall hard enough to create another exit.

Moving as one, Dave and Paul broke for the door, running down the hall full-tilt, taking rights then lefts, doing anything they could to get to a better vantage point. They could hear the thudding, heavy but unhurried footsteps of Nemesis II behind them by several hallways.

“I have something that’ll do the trick, but we need to shoot it with something pretty heavy to set it off. And we sure as hell don’t want to be in the open when it detonates. We need a room with metal walls, but a window to shot through.

The emergency lights were just bright enough to illuminate the signs on the walls. One sign caught Dave’s attention.

“That room! Set up, quick! That room is our best shot!”

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Ashley swatted at the mutant infant with the barrel off her shotgun, using the next instant to fire from the hip at the other hellish offspring. It had a small effect- the infant toddled backward, falling hard on it’s bottom. It was a bizarrely infant-like occurrence- just enough to give Ashley pause before she could fire again. The other child attacked her, it’s shovel-like hands ripping at her clothing, trying to hold her down to give her the bite that would make her one of them.

She could see Dan- he was groggy, but conscious. He had the ‘mother’s’ attention. He was coiled, ready to attack- and then he ducked and ran as the ‘mother’ swatted at him. He dodged her arm by a paper’s width and joined Ashley, his foot lashing out again. The infant rolled and swung a tiny fist into the back of Dan’s knee, causing it to buckle. But something odd happened- the infant cried out in a wail that would have woken the dead.

Ashley saw it: Dan’s knee was on the ‘umbilical cord’ connecting the infant to it’s mother. A weak spot?

Dan must have thought the same thing because he dug into his boot and came out with a small serrated

knife. He snapped it downward into the cord, severing it cleanly. He was rewarded with a backhand from the 'mother' creature and an unearthly scream, but the damage had been done. The mutant infant was still moving, but it turned a pallid green color. It stumbled, looked at Ashley, and leapt toward her face. Ashley shot on instinct and this time the bullet hit the infant and passed through it. The inert body hit Ashley, but she batted it away with her arm, a sound of disgust escaping her throat.

The unholy roar of the 'mother' creature was heard- one of her babies had been killed, and she was completely focused on the murderer. Dan had recovered from the blow he had taken, retrieved his knife, and jabbed it into the other umbilical cord. The cord snapped, and the mother's rage turned on him again. He backed up, his elbow nudging a red valve. In a haze, Dan's eyes took in the steam coming from the valve and realized what was inside.

"Ashley! Distract it!" Dan shouted, turning to clutch the red valve. "From the stairs! Get on the stairs!"

Ashley did, slinging her rifle over her back and into place at her shoulder. She took aim and fired a shot into the 'mother's' head. It slowed her for precious seconds. Dan turned the valve, mustering all his strength to do it.

Boiling hot water came gushing out from a spout near the valve. Dan leapt for the door, hanging by his fingertips off it as the mother felt the first wave of hot water. Dan began to climb, but felt a hand on his ankle, threatening to pull him down into the water. He heard the booming crack of gunfire and the wet smack of blood hitting flesh, and the tension on his leg was gone. He pulled himself up on top of the tank the water had come from, barely registering the just-barely-tolerable heat on the tank as the water now waist-high in the room.

The mother creature was using a new tactic now- she swung her umbilical cords around. One caught Dan in the side of the head, and he nearly tumbled off the tank. Another good shot from Ashley stopped the creature, and Dan began to run across the tanks, making a final leap for the stairs. He made it and grabbed for the stairs, sinking his fingers into the industrial metal lattice as an umbilical cord snapped around his ankle and began to drag him down to the water. He could see his knife and shotgun, just out of reach. His fingers brushed the handle of the knife. Ashley fired again, but the mother had one single focus: Kill the murderer of her children. Her cognitive reasoning made Dan the murderer- something that struck him as odd. This zombie wasn't acting as mindlessly as the others.

His hands found the knife and stabbed down. The sudden loss of the tug-of-war opponent caused the mother creature to reel backwards. Ashley shot again, and the impact of the bullet knocked the mother backward into the water.

Dan retrieved his weapons and ran for the top of the stairs. Ashley made it through and he slammed the metal grate home, locking it in place.

There was one more horrible scream, and then unnerving silence.

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Nemesis II was much like it's predecessor, save for it's more human features. It had been based on the concept of infiltration. It was tall, just barely a reasonable height, and it's face looked like a normal

humans face for the most part. There were scars on it from the surgical work done to make it look more presentable. The face seemed to be stretched botox-tight; most likely because it's facial tissue had been grafted off a 'donor'.

Nemesis II tracked the two humans with the single-mindedness of a creature that was engineered, not born with a free will. It paid no mind to the dangers around it. Little could actually harm it. Unlike it's predecessor, it was able to understand what could potentially kill it, and it would avoid those things.

