



PEDAL ZOMBIES

EDITED BY

ELLY BLUE

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THIRTEEN FEMINIST BICYCLE
SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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Edited by Elly Blue

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This is the third volume in the *Bikes in Space* series

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INTRODUCTION

In April, 2011, I started to panic on the BART. For the ten-minute trip under the San Francisco Bay, each person in my range of vision was looking down at their phone, completely silent and absorbed.

I had a headache, and the changing pressure as we sped under the bay was making it worse. I forced myself to look over my shoulder at the staggeringly normal view of an old man napping and a young woman writing in a notebook.

When I looked back straight ahead, the scene was unchanged. But slowly it shifted. The man seated across from us abruptly put his phone in his pocket and began to pray. The guy with the skateboard on the other side of the doors stood up, and I saw that he had been hunched over a paperback book the entire time.

Then we came to the West Oakland stop and things started moving again.

That night, and ever since, I haven't been able to stop thinking about zombies.

Before this, I'd never been remotely interested. Shaun of the Dead was a funny, timely parable, but the gore and kitsch and Jane Austen mashups never appealed to me. But I started to read and to ask around, and what I found was much more complicated and interesting than expected.

The original zombie stories were powerful tales of witchcraft and colonial control of peoples' bodies. In the last decade, it's the colonizers who have become obsessed with zombie stories, and we have given them new, disturbing meanings. Sometimes they seem to be violent, unthoughtful parables of some sort of class or racial division gone very wrong. Other times, they read like true stories of city life, where a chronically unhealthy, lonely population slogs through their days behind the wheel of a car, while looking at their phones, mistrustful of anyone who hasn't gotten the virus; the special individualistic unbitten meanwhile hail each other as heroes, high-fiving and cracking jokes as they wreak casual destruction on everyone else. And of course these stories increasingly tap into anxieties about end of the world.

It was on that same trip in 2011 that, riding down Market Street in Oakland, we saw the giant orange billboard predicting the end of the world coming up that May 27th. We laughed about it a few times and then I forgot about it until it was suddenly all anyone was talking about on Facebook. The millennial feeling was contagious. It took some effort, for a few days, not to crack a joke about the end times, or to click "like" on the fan page for stealing everyone's stuff after the Rapture. Of course it's easy to laugh at a wingnut predicting the end of the world, when the daily news is far more dire.

Perhaps by ironically performing the events that scare us to an exaggerated degree we can soothe our real fears. Zombie marches happen at least once a year in Portland. The idea is that dozens or hundreds of people dress as zombies, with elaborate makeup and ripped clothes, and march through the streets staring vacantly and jerking their arms around. Sometimes it's a bike ride; often

culminates in a zombie prom or other kind of zombie party. Alcohol is a factor.

My friend April has been participating in these since 2006. I asked her: Why? Why do all these people want to be zombies, rather than, say, heroic zombie hunters?

“The makeup is really easy to do,” she said. “And it’s fun.”

Pressed further, she divulged that the friend who got her into the zombie scene “definitely felt like the world was turning him into a zombie.”

And finally, “Zombies are scary because *people* are scary.”

We are scary. Whether we’re more terrifying to ourselves or each other is an open question, but it’s obvious to anyone who’s been going to the movies lately that we are telling a lot of scary stories about the future of humanity. Zombie stories are by nature dystopian. Zombies signify failure—of political will and social cohesion, of technology and medicine, of the human body and soul. These are all topics that are being battled over right now, among people who care about all three worlds that this series occupies: science fiction, feminism, and bicycling. Questions permeate news and Internet discussions like: Who has power and who ought to? What forms of social or personal control are desirable and which are anathema? What is the line between life and death, humanity and inhumanity? When it comes down to it, who will survive?

Welcome to the third annual Bikes in Space. These stories may not answer every question you have about the future of humanity, but I hope they at least entertain you along the way.

Elly Blue
Portland, Oregon
June, 2015

NOTES ON ZOMBIE SPECIAL EDITION CATALOG

Jessie Kwak

From: Joanna Ecco
To: Creative Team
Re: Notes on Fall 1 Catalog

So far so good, people. Thanks for staying focused, I know it's been difficult with what's going on in the news. Also, has Tania checked in with anyone? Merchandising wants to add new product. This is not a good time for our photographer to be AWOL.

