HSFD: High Security Food Delivery

Mission Alpha

 “Shots fired, shots fired”, I screamed into my mic as I ran away from the front door of a small brick house on a hill, spraying rounds blindly behind me. Seconds before I had been standing in the dark, knocking on the front door of the brick house. I was trying to get the damn fool customer to come out so I could give them their pizza. Cussing under my breath I heard a creaking above me and looked up just in time to see a monstrous creature standing on the eve of the roof slicing its clawed hands towards my head.

How big were the claws you ask? Big enough to make a combat veteran and ex-cop scream like a little girl and sprint to his armored vehicle. I was a solo driver just trying to deliver food to the beleaguered residents of the small town of Kernersville. Oh what joy!

 As all good combat stories go, the next phrase here should be *and there I was*, but let's skip that part. So, there I was, sprinting and spraying as I dove towards the vehicle and rolled under it. And let me assure you that a combat roll and scramble under a vehicle for a forty three year old fat guy is not the least bit graceful under the best of circumstances. Breath heaving, body armor choking me and my helmet bouncing off the transmission I tried to contort my body to bring my rifle back in line with where I knew the nightmare on legs would be coming from.

Just as I got my sight picture to the right area, there was nothing there. Nothing, nada, zilch. My inner monologue went from *oh shit, oh shit, oh shit* at nine thousand RPM to a clueless *where the hell did it* *go* somewhere around two thousand RPM. I scanned the darkness as the chicken shit left my brain and some semblance of training took over. Scanning the dark with my eyes and listening over my thundering pulse, I tried to figure out where the beastie went.

 A resounding thump echoed from above me. The whole truck, a converted frankenstein version of what had once been a pickup truck, shuddered violently. Whatever the monstrously mutantized being currently wanting to rend me limb from limb was, it had landed on top of the vehicle. I took a quick breath and rolled, or maybe sprawled, out from under the truck while aiming my combat rifle towards the beastie. As I drew a bead on the monster I finally got a good look at it in the beam of the flashlight. And froze like a rabbit in the path of a speeding transfer truck. It was a Durock. A friggin’ Durock, really?

As this wonderful moment of realization hit me, some small voice somewhere between gonads and thought made me wonder what strange minor deity was so very pissed at me tonight. Talk about bad luck, next I’d be drawing to an inside straight! Durocks were one of the first hellish mutations to come after the virus and subsequent vaccinations began changing people into monsters straight from every horror writer's worst nightmares. Fast, seven feet tall, with black and green patchwork skin and giant oversized hands ending in scimitar style claws, Durocks were seriously hard to kill. Did I also mention they were ugly? Like, seriously, even beer goggles in a country bar at two A.M. wouldn’t be enough for this thing.

 I quickly aimed for the bulbous head and squeezed off five rounds of 300 Win Mag into it’s melon. The rounds seemed to disorient the thing so I kind of crawled and shimmied back and onto my butt as I continued to place precise fire into its football of a head, watching as the green ichor flashed in the air and sparkled in the beam of the flashlight. After maybe fifteen rounds, who can count while faced with the bad breath monster from hell anyway, the Durock began to sway and slowly fall forward from the roof of the truck. It fell right beside me, almost pinning me like a tree falling on…… ok so well it almost pinned me to the asphalt. Hey, I’m a shooter and a pizza boy, you think I have a theasaurus or writeasaurus or whatever? Geez…

 Knowing full well that there was no way this thing was dead, I managed to actually stand up without tripping over myself, or anything else, and actually probably looked pretty cool. And just when I was feeling confident and kind of awesome, the monster swiped it’s arm back towards me, slamming it’s fist into my body armor and spinning me ass over tea kettle into a ditch. Yeah, I’m awesome all right.

Wheezing for breath and my head pounding I regained my vision just in time to see the Durock standing a few feet in front of me flexing its claws and making this horrible growling hissing sound that I just knew was not a term of endearment. As my rifle had somehow managed to stay attached to my tac harness, I desperately jerked the rifle in line with the monster's legs and burned the rest of the mag into the general area where I thought the things knees should be. Down it went, felled like a mighty oak. Ichor sprayed in the dark and it shrieked in it’s weird hissing psuedo-language. It hit the pavement with a very satisfying plop. Knowing this might be my only shot, I drew the combat knife from my belt, dove onto the thing like a fat kid pouncing on ice cream (Hey I was the fat kid okay) and began stabbing repeatedly into what I hoped was its eye cavity. It spasmed and jerked as I rammed the blade into its slimy head until it finally stopped moving. I fell off it gasping for air and seeing tiny sparkles in my field of vision.

 Of course, it was at this point that I heard the front door of the house creak open and a querulous voice call, “why didn’t you knock, our food’s late”. Laying on the ground, enjoying the mild hallucinatory effects of exertion based hypoxia, I managed to hold up my shaking arm towards the customer and introduce them to my dear friend and mascot, the middle finger. Oh, how I love being a pizza boy or man or whatever. Phew.