A small scent caught Nemesis' nose. It turned and stomped toward the smell, not concerned about stealth. It's vision was enhanced, unlike some of it's brethren, and it could see that the room it was heading for had only one exit. The two humans were in there, and they could only escape by going through Nemesis.

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Dave and Paul crouched low, the equipment they'd stolen heavy on them. But it was necessary, Paul had assured Dave.

They could hear the hulking monster's footsteps, and both ducked low, closing their eyes, covering their ears, and opening their mouths. It meant putting up with the taste of blood and the disinfectant used in hospitals, but that was fine, given what was about to happen.

They'd broke into the X-Ray lab. There were multiple rooms in here, and one central office area made up mostly of glass, like a fishbowl. In the back room they were in now, they'd found two X-Ray gowns. They put them on for added protection against what Paul promised to be 'doomsday for that giant bastard'. Dave had to agree- he'd never seen a proximity bomb packed so full of explosives and shrapnel. Even in this back room, with the door closed and the gowns on, there was no guarantee they'd be perfectly safe. Still, better to take their chances with shrapnel than Nemesis II.

"See you in hell," Paul murmured. Nemesis was now right on top of them, standing outside the room. In a stroke of genius, Paul had stuffed the potent explosive into the exit sign that would be just about face level with Nemesis.

The door creaked opened.

**Why the hell do all doctor's office doors creak?** Dave thought distractedly.

BOOOOOOM!!!

Instantly, both of them threw their gowns off and ran, guns at the ready. Nemesis was down, but already stirring.

"Grenade!" Dave called, running forward, holding the pipe bomb Paul had made for just such an emergency. He jammed the pipe bomb into one of the wounds in Nemesis' chest. He kept running, and Paul was right behind him. Paul paused only long enough to fire his pistol at the pipe bomb, triggering a second horrible explosion. Nemesis was back down.

Way down.



The floor gave way, and Nemesis fell down two levels. A 'splash' went unheard by Paul and Dave.

Two minutes left until the building became all but impossible to escape.

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Dan put a hand to his ribs, grimacing. The adrenaline from the fight had worn off, and now he was feeling the backhand that had sent him reeling.

"Hey, you alright?" Ashley asked. "Anything serious?"

Dan shook his head. "Nah. Breathing is just gonna be a dog for a while, pardon my French. Let's get out of here."

The two ran down the hall, spotting a red door at the end. They moved toward it. Before coming in here they had looked at a map, and this was about the right spot for the laboratory with the anti-virus. They were running short of time, but after coming so far...

The question that haunted both Ashley and Dan was about the last monster they fought. Was Umbrella so devious that they implanted infected fetuses in a host? Or were they so devious that they injected a pregnant woman with the virus? Or had it been an accident? The big question, though, that dwarfed those, was: Would the anti-virus have saved her and her babies?

"That zombie..." Dan began, then trailed off.

Ashley looked over at him. "What about it?"

"...It didn't act like a zombie. It started to listen to my orders. It protected it's children. It had some level of cognitive reasoning. From what I understand, the T-Virus and G-Virus didn't do that."

"And there were none of the mutations caused by Las Plagas..." Ashley said in dawning realization. "But it attacked and moaned like a zombie. So..."

"...What was it?" Dan finished.

They had reached the red door at the end of the hall. By tacit agreement, they focused on getting into that room. Ashley peered through the narrow glass window on the side. "We're clear."

Dan swept into the room, his gun at the ready. It did seem to be perfectly clear. There were bookshelves and file cabinets lining the walls toward the back. What wasn't covered by files was occupied by counter space. There weren't any individual work areas. A big communal table dominated the back section of the room. There were four or five coffee mugs and the same number of office chairs scattered around the desk. Papers were scattered all over the table. It looked to be all numbers and codenames.

There was one desk in the room, placed in the center. It had the only computer in the room on it. The

desk was out of place in the room. Rather than being the cheap metal and wood desk that was the norm for a room like this, it was a thick mahogany desk, large enough to dominate the room. It was pretty beaten up, likely from being moved more than once. It was definitely the desk of a supervisor or chief scientist. Bizarrely, Ashley noted, there was an old scratched-up typewriter on the desk. It looked to be bolted down, suggesting that the desk was both old and a hand-me-down.

There were no corpses in sight, which was both calming and unnerving. However, having nothing trying to kill him or Ashley made Dan relax marginally. He began to look for the blue spiral tube that was supposed to be the anti-virus. He saw some herbs- red, yellow, and green- and scooped them up, just in case they would prove useful.

Ashley looked around the other end of the lab, eventually seeing a safe. She tugged at the door, hoping without hope that it would just open. The door stayed stubbornly closed. She sighed, not surprised in the least.

“Dan, look for a code. Probably a four-digit number. I want to get into this safe.”

The computer on the big desk was still on. Dan raised an eyebrow. “This computer is still on. What could be so important on a computer that it would need back-up power? That code is probably over here somewhere.”