- **Raul** – I need to see finalized images by Wednesday. Consensus from Sales is to lose the blood spatters. Can you clone those out? Please tell me we don't need to reshoot.
- **Martina** – Enough with the Night of the Living Dead references in the product copy. People don't sell bikes. Specs sell bikes.
- **Steph** – Come by my office, let's go over cover options. Do we have any shots of the model where she's showing more muscle? And Sales isn't into the shotgun poses, they say it confuses customers. We're a bike catalog, not a small arms dealer.

ADDED SKUs:

- SKUs #41217 & #41218: We FINALLY got the sample product for the new Gore Bike Wear ZombieProof® Active Shell Jacket and Pants. **Martina**, product specs are on the Creative drive. Play up the bite-deterrent-yet-stylish stuff in copy, but Legal says don't make too many promises. **Steph**, shooting laydowns of these is priority one for Tania when she gets in. They're going on the commuter spread (44/45).
- SKU #43189: XLC LazerBlade® Mini U-Lock. **Steph**, hi-res image is on the Creative drive. **Martina**, emphasize the safety features on this, we don't want people thinking the lasers will turn on in their back pocket anymore. XLC swears they've worked out that bug.

DROPPING SKUs:

- The Bay Area has gone dark, so Merchandising doesn't think we can get any more Clif Bars product. Drop all carry forward Clif SKUs on the nutrition spread (32/33). Merch will turn over replacement items later this afternoon. Remaining Clif Bars will be stockpiled in the warehouse, but the news keeps saying it won't come to that around here, so no worries.

This is the approved copy for Model ZA-11 Ranger and the Model ZAP-13 UltraVolt:

RANGER: This tough-riding, indestructible commuter will get you through the Apocalypse. Hands down the most hassle-free bike on the market, with an ultra-silent Gates Carbon Belt Drive and low-maintenance Shimano Alfine Internal 11-speed rear hub. Comes standard with our patented indestructible titaniumzombonium® alloy disc brakes. Face the Apocalypse head on when you add the optional collapsible gun rack and double Uzi holster. Steel. Colors: Lava and Espresso.

ULTRAVOLT: Endurance race geometry combines with the latest in long range electroshock weaponry for a high-voltage, high-adrenaline off-road bike. 27.5" wheels handle any obstacle.

they come across —as does the quick-fire VeNom® system. The 275-volt piezo-electric projectiles stun instantly, and with a range of 30 meters and up to 25 charges, *you'll* be the menace of your local trail system. Aluminum. Colors: Citrus, Aqua.

Martina – Do we need to mention that Uzis aren't included with the Ranger? Sales is concerned about the lowest common denominator and all that. And I know you hate “zombonium.” I know it's probably just the same alloy we've always used. But R&D says it's a thing, so we use it in copy. End of story.

Raul – The graphics on the ZAP-13 need to really sizzle. Can you bring out the greens and yellow? Also, any way to show the stun gun thing in action? Questions? I'll be in my office.

Thanks,

Joanna

#

From: Joanna Ecco

To: Creative Team

Re: Re: Notes on Fall 1 Catalog

- **Steph** – I talked to Kelvin in the warehouse about helping out in the photography studio since Tania hasn't checked in. Kid has an art degree, so he can probably figure out how to work a camera. Also, can you forward a press kit to that reporter from BRAIN?
- **Raul** – The retouched ZAP-13 graphics are perfect, thanks. Unfortunately, Production just told me they're changing them. See attached file. Can we clone those in? No time to reshoot.
- **Martina** – “Great minds taste alike”? When I said no *Night of the Living Dead* references, I also meant no references to *Walking Dead* or *World War Z* or any zombie puns AT ALL. The headline should go without saying that the headline for the components spread (48/49) will not be “Chaaaaaiiinns.” Keep it classy. We're in an apocalypse, people are dying. Don't make me give you a list of outlawed words.

ADDED SKUs:

- SKU #48990: PDW BlueDiamond Taillight. **Steph**, Merchandising should have a hi-res image to you by this afternoon. **Martina**, Apparently it's a thing that they can't see the color is blue. Roll with it. PDW has a FAQ page on their website with all the specs. Again, Leg says not to make any promises. Goes on electronics spread (46/47).