 I guess I should explain how the fun filled world of food delivery became an armed contact sport and where I began to fit into it. Boring history first, hey, I had to suffer through it and so can you. Where was I? Oh yeah, how I arrived here on the asphalt gasping for breath and praying I didn’t have stains in the groin region of my BDU’s.

In and around the year 2020 some genius thought it would be a good idea to release a bio weapon into the human population. Yeah, great long term planning there huh? The virus swept the globe in months causing millions of deaths and slowing global society to a crawl. Folks were afraid to leave their homes and jobs were hard to find. Having left the soul corrupting field of law enforcement a few months before and having recently endured my wife cleaning out our home and bank account one day while I was out looking for work; I was desperately trying to find my place in a civilian world.

Being heavily tattooed, kind of muscular, and definitely lacking common sense I applied to the local Momma Johnnies pizza place. I mean, when your skill sets mainly focus on the application of appropriate force and how to enjoy a perfect donut, what else are you supposed to do right? Taking a minimum wage job mainly to piss off Satan’s Second in Command, my soon to be ex-wife, I thought I could just ride the situation out until something better came along.

 For months the virus continued to run around the globe, popping up randomly in places where health officials insisted that they had it under control. The changes globally and here in America to everyday life were astounding. The Great Lock Down of 2020, as it would later be called, locked Americans in their homes unable to leave for fear of contracting the virus. Travel slowed, the Earth actually cooled two degrees, and the internet became a whole new world. We persevered through the loss, the loneliness, and the heart ache. Dr. John Corvax of somewhere and so forth identified the virus and all but single handedly introduced first a rapid agonist test for the virus and then a revolutionary vaccine that modified the body’s immune system to specifically fight off the virus. Over the next few months the virus, now known as Corvax-7, slowly ground to a halt and the world felt hope again. News agencies touted Dr. Corvax as a hero and he was celebrated globally as the savior of Humankind. But nothing’s ever that easy right?

 For me, I can’t say as I really noticed. Fighting to feed the divorce attorneys and keep myself afloat took all my time. I took basic precautions and drove on. I was a fortyish male living the stereotypical country song and trying to restart my life. I mean, the virus couldn’t be as bad as my wife right? And then the disappearances started. No one noticed at first. People vanish every day for lots of reasons. I’d considered heading into the wind myself a time or two. Then, whole towns started going dark. Leaked footage of horrible massacres were posted on the web with no explanation. More months went by and everyone began having an unexplainable feeling of dread. Something just wasn’t right, you know?

 On a fine Spring evening in 2021 National News Reporter Debby something or another (who remembers) was doing a live news broadcast piece in Michigan. As she cheerfully droned into the camera about another horrible tragedy, she was attacked on camera by a seven foot clawed monster. The first Durock ever to make a TV appearance. I wonder who his agent was?

At this point there was no way to hide the truth from America or the world. The weird disappearances were the result of two items. One, the vaccine which had given the world so much hope was responsible for horrible genetic and magical mutations. Dr. Corvax had been not only a brilliant scientist but a student of the occult. Somehow Dr. Corvax had combined the two disciplines to create a vaccine to save the world and had destroyed it instead. Two, these mutations weren’t just Durocks. They became a whole host of critters all hungry for good old destruction. Many of these creatures are still evolving. Becoming something other.

 Enter stage left, your hero, the forty three year old pizza boy. As the mutations began to spread, towns became vacant and people holed up wherever they could. But the weird thing was that they seemed to want to ignore what was happening. It was like people didn’t want to believe there was a slavering ghoul outside eating the neighbors dog and then the neighbor. As food became scarce and the economy buckled, a new industry formed. High Security Food Delivery.

Formerly governed by a world of rejects and a few honest folks seeking extra cash, the food delivery industry became an armed service of rejects and a few honest folks just trying to stay alive. And so I took my responsibilities as senior delivery boy… uummmm… person, and field medic with a dose of salt and a full cup of black coffee. We still work for tips by the way.

Having learned to breath again, I grunted and groaned my way into an approximation of standing and began hobbling my way to the truck, before remembering a vital rule known to every combat veteran. Always straighten your gear before trying to walk after enjoying a roll and romp on the ground. Why, you may ask? Because as I took my first step my thigh holster reached around and slapped me right in the cojones causing a fun return to the hypoxic neverland of pain. See folks, these are the things you only learn through the rough fun of the cruelest teacher, experience. Gasping for breath yet again, really who did I piss off, and grunting and groaning like a parapatetic monkey, I slowly walked down the cement driveway, past the ornate brick mailbox, and back to my truck for a fresh magazine and a strong pull of black coffee; that substance which gives meaning to the universe.

 Climbing into the cab of the frankentruck I lined up all my gear, swapped mags, and prepared myself for the drive back to the shack. To be honest, I loved the frankentruck. My buddy James and his amazing wife Kris helped me weld and reinforce the