This desk was central to everything else in the room. If anything important was in this room, then the clue to getting at it was at this desk. Ashley sat down and began to work at the computer. Dan examined the safe. The weapons they carried probably had enough firepower to blow it open, but after meeting those last creatures, he wasn't wasting a bullet on a safe that may or may not contain what he needed.

**With any luck, we'll find the recipe for the anti-virus, and not just a sample.**

Listening to Ashley type, Dan wondered what kind of guy this 'Leon' was. For someone like Ashley to be so in awe, he had to be someone special. She'd already told him about what he'd done for her, but he was more curious about the man himself. To turn down the president's daughter took, well, balls, for want of a better term. This was to say nothing of the fact that she was an attractive and capable woman on her own. Dan had to concede that there was something really sexy about a woman in the leather, figure-hugging, S&M-ish Umbrella security uniform. Her blonde ponytail trailing down her back moved tantalizingly.

**Stop it, Dan. Don't torture yourself. She's after this 'Leon' guy. He's at least her idol, if not a real love interest. You're just a soldier right now, helping people before you get bitten yourself. If you make it through this, then think about how you're going to get your loving.**

Sardonic thoughts aside, Dan began to thumb through some of the research books, looking for notes scribbled in the margins. The books weren't made for the layman to read, but notes might be a different story.

Ashley typed incredibly fast, her wrist computer given to her by Dave counting down to lockdown of the building. Two minutes, ten seconds left. She typed faster. She was proficient at computer hacking, but this was pushing her abilities. She was just stumbling across the interesting stuff now. Names, locations,

dates- those would all be useful. She looked around for a printer, not seeing one. Typical Umbrella to put the printer in another damn room!

**Probably anything done on this computer goes straight to their bad-\$\$\$ 'Kommandant',** she thought with a snort, realizing that wasn't really a fair comparison. **Even the Nazis didn't want to kill everyone. In that way, I guess Umbrella is the great equalizer.**

"I'm going to try some random codes on the safe," Dan called, having found nothing in the books that would help them.

"Okay. We've got two minutes left, so-" Ashley began, putting her pencil down and stuffing the paper into a breast pocket. She didn't get to finish her sentence, though, because:

**CRASH!**

Something crashed just down the hall. It sounded like a safe being dropped ten stories. In the house of Umbrella, that couldn't be a good sign. There was a sound of water sloshing around that gave Dan and Ashley a clue as to where their visitor had dropped in.

Dan signaled for quiet. He tapped Ashley's shoulder and pointed down. She nodded and they both ducked behind the desk. They were no sooner hidden than the sound of thudding footsteps met their ears.

**A guy that heavy has to cracking the tiles as he walks,** thought Ashley, checking her weapon. She kept her head down, hoping that whatever was coming would ignore the red door at the end of the hall. It could go to the left, right, or barge right into the lab.

Dan was poking at the desk, feeling around for something. It was almost completely dark, and the two of them had turned their flashlights off to use the darkness as camouflage. Using the slight glow from her wrist computer screen, Ashley lit the side of the desk up.

There was a drawer that they hadn't seen down there. Dan's gloved hand found the handle to open it. He waited to hear the footsteps again, trying to gauge the time between them. As the footsteps came closer, he slid the drawer open one inch at a time right in time with the footsteps.

**Paydirt!** he cheered inwardly, seeing a yellow legal pad inside. Four numbers were scrawled across the top page. He held it up to Ashley. She nodded and moved for the safe. She tapped in the code in time with the giant's footsteps:

1 (footstep)-  
7 (footstep)-  
7 (footstep)-  
4

The footsteps stopped as the safe beeped, the door making a seemingly echoing clicking sound as the lock disengaged. The footsteps came closer, and suddenly the pale light cast from the emergency lights. Ashley reached in, and nearly cheered.

The blue spiral of the anti-virus greeted her. There were five of them stacked in a cylindrical container made of glass. Ashley removed it, stuffing them into a padded compartment of her pack.

“shoot- Hit the dirt!”

The hollow CHOONK of a grenade launcher blasted the locked red door, sending it spinning into the room. Ashley and Dan burrowed beneath the heavy desk. They opened their mouths and covered their ears and eyes as best they could. Dust and debris rained down on them; several small fires started but were immediately put out by the fire suppression systems.

“Break ‘com silence! I’ll draw it’s fire!” Dan shouted, popping up and firing at the mutant...thing. A sizeable chunk of the monster’s head was cut open, showing pulsing gray matter. The thing had been wearing clothes, but those clothes had been shredded from a previous battle.

**Paul’s work**, Dan thought, dropping back down behind the desk. **If I can splatter it’s brains...preferably before it fires another fracking grenade...**

A mutant hand swung down and chopped through the thick desk. Ashley dove to the side, but the same hand seized her ankle. Several small bones immediately began to protest, and Ashley cried out involuntarily, trying to aim her handgun. It swung her like a flail into the wall, which was thankfully only cheap sheetrock and gave way.