DROPPING SKUs:

- ALL BELLS. Sending a separate email with specific info, but FYI, apparently they really go crazy when they hear bells. Bells are out, going forward. **Steph**, come by my office and we can discuss other options for the accessories page.
- SKU #43189: XLC LazerBlade® Mini U-Lock.

Steph and Raul – I sent you a meeting request. We need to talk about prAna's camouflage line. Do we have any other images from that shoot? I want the model to look more serene, but still wary. And the katana is overkill. Clone it out.

If you haven't heard the news, there is now a contagion alert for the whole metro area. They're recommending that we all stay put, so the guys in the warehouse are sorting out sleeping and food arrangements. Talk to Operations if you have any questions, and pass the message on to your families.

Thanks,
Joanna

#

From: Joanna Ecco
To: Creative Team
Re: Re: Re: Notes on Fall 1 Catalog

This catalog is going to the printers on Saturday. This is a hard deadline, people. I expect to see all nighters. And it's not like any of us have homes to get back to anyway.

- **Everyone** – If you see Tania DO NOT LET HER INTO THE BUILDING. Come see me if you have any questions.

ADDED SKUs:

- SKU #49181: Burley BearCub Armored Baby Trailer. Going on the kids spread (16/17). Merchandising is working on getting hi-res images, but it sounds like things are getting tough in Eugene right now. **Steph**, can you find room in the spread? We can drop the Tra SnakPaks if we need space. **Martina**, we don't have any product sheets. I'm sure you can find everything you need for copy on Burley's website.
- **Steph and Martina** – Merchandising will be doing drive-by turnovers today to fill holes in the accessories spread (24/25). A handlebar-mounted motion sensor that CatEye just released, and couple handguns to cross sell with the Detours saddlebag holster. Turns out we're a small arms dealer after all. **Steph**, can we get these to Kelvin to shoot ASAP? **Martina**, Google the specs.
- SKU #43189: XLC LazerBlade® Mini U-Lock.
- (Online only) SKU #49908: Stainless Steel Katana. Will turnover this afternoon. This is the same katana from the prAna shoot. Sales thinks it's a good cross sell. **Raul**, can you add this back into the photos? Also, we just got the camouflage shipment, and the production colors are all completely different than the samples they sent us. You'll need to color correct. Merchandising will bring them by. **Martina**, this is online copy only, please add "katana available online" to the copy block for SKU #43353 (prAna Inner Strength Bulletproof Camisole).

DROPPING SKUs:

- SKUs #41217 & #41218: Gore ZombieProof items DO NOT WORK. Turns out they've been losing testers over there. Please replace with SKU #38990 Showers Pass Zombies Parka FlakJacket – pick up the copy and images from Summer 2.

Dinner's at 6 tonight, R&D is cooking spaghetti. Creative is excused from cooking shifts until all pages release to the printer. Attendance at weapons training demos is still required – next one is at 4:30 in the break room.

Back to work, people. We have a catalog to print.

Thanks,
Joanna

RIDING THE CIRC

Jim Warrenfeltz

“You don’t drop anyone while you’re in the city. No matter what happens. No matter what you see. No matter who, or what, is after you. You don’t drop *anyone* while you’re in the city.”

I looked around at my fellow riders. We were all nodding, dutiful little students to the teacher. Yes, we all agreed, we are a team. We work as one. One for all, and all for one, and all that hokey stuff from the kidvids. Spirit of the Twenties! Together, we survive!

Never bought into it myself, and somehow I didn’t think that the collection of misfits around me did either. Take this scathead kid, Rorie, that I picked up coming up the Garden State. Found Rorie on the side of the road, trying to fix a flat while keeping eyes on all the rusty remnants. Pure paranoia. No one dead had walked out of those things for five, ten years.

“First time out of the village walls, kid?” I said, downshifting and kicking free of the pedals. Always good to announce yourself vocally. Some people can get anxious, even when you’re on a bike. Zombies don’t ride bikes, but try telling that to someone who just blew your head off. You can’t. You don’t have a head.

“Kid yourself. I’m Rorie. Rorie Fontaine?” The kid meant for it to be a statement that carried a certain impact, but the inflection at the end turned it into a question, a question that told me exactly who the Rorie Fontaine was supposed to be. Rorie was a top shit racer in a small town. Rorie might have posted a few helmetcam vids online. Maybe one had even hit a few thousand views. Probably had a few fans amongst the local brats.

“You never heard of me?”

If you have to ask, kid... “Look, I can spot for you for a few minutes. Get you back in the saddle. The Circ. I gotta get going to this thing—”

“The Circ?” A gleam in the dawn light as Rorie’s teeth flashed. Could have been a smile. Could have been a challenge.

I nodded, slowly. “Yeah. The Circ.”

“Great. You can come with, that’s where I’m headed.”

I rode sweep while Rorie led the way. Amazingly, Rorie seemed to be one of the more put-together Circcrider aspirants on the Weehauken field. Glancing past Rorie’s green mohawk, I saw many young, angry, and pimply riders, a couple who were clearly stoned, and one who didn’t even have a pac

Don't know where they thought they were going to pick up a spare tube in Old Newyork. S'pose you could just ask the zombies, real nice-like.

“Alright then, here’s the plan.” I looked back at the Circ Ride organizer. A row of studs up each ear and steely blue eyes that inspired confidence among the young and easily led; calves chiseled out of solid oak that inspired confidence in me. “We walk our bikes through the Lincoln Tunnel. It’s too jammed to ride, but if we stay on the catwalks, we’ll be fine. Any roamers in there were put down years ago. Single file, everyone stay in contact, no one panic. Nobody afraid of the dark, right?” Nervous laughs all around.

“After that, we get out, we go south. Keep the water on the right the whole ride. We keep pace, we keep *moving*. I want us rounding the southern tip in fifteen minutes, midway up FDR in thirty. Follow the line of the person in front of you. We round the top of the island in less than an hour, we’re doing good. Then it’s a straight shot down the Westside Expressway, back into the tunnel, we walk our bikes out, we’re back here in an hour and a half. Quick and painless.

“A few rules. We do *not* drop anyone in the city. We do *not* go into the heart of the city. If you get in serious trouble, you ditch your bike and you *swim*. That is why we stay by the water. It’s the Circumference Ride, not the Circ-and-a-bit-in-the-middle Ride. Swimming is safe.

“What we are doing is *illegal*. But we’re going to move fast, be in and out quick. The policebots won’t have time to tag us. And hopefully none of you is dumb enough to be carrying or wearing anything identifying.” The leader glanced doubtfully at Rorie’s green spikes.

One of the pimply, angry kids spoke up. “Hey, I heard that, like—they’re cracking down on stuff hard, right?”

The leader speared the kid a glare. “Maybe. I heard the same thing. Some people I know might not be on the streets anymore. Things are getting a little thin. If you want to drop, though, drop now. Come home now. The rest of us are doing this.”

The kid dropped their eyes. The leader continued, “If you see a zombie, call it out. Keep the pace. Have a good ride. And *no one* gets dropped in the city.”

We all nodded again, dutifully. For such iconoclasts and rugged individualists, we were easily bossed around by someone with a strong voice and piercing eyes. And great calves.

“I’m pulling. And…” the leader scanned the crowd, once, twice. Settled on me. “And I’m going to put you as sweeper, alright?”

“Alright.” Why do I have to be so competent-seeming?

There wasn't much to say after that. We scooted down the ramp into the tunnel, skirted the barricade and the signs spelling out the penalty for what we were doing, and were underground. The walk through the tunnel wasn't so bad. Dark, sure. Rustling sounds, of course. Could have been rats. I was glad to see the sun again on the other side.

We mounted up and were on the east side drive before we saw our first zombie. Just a shuffle trapped in one of those fenced-off hundred square feet of green the Old Nukers had called parks. But the groan got us going, and we made good time the next few miles for sure.

Coming 'round the top of the island twenty miles later, the initial surge of adrenaline was long gone, the kick of breaking the law was wearing off, and the Circ Ride was beginning to feel like a bust. We had seen a few more zombs, sure, and the big buildings were amazing, but the view begins to wear on you. I don't know what I was expecting.

Ruminating on these thoughts, I didn't shout out when Rorie broke from the peloton ten miles on. I simply followed, leaving the group and heading into the heart of the city.