“Drop her!” Dan’s voice called as Ashley’s head swam. She heard the sound of a meaty thwack, and was sure she was imagining things when she saw Dan climbing onto the monster’s shoulders with his combat knife, hacking away at it’s head.

Dan stabbed the knife down into the exposed brain with two hands, putting all the force he could muster into the strike. The monster roared in pain and spun around, dropping Ashley and it’s weapon, bucking Dan off in the process. He hit the ground and combat-rolled, ready for action, but the monster had retreated, the knife wobbling in it’s exposed brain.

Immediately, Dan put Ashley onto his shoulders and ran for the next floor up. The basement- the armory. If they had to battle this demon from hell, that was the place to do it. Better yet if they could get the hell out of here first.

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Dave heard the garbled ‘com transmission first. He put his finger to his earpiece, hearing only an odd squawk, followed by the sickening crack of a head meeting a wall. He’d been in enough fights in the military and in bars to know exactly what he was hearing.

“We dropped Nemesis II right on top of them!” he told Paul. “We have to get down there!”

There was one minute, forty-five seconds left in the countdown. If they headed for the armory, it would take twenty seconds to get there; another twenty to get back to this position, and ten more to get to the nearest exit. That left them with just over a minute to stock up and finish off Nemesis.

Locked and loaded, the two ran full-speed down the corridor, their weapons barking occasionally as an infected would stumble toward them. They cleared out as many as they could now, knowing they wouldn't have time to deal with a huge number of diseased undead later. Their run out was going to be tight time-wise. A straight run with no stops would be the only way to make it before the building locked down.

The door of the armory was just ahead. One minute, twenty-five seconds left.

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The armory was a room made of gray blocks, gray lockers, and two battered wooden tables. There was low illumination, the only light coming from a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling. The light wobbled around when Dan pulled the cord to turn it on, casting odd shadows all over the room.

Dan laid Ashley on a table in the center of the armory, clearing all the weapons, clips, and ammunition into a couple tactical bags he'd found. He had easily three hundred pounds of equipment. There was no way he could carry all that in one trip. He had been counting on Ashley's help, but her head meeting the wall kind of put paid to that. She was alive, breathing, and conscious on and off. When Dan took a minute to assess her condition, he noted her pupils were slightly dilated. Slight concussion. He'd torn a piece of his undershirt off and soaked it in cold water, laying that gently onto Ashley's forehead. He couldn't remember what else to do for a concussion but keep her conscious, which he'd been trying and succeeding most of the time to do.

"Ashley, talk to me," he called, zipping up bag number two. He put an equal amount of guns and ammunition in each bag, in case they could only take one.

"Ugh...damn it...concussion?" she asked, her eyes flickering open, then shut again. "I'm awake...light hurts."

Dan nodded to himself, finishing up packing everything he could carry. He heard to running sets of footsteps behind the door. He pulled out his shotgun and stepped in front of Ashley. The footsteps stopped at the door.

### **Undead can't open doors...**

"Identify yourselves!" Dan shouted.

The door creaked open, a familiar gloved hand sliding in through the crack. Dave slid in first, followed quickly by Paul. They shut the door behind them, slamming home a deadbolt that Dan had missed when he broke in here.

"I've got three hundred pounds of guns and ammo, and one injured comrade. Light concussion. How do we do this?"

Dave hefted one bag over his left shoulder, aiming his M-16 with his right arm. "I can manage this as long as I don't take point."

Paul took the other bag, slipping it over both shoulders, then adding his rifle to the pack after a moment's thought. He pulled out his pistol and held that in his right hand. In the processes of doing that, he checked the device taped to his left wrist.

"I'm good. I can detonate the explosives, if it comes to that."

That left Ashley. Dan picked her up in a fireman's carry, but she wriggled off his shoulders, taking her pistol out.

"I can walk. And shoot."

Dan nodded. "Alright. I'll take point. I'll blaze a trail; you guys follow. Paul, you take the rear. Dave, you go second. Ashley, you go between them. We've got a straight run if we hur-"

**BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!**

The thudding footsteps of Nemesis II reached their ears. Everyone dropped their packs and took up a heavy weapon.

"The exit?" Dan asked.

"Behind him, unless we crawl through air ducts," Paul answered. "And that ain't happening with this baggage," he said, indicating the guns.

"It was wounded pretty badly when I saw it last," Dan told them. "I hacked at it with my knife and it dropped Ashley and ran. Right side of it's brain was exposed. But obviously even hitting that won't kill it."

Dave was looking up at a locked cabinet that Dan hadn't opened. He'd focused on what he could collect quickly- good instinct to have in a case like this- but in Dave's experience, if something was locked up, then it was that much more useful.