A couple of short blocks later, weaving through the rusted, tangled, burnt-out hulks, our speed was down, on the cleared-out Westside Expressway (which, I have to admit, felt a little tamed—almost touristy and dilettante), I called out to Rorie, low and quiet, but loud enough to carry over the wind and sound of our wheels, "Where you headed?"

Rorie tossed a look over their shoulder, nodding at me. "You didn't want that kiddie stuff, right? Damned if I ride in Old Nick without seeing The Loop."

The Loop in the Park. A 10k dream ride that old-timers still talk about. In a city of millions that had once meant thousands of bikers at any time, looping through the hills and trees. A biking mecca. And of course, as the talk had it, now swarming with zombies. Not to mention open to the policebots, being unshielded from sat coverage. But still. The Loop.

"Let's do it," I said, the words spilling out of my lips before my brain formed them, pure spinal cord response.

We rode it. The whole thing. And it was glorious. Roads without rusty hulks blocking them. Zombies by the score, but too slow and sleepy in the morning sun to keep up with our pace. Blasting down one side of a hill, burning up the other, legs pumping, pumping, pumping, laughing in the morning light and veering to one side to hit a zombie with your tire pump just because you can.

But then there was the droning whine. Behind and to the left, then another behind and to the right, interfering with each other's sounds waves and making a dreadful, throbbing, high-pitched buzz. Policebots.

You don't look at a policebot. You keep your retinas to yourself. But when a shadow falls over you and you ride, you can't help it, you turn your head toward it. Instinct from when we were little monkeys and feared the piercing grip of the talons. What's old is new again.

I looked up, I admit it. And when I looked down, Rorie was in a tangle off to one side, bike wrapped around legs, green spikes of hair on the ground.

I pulled my bike to the side, clipped out and wrenched my tire pump free of the frame. I ran to Rorie's side. There were a few scratches, but nothing major I could see—the padding in Rorie's kit had done its job, and Rorie had caught the fall with gloved hands.

"You alright? Can you get up? We need to go. Now." The policebots were right over our heads, and their whining was waking up the local zombies. Dead heads and blank eyes turned toward us, noses raised in the air to catch a scent.

"You ride really well," Rorie said.

"Thanks, but—" I said, taking hold under Rorie's armpits.

"No, I mean it. Really powerful. I wanted you to know that."

I pulled up, hard, trying to lift Rorie. "Thanks, but enough of this. You can tell me when we're out of here." Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a few dozen shufflers heading our way. Fortunately, they didn't appear to be any fast-twitchers amongst them. Yet.

"Sorry," Rorie said, and jerked an arm back, punching my thigh. Burning fire spread from the impact. Rorie shrugged out of my arms, dropped a syringe, and remounted the bicycle. "The policebots will airlift you out after you get bitten. The drugs should keep you from feeling any pain as you change. I'm just telling this because you helped me, you know."

I was holding my thigh in both hands, as the fire spread down to my toes and up to my groin. "What? Why?" Cliche, but I really wanted to know. Curiosity to the point of death; another remnant from my monkey days.

"Because the power plants pay me. They always need new, strong zombies on the generator crank. And you ride really well. Powerful."

With that, Rorie was gone, the zombies were close, and the policebots were hovering overhead.

I staggered to my bike, clipped back in, and started to pedal. My one leg was dead, unable to push or pull. I lurched about horribly, barely able to keep ahead of the zombies. The policebots stayed directly over me, but it was all I could do.

There was no way I could get back to the tunnel. No way back to the water, much less off the island.
~~But there was one place I could go. Call it my monkey instincts again.~~

Which is why I ended up spending three days on the sea lion's rock in the middle of the Central Park Zoo, surrounded by water. And beyond that, zombies.

Good thing I packed well. Energy bars will get you through anything.

As to how I escaped the island? Well, Rorie was right. I ride really well. Really well.

ON EACH OTHER'S TEAM

T. M. Tomilson

Hallie had bought the bike in a moment of weakness. After she bought it, all she did was look at it. She'd had a lot of fears wrapped up in that bike. Those fears mostly had to do with getting hit by a car or falling off into traffic. She had told herself that these fears were irrational, had promised herself she'd ride to school early on a clear morning.

But by then it had been fall and it rained every day. The bike sat in her living room collecting dust. It became a makeshift coat rack and eventually disappeared beneath layers of cloth. Winter began with light snow, and then early spring brought the zombie apocalypse. As excuses went, Hallie thought the zombie apocalypse was a good one.

But it had also meant she needed to get around more than ever. And get away.

She'd thrown out some of the stuff she'd bought with the road bike. The reflective gear. The fancy pedals with their matching shoes that clipped on. She'd kept the distance tracker, the magnetic hand pump, and the repair kit. While everyone else had been running for weapons and food stores, she'd kept to the repair and hobby stores. She'd picked up a better helmet, spare tubes and tires, and a comfortable backpack. With her cycling shorts and black windbreaker, she looked like the pro she'd never been.

No, that was wrong. She looked like the pro she was becoming.

As Hallie rode, she wrote a guide in her mind. It distracted her from the burn in her legs. She thought of a lot of different titles over her hours of cycling. She was particularly enamored with "Cycling in the Post-Apocalyptic World: Each Other's Team: Cycling in the Post-Apocalyptic World."

Cycling burns a lot of calories. Keep this in mind. Before the zombies, many of us could afford to burn these calories just for kicks or for weight loss. But now we need to conserve our energy and be careful with our fuel. Be mindful that you're not pushing yourself past your limits. Take what is offered and offer what you can. We're all on each other's team now.

And whatever you do, keep these five rules in mind:

- 1. Keep your repair kit stocked.*
- 2. Never get caught out at night.*
- 3. Check your gear at every stop.*
- 4. Be mindful of fuel and distance.*

Hallie glanced at her distance tracker—36 miles down today. Lynne’s Town was just around the corner.

The pavement was cracked on this route but not as bad as in some other places. The trees hadn’t yet started to reclaim the land. She slowed and then balanced on her bike as the guards opened Lynne’s Town’s repurposed metal gate.

“Hey, Surveyor. Got any letters?” One of the guards asked. She was kitted out in body armor and was resting a hunting rifle against her left shoulder. Atop all this was a big smile and a red and white cap with a fuzzy ball on the top.

“No. I’ve got a dictate for the mayor, though,” Hallie replied. “And some news about the road between here and Beale.”

The guards exchanged glances. “You know the way then, Surveyor,” red-and-white-cap said. “You spending the night here?”

Hallie glanced at the afternoon sun. “Yeah. Don’t want to risk it.”

“See you at the gathering, then.”

Hallie nodded in agreement and rode her bike careful and slow down the path into the town square then off to the right. The familiar grey-and-white Surveyor tent came into view, with its surrounding fence of broken bicycle wheels, rusting in the open air.

She parked her bike and went inside, dropping her backpack by the door. She’d rest a bit before the gathering, where she would have to recite all of her messages.

After removing her shoes and helmet, Hallie got as comfortable as she could on a cot. She dreamed of a light snow on decaying leaves and the sound of her university’s bells until she was woken by a cough.

A woman was standing in the doorway of the tent. She wore a black headband, the symbol of a Runner heralding bad news. She’d go from tent to tent, home to home, alerting the town. “Zombies approaching from the west, Surveyor. You’ll want to get to the east entrance.”

They regarded each other for a moment. Hallie was exhausted. Her muscles were aching. She didn’t want to get back on the bike, especially not with night approaching.

But the Runner’s gaze was dark. “It’s a horde. We’ve got firepower, but our fortifications won’t hold.”

up. Not since the last time.” She shook her head. “We just finished rebuilding that section of wall last week.”

“It’s only 15 miles to the next town,” Hallie said. “The road is good. Shadeville cleared the fallen trees.”

The Runner nodded, looking grim, and pulled a parcel from the bag she carried. “Bread and honey.” She tossed it on the cot next to Hallie and watched Hallie begin to put her shoes back on.

“Good luck. Make sure Shadeville is prepared.”

“I’ll see you there.” But the Runner was already gone.

Hallie gathered her things. Then she was off, cycling against the flow of Lynne’s Town. The women all had guns and supplies and were grim faced and determined, running toward the storm and nodding as they past her.