"Paul, get that open," Dave said, nodding to the cabinet. "If it's locked up in an armory, it's got to have some serious bang to it. C4 maybe, or a grenade launcher. The rest of us will buy you the time."

Dan took up a shotgun. "I'm the smallest and quickest. I'll dance around it and draw it's attention. Get it to turn it's back to you. Besides," he quipped, patting an empty sheath, "Bastard has my knife. Gotta get that back."

**BOOM! BOOM!**

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The footsteps stopped. Nemesis was outside the door. Soon, there was no door. It splintered into a million tiny pieces. Nemesis stepped through, heedless of the weaponry it faced. Conventional weaponry did nothing to it, said it's programming.

"Hey, asshole, gimme my knife back!"

The smallest male was speaking. Nemesis focused on him, remembering the damage he had done.

There was nothing in it's memory about this man being a target. But removing obstacles was a standing secondary objective, so the male could not be allowed to live. The others had no weapons aimed at Nemesis. They were a lesser priority.

-

Dan shouted his words and ran toward Nemesis, judging on a whim it's reach. He stopped just shy of a hand the size of his face as it swung through the air. Dan used the stock of his shotgun to shove it's arm, spinning the monster into the wall face-first. He jumped up, pulled his knife out of it's exposed brain (Swallowing bile down as he did), and made for the door, ducking as a backfist nearly beheaded him. He took off down the hallway.

Nemesis followed, realizing too late that it had made a mistake. The three other humans opened fire on it. Several bullets pierced it's exposed cerebellum. One particularly damaging round struck it's brain, flattened and then tumbled, hitting the brainstem.

It fell to one knee, leaning forward, head down.

Dan saw his target. He aimed and unloaded shot after shot into the top of Nemesis' head. He was using birdshot, designed to inflict a lot of wounds on a group of zombies. The pellets rattled around the inside of Nemesis' head, striking more and more vital points.

It stood up once more, arm extended toward Dan. Dan's shotgun was empty. He dropped it and pulled his pistol up.

Nemesis fell forward, the towering colossus making a huge noise as it hit the tile floor. It's fingertips brushed Dan's tactical vest.

Then it stopped moving.

Everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief. Dan retrieved his knife, putting it back in it's sheathe as he jogged back to the group. Dave held out an assault rifle to Dan; he took it gratefully, dropping his empty shotgun into one of the tactical bags.

"Fifteen seconds!" Ashley called, slurring her words slightly. The rest had done a bit of good- her mind was more clear now. It took her foggy mind a minute to remember why fifteen seconds was so important. It hit her suddenly, and the group was already in motion, hefting packs. Ashley got to her feet, taking a couple unsteady steps before the room righted itself and she could walk normally.

"Best speed, everyone!" Dan called, taking off at a careful run. His assault rifle barked repeatedly in short bursts. The squishy sound of infected falling was heard over and over. The hungry "uhhhnnnnn" sounds continued. Some stumbled out of rooms behind Dan, their arms stretched out for a prey that was already speeding ahead, aware of their existence but ignoring them save for the most peripheral thought.

Dave took care of the infected Dan had lured out, and Ashley did her best to simply keep moving over them at a jog. Each step made her head throb, but she felt no worse for the wear beyond that. In just a few seconds, she'd be outside and safely in a vehicle.

**And probably out cold after that, too. I get the feeling adrenaline is the only thing keeping me moving.**

They thudded up an enclosed stairwell, seven seconds on the clock and one short hallway from being safe.

“Damn it! We don’t have time for this!” Dan cursed up ahead, his rifle shooting on full auto as he mowed down an almost solid wall of undead. His rifle clicked, exhausted of ammunition. He used the stock to crack the head off the nearest undead. He pulled his pistol out, walking down the hall now at a steady pace, firing shot after shot, hitting head after head. The hallway was clear, and they were at the door.

Two seconds left.

“Ashley and Dave out first! Go, go!” Dan called, pushing open two doors that were once clear glass emblazoned with the umbrella logo. Now they were cracked- bulletproof and shatterproof from the way the glass starred out without completely giving.

Ashley and Dave got out, Paul hot on their heels. The clock ticked zero. Paul dove, the rocket launcher in his pack catching the lip of a rapidly falling steel shutter. It clattered to the floor behind him as his run turned into a dive. Dan was behind him, but leapt backward as the shutter fell from the ceiling.

“shoot!” he said silently. Locked in the dark with Umbrella’s remnants was *not* the place he wanted to be.

**Okay, the equipment got out, and so did the others. I can, too. Worse comes to worse, I use the rocket launcher and blow the front of this building away. If that doesn’t work...well, three out of four and enough supplies for everyone ain’t bad.**

Dan nodded, not resigned to his fate but accepting whatever may come. He picked up the rocket launcher, creating a makeshift sling for it out of some rope from his pack, and slung it across his back. He began to look for the controls for the shutter. It might simply be a matter of shooting them out.