Hallie pedaled faster, down the hill between huts and around a small garden. A Runner opened the gate for her and waved her out into the open road in the falling dusk.

She could hear gunshots, not so distant, and then distant, and then swallowed by the wind. She kept pedaling and reset her distance tracker with one hand. Just 15 miles to go.

She rode steadily until her bike began dancing on the concrete. Cursing, Hallie slowed down. Her front tire was flat. She hadn’t had time to check her gear. Foolish. She should have done that first. She flipped the bike over to inspect the tire and then glanced back in the direction she had come. There were zombies there, but so were strong walls and a lot of tough women with guns.

Safety, she thought, then shook her head. The next town had to be notified, so they could help Lynne’s Town and to prepare their own defenses.

Hallie hunkered down and focused on checking for whatever had caused the flat, ignoring the swell of panic that a zombie would come out of the ditch or from behind her.

“Rule six,” she said, keeping her breathing quiet and steady as she began to inflate the replacement tube. “It’s okay to be afraid, but don’t abandon your team, or your objective, or your purpose. Follow through. We’ve only got each other.”

THE LONG WAR

Bob Simms

Angie turned in a slow circle. To the east and west the A2 stretched to the horizons, clogged with rusting vehicles. To the north, the ground dropped down in a steep embankment. It was the south that bothered her. Thick woods were beginning to encroach onto the road's shoulder.

"Do you remember films?" said Lisa.

"What?" Angie turned back to her companion. Lisa screwed up her face as she levered the tyre back onto the rim.

"You know. Movies."

"Of course."

"So in the movies, you just had to shoot a zombie in the head, right? Bang, and it was over. Why can't real life be like that?"

Angie turned back to the woods. Something rustled in the leaves. A bird?

"You ever have an intellectual conversation with one?"

"Ha! I guess not."

Angie shrugged. "No need for brains, then. No need for any central nervous system. All they need to do is breed, and no one ever needed brains for that." There was definitely something there in the long grass, by the hawthorn. "You done yet?"

"Nearly. Just need to pump it up and hope the patch holds." Lisa mounted the wheel onto her upended bike and gave it an experimental spin.

"Okay." Angie stepped over the central barrier and edged slowly towards the trees.

"What is it?" called Lisa. Angie ignored her. The hawthorn suddenly thrashed, causing her heart to jump into her throat.

"Angie? What is it?"

Angie stopped where the hard shoulder began and stared into the shadows. There was something there

on the ground, something big. It jerked and she caught a glimpse of a limb. She turned and strode back to the bikes. Lisa stood there, pump in hand, searching her face.

“Zombie,” confirmed Angie. She opened the lid of the bike trailer and rummaged through the containers of petrol they’d scavenged.

“It’s not a dog, is it? I hate it when it’s a dog. I had a dog, you know, Before.”

Before. It always had a capital, even in speech. No one needed to ask before what.

Angie pulled a gallon Jerry can from the trailer. “No, it’s not a dog.” She shook it. Half full. She replaced it and hauled out a full one. Lisa caught the significance and her hand flew to her mouth.

“Oh God, really? Out here? What were they doing?”

Angie shrugged. “Masks and gloves,” she said, pulling on her own. She unscrewed the top of the pressure sprayer and carefully filled it with the precious fuel, then pumped the handle until the pressure was right.

Lisa was masked already when Angie hoisted herself into the straps. She hefted a pickaxe in her gloved hands.

“Ready?” she said.

Angie shook her head. “Never am, not for this. Let’s get it over with. And I don’t care if it is a dog, anything comes out of that wood you smash its head in, right?”

“Right.”

“And if it’s... if it’s not a dog, you do the same.”

Lisa nodded, her eyes wide above the mask.

They made their way over the central barrier and across the cracked tarmac to the shoulder. The verges beyond sloped up to the wood. Under the trees a wooden fence peeked out here and there from a mass of brambles and bindweed. Lisa stopped three feet shy of the body and stared. Angie stepped up beside her.

“You need to go further on,” she said gently. “Between me and the woods. Lisa?”

“Yeah.” Lisa tore her gaze away. “Yeah, right. Further on. You think there’s more?”

“More like that? No. It’s days old. If there are any, they’ll not be in any state to bother us.” It was easier, calling them ‘it’. It was just meat, days old and rotting. It didn’t have a name. It had never laughed or had friends or...