THUD

Dan’s blood ran cold. He turned, and he saw a worst-case scenario unfolding in front of him.

Nemesis was up, and it was striding toward Dan.

Dan looked left and right, picking right on a whim, and ran into the abutting hallway. He heard Nemesis following slowly; methodically.

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Outside, Ashley gave the shutters a kick, using a technique meant to open a door. Unsurprisingly, it didn’t faze the metal shutter. The folded metal was marked with an Umbrella logo, with the words “Our business is life itself” written in neat letter underneath it.



“Bastards!” she fumed, giving the shutter another kick.

“Comms are blocked,” Dave murmured, taking his hand away from his earpiece.

“This is sturdy stuff,” Paul commented, pushing the shutter with the toe of his boot. “I’m not sure I *could* have blown it up, if it had come to that...”

Paul was in command now, and he knew what S.O.P. was. Reluctantly, he considered everything, and made his decision.

“We have to...we have to cut our losses,” he said sadly, stiffening his face. “This equipment will last us a while, and we also have the anti-virus. For now, we regroup and head for the capital.”

Ashley gritted her teeth, knowing that it was the right move. She knew it with her head, and with her heart, too. At the end of this road was Leon. But something wasn’t right. How could they leave Dan behind? After all he’d done for them? Just pack up and leave him? Just because a stupid door was separating them?

“We can’t do that. There has to be an access point we can breach. What about the roof?”

Dave tapped away on his wrist computer. He raised an eyebrow.

“It has an access point. Probably more flimsy than the steel here. It’s meant as an emergency exit and entrance. Ostensibly for patients being treated here it’s the mercy flight entrance, but more likely it’s the helipad for Umbrella’s top brass.”

Paul looked at his wrist computer. It was only a half hour until sundown. No matter what, they were out of here in twenty minutes.

“Alright. We’ll blow the hatch on the roof, and pray to God we don’t crush Dan. Let’s move.”

--

Dan moved at a job, taking in the rooms, seeing no other exits. Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. The halls were all the same, painted typical Umbrella white. The floor was mint green tile, supposedly a neutral, soothing color. Not very soothing in the pulsing red and white illumination that was marking the building’s locked down status.

A gray door with an illuminated exit sign was at the end of the hall on the right; an elevator on the left. Dan pushed the call button, hearing nothing. It figured that the elevator was locked down. That was standard procedure for emergency situations.

Nemesis’ heavy footsteps were coming. Easy choice to make now, Dan thought, hitting the stairwell doors and running up the staircase. The door to the second floor was right there. Dan hit it and bounced off. It was locked.

**Not good, not good! Okay, calm down, back the way you-**

Nemesis entered the stairway at the bottom. It looked up and saw Dan.

## **Okay, new plan: open the door!**

Nemesis moved suddenly, closing the distance between him and Dan in just a couple seconds. Dan, eyes wide, leapt to the side, letting the behemoth hit the stairway door. To his shock, the monster's head pierced the door, but the door didn't give.

That was when a gray that was slightly lighter than the rest of the utilitarian gray in the stairwell caught his eye. A ladder!

With no thought, Dan stepped onto Nemesis' back and leapt off, grabbing the ladder. Nemesis freed it's head just as Dan found the hatch. There was some sort of single tumbler mechanism locking the door. No problem to pick, even for him, if there wasn't a monster from hell about to grab his leg and rip him apart.

Taking a chance, Dan aimed his pistol with one hand, the other holding him on the ladder. He aimed for the exposed cerebellum, hitting it with a single accurate shot. Nemesis roared in fury and fell backward, the this metal railing buckling under it's weight.

## **Got you!**

Dan dropped down until he was hanging off the bottom rung of the ladder, putting Nemesis' head at his waist level. He braced his legs against the wall, pushed off, and kicked Nemesis in the chest with both feet. It felt like he kicked granite, but it was enough: Nemesis' bulk was now a disadvantage, sending him pitching over the railing, falling down to the base of the staircase three stories below.

Dan looked at it for a moment, then turned to pick the lock. He wanted out of here. He could celebrate later if he wanted. Right now, he just wanted out before his team left. It was a long walk to anywhere these days, and he only had a pistol and a single-use rocket launcher to use.

The hatch lock gave after some work with a multi-tool. Dan opened it and clambered up.

Something seized his leg. He looked down, seeing a black tentacle wrapped around his ankle. It squeezed, and Dan's bones protested. Dan cried out in pain even as he tried to aim with his pistol. The .40 caliber round hit the tentacle, and it withdrew. Dan hefted himself through the hole. His ankle was hurt, but he didn't have time to deal with that not. He had to get away from the hatch before-

With a crunching sound, the tiny hatch suddenly quintupled in size as Nemesis II forced itself through. It had undergone a grotesque transformation. Black tentacles extended out from it's body, numbering anywhere from four to eight at any given time. One tentacle shot out, and Dan dodged. The roof cracked where the tentacle hit like a whip. Before Dan could recover, the tentacle shot out again, slapping him across his already-hurt ribs. Another tentacle swatted him down from above, pinning him to the ground.

Nemesis began it's slow, methodical walk, leaving it's tentacles in place. Dan reached for his pistol, but it had been ripped away from him at some point during the struggle. Not knowing what else to do, he pulled his knife out. Running on instinct, he hacked at the tentacles. Apparently it hurt Nemesis when those things were hurt, because the one Dan was slashing pulled back. Freed, Dan got up and rolled for

his pistol. A tentacle swept out and knocked the pistol off the roof. It was eerily silent as Dan's salvation clattered to the ground three stories down.

Desperate, Dan looked around the roof quickly, seeing no ladder down. He noticed belatedly that he was standing on the giant "H" for a hospital helipad. He suddenly felt very helpless, limping with a hurt ankle and holding bruised ribs.

**Too bad there isn't a helicopter. Thought I guess I still need to blow this damn thing up first.**

There were three large objects on the other side of the roof. Dan couldn't tell what they were, but he ran for them. Nemesis' tentacle slapped down, halting his progress. Dan ran back the other way. Unfortunately, that left him in a corner. He was opposite Nemesis and out of reach for the moment, but he still had no means of escape.

**Or do I?** he thought, remembering the launcher strapped to his back. He'd never fired one before, but he knew it could probably kill Nemesis. At the very least, it would buy him time. If a .40 bullet could halt it, then what would this 88mm monstrosity do it?

**If the damn tentacles would just stop long enough for me to shoot!** Dan thought frantically.

Crack! CrackCrack!

Bullets hit Nemesis. It howled and began to stumble around, its tentacles flying wildly around its body to protect it from the bullets. From the sound, the shots came from a .50 Sniper rifle.

**Nemesis must be at an angle where the others can shoot it! This might be my only chance!**

Kneeling down, Dan slung the rocket launcher into place. He flipped the sight open, aiming center-mass.

**Here goes nothing.**

He fired, and a jet of fire shot out of the rear of the launcher. The projectile was shaped like a sort of rounded cone. It hit Nemesis dead-center, with devastating results. The monster howled once more, falling to its knees as it did. The tentacles burned off from the heat of the projectile. Nemesis fell forward, this time with a sense of finality. Its skin began to gray and cool almost instantly.

The nightmare was finally over.

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Dan let himself relax in the passenger seat of the SUV. He looked back at Ashley, making sure she was still conscious. She was, and she gave him a small smile.

"Good times, huh?" she commented.

Dan smirked in reply. "You know it."

Ashley reached into her pocket, taking out a folded sheet of paper. She handed it to Dan, saying "Here. This information was in that computer. I wrote it down before Nemesis crashed the party."

Dan took the paper, unfolding it. In Ashley's neat handwriting, he read the following:

*The CR1 (Cognitive Reasoning 1 prototype) has been successfully bred with the Bsub2 (Birther, type 2). The physical infiltration abilities and weapon-resistant skin gained by the NemesisII prototype has been combined with the ability for a B.O.W. (Bio Organic Weapon) to follow basic instructions in order to infiltrate hostile camps. In addition, the ability for the B.O.W. to procreate in an A-sexual manner has been achieved.*

*Known drawbacks include:*

*-Fetuses may not separate from their 'Birther', remaining attached by means of an umbilical cord  
-Fetuses are dangerously exposed if the umbilical cord is damaged*

*No fetuses have yet been able to grow and mature. They are born with the same cognitive abilities as the 'Birther', as well as the physical 'weaponry' of claws and teeth. Further work to be conducted.*

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*The resistance the BSAA has offered has been particularly troublesome. The original group, comprised mostly of former S.T.A.R.S. members has been dangerously successful. Thankfully, terrorist organizations have spared Umbrella from their full attention. Eliminating the BSAA agents and their counterparts has been made a top UCSS (Umbrella Corporation Security Service) objective. Several names have resurfaced in multiple reports. Attached is the list of names, affiliations, and last known locations of these key agents:*

*Redfield, Chris; BSAA; Europe*

*Valentine, Jill; BSAA; Europe*

*Archer, Josh; S.T.A.R.S; North America*

*Burton, Barry; S.T.A.R.S; Europe*

*Chambers, Rebecca; S.T.A.R.S; North America*

*Kennedy, Leon S; Dept of Homeland Security; North America*

*Redfield, Claire; Civilian with ties to BSAA; North America*

*Burnside, Steven; Civilian with ties to BSAA; North America*

Dan looked at the list, a smile forming on his face. "That's great! Others are fighting; it's not just all rumors! And your friend is on this list! If he's opposing Umbrella, then we're bound to meet up eventually."