Angie shook her head and forced herself to concentrate. It had been male, judging by the clothes, and mature, judging by its size. The flesh was purple-black. It lay face down where it had fallen. Bite marks on its leg indicated scavenging.

“Eyes and ears, Lisa. Something’s had a bite of it.” She glanced up. Lisa stood between her and the woods, but she was looking back, staring at the corpse. “For Christ’s sake, Lisa, get your head on Eyes front. Cover me.”

“Right.” Lisa turned back to the wood, shifting her weight nervously from foot to foot.

Angie held up the long nozzle and pressed the trigger, watching the spray of fuel arc through the air and cover the body. Suddenly it convulsed, limbs flying. Its head twisted and she saw the nightmare of a face contort. Lisa swore.

“Can’t we kill it first?” she asked.

“It’s dead already. Look at it. It’s been dead for days. Weeks, probably. You know how it works. The virus causes random electrical spasms. Movement attracts predators. That’s all it is. It’s the virus trying to reproduce.” Angie gave a vicious kick at the leaf mould, sending a wave of leaf matter and dirt over its head, hiding the obscene mockery of a face. “And if you don’t want to end up the same way, keep your bloody eyes on the wood. A fox or something has been at it.”

She made sure Lisa was watching the woods before she resumed spraying the corpse.

“It’s never going to end, is it?” said Lisa. Angie glanced up. At least Lisa was still facing the wood.

“Yeah, it will, eventually. Not tomorrow, and not completely, but it’ll get better. We’ve just got to keep fighting it. Eventually it’ll burn itself out. It has to. It’ll run out of hosts, reproduction will slow and we’ll develop a resistance. In the end it’ll be like the Black Death, consigned to remote pockets and then, eventually, it’ll be just history.”

“Not in our lifetime.”

The sprayer sputtered and spat the last of the petrol onto the body. Angie pulled out the matches. “Maybe not, but that’s not the point. We keep fighting it now, so it ends in somebody’s lifetime.” She struck the match and started the fire.

THE BREEDERS

Emily June Street

My cotton underwear felt oddly sticky between my thighs. I rose and pulled down my pajama shorts. Shock, horror, and a tiny drop of wonder bubbled in my stomach. *What the hell?* A big splotch marred my underwear. It was definitely blood, still damp.

“Holy crap.” My whole body trembled as I considered the ramifications of this blood.

I pulled out fresh underwear and the cotton undershirt I wore beneath my work jumpsuit, tearing the tee into shreds to soak up the blood. I burned the stained panties in the bathroom sink.

“It’s Maddy Morgan,” I said into my comm-box. “I woke up this morning feeling off. Some kind of stomach bug. I’m taking a sick day.”

I tried to recall what women did about the blood before the Event, but I had only been a few years old. I had always assumed I would be like the vast majority of women who came of age after the Event—so messed up hormonally that I’d never menstruate or be fertile. From what I could recall of my mother, she must have worked right through her cycle. I shivered. Work was not an option. Any engineer’s nose would smell my blood a block away.

I lay on my bed, kneading my sore belly. I felt jittery and more than a little scared. No one talked much about the Event—a worldwide plague, alien attack, or massive experiment gone wrong—depending on whom you asked. We’d all simply accommodated ourselves to its effects, the main one being human reproductive failure.

About seven years before, Sector scientists had perfected “a viable reproductive alternative.” Basically, it amounted to reanimating preserved dead bodies—rich people who had been cryofrozen using experimental technologies back in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They had wanted to live forever and were now having their moment. Their century-old corpses were being defrosted and reanimated. Unfortunately, only the male gametes proved viable.

This left women like me—the one percent who produced eggs and menstruated against all odds—provide the other half of the equation. “For the good of the species,” as the slogan went.

Unless I wanted to become Breeder Camp’s latest poster child, I’d need to lay low for at least five days. Could a sense-enhanced agent detect my fertility aside from smelling my blood? Were there other associated odors? I didn’t know.

First thing, I needed to get more tee shirts to make more pads. I had to risk one outing. I grabbed Blue my bike, a triumph of parts scavenged from junkyards far and wide, and pedaled to the local supply

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