They exchanged smiles for a moment before Dan turned back to the front, helping to navigate the vehicle. They couldn't risk using a GPS in case they were being tracked by Umbrella somehow, so someone had to read a map. Dan glanced, seeing it was straight road for the next fifty miles or so. He let

himself relax. Reaching into the glove compartment, he pulled out a small black, leather-bound book. He flipped through the weathered pages to a half-empty one. He pulled his shooting gloves off to write.

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*July 27th*

*The nightmare is nowhere near over. What I've seen and done makes me proud. I'm not happy to have to kill, but I know I'm making a difference now. This world is going to need more soldiers like that. Ashley is pure-hearted and strong, but I think she may be more motivated by love than anything else. Once we find Leon, I think that she'll leave our group. I would offer them the warmest wishes.*

*My role? I've been struggling with this. Am I supposed to lead a group to survive? Or am I setting them up to do battle? Not everyone is cut out to be a warrior. For each person we bring with us that cannot fight, I have to wear one more hat in combat. So far, that's worked, but what of next time?*

*We're going to hit more Umbrella strongholds. We'll need more weapons and ammunition if our group is to both survive and grow. But maybe we need something else, too...*

*Originally, I planned to help Ashley find Leon for her sake only, as a friend. But now I wonder about recruiting. The BSAA members are doing fine on their own, and they have funding and training that we could never match. But maybe courting the S.T.A.R.S members and some of the civilians would be a good choice. We need people who have experienced this hell and know how to deal with it.*

*...As for me, I'm going to kill zombies. That's about the only role I'm fit for. The hell that this world has been plunged in to fits someone like me, who needed an excuse to fight. Part of me can't help but think that there are so many people that deserved to be eaten by zombies and then shot or stabbed to death. It's wrong to think that way...isn't it? I'm conflicted to some degree. But I will absolutely protect those who are with me.*

*I hope the day will come when I can be satisfied with myself. Find a girl, maybe have a couple kids; teach martial arts and work a regular job. Maybe I'm not as warped as I thought. Whatever else I think, I know I'm making the best decision I can right now.*

*Someone has to fight.*

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*Umbrella Corporation Employee Memo  
Monday, July 29th*

*To all employees:*

*There was a raid conducted recently at one of our abandoned locations. The attackers stole valuable medical supplies that would aid our efforts to help the wounded. All locations are to be on double-security, condition red.*

*We will deploy two decoy locations that will appear abandoned, but will be defended by specially trained employees. These intruders will be captured alive and turned over to the authorities.*

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The control room from which he could observe everything was the best place to be. Twenty computer monitors measuring fifty square inches each made up one entire wall. In front of these monitors was a large glass and steel desk, bare save for the keyboard on a roll-out drawer and the Umbrella Corporation logo in the center of the desktop.

A leather chair, currently occupied, observed the monitors thoughtfully. The security cameras had clicked back on just in time to watch the sole intruder trapped in the building fight the NemesisII project. He watched the fight progress from the front doors all the way to the roof, where NemesisII was finally dispatched.

The glass in his gloved hand shattered, though he uttered no sound of anger. NemesisII was simply a prototype. What was more important was that the anti-virus got away. Something developed only for the chosen few of Umbrella's top funders and researchers was in the hands of the commoners.

He switched to the feed of the perimeter of the building. Three people popped up on another screen. Two were picked out by facial recognition; the other was selected by the man in the chair. A picture was beside each bio.

*Name: David Holmes*

*Age: 33*

*Marital Status: Married to Nicole (Palumbo) Holmes*

*Bio: Former Umbrella head of IT services in New York; drafted into Umbrella Security. Left.*

*FLAG: Suspected of sabotaging UC equipment*

*FLAG: Suspected of selling UC equipment*

*FLAG: Proven collaborator of break-in at New York facility*

*Name: Ashley Graham*

*Age: 24*

*Marital Status: Single*

*Bio: Daughter of previous President; kidnapped by "Los Illuminados" religious cult in Europe. Rescued by Leon S. Kennedy [FLAG: Known enemy of Umbrella]*

*FLAG: Proven connection to Leon Kennedy*

*FLAG: Proven collaborator of break-in at New York facility*

*Name: [Retrieved from voice recording] "Dan"*

*Age: ?*

*Marital Status: ?*

*Bio: ?*

*FLAG: Proven chief perpetrator of break-in at New York facility*

*Frowning, the man sent the three profiles to Umbrella Security. That was all he could do for now.*

*“When the cat is away, the mice will play,” he said, standing up. “When they think the cat is dead, the mice will fall asleep in their bed.”*

*Albert Wesker was not supposed to be alive. But he was very much so- enough to be very angry with the three faces staring back at him on the screen. Very few could brag about facing Albert Wesker’s wrath and living to tell the tale.*

***Perhaps, he thought, a sinister sneer crossing his face, I will meet this “Dan” at the decoy facility. This may require my...personal touch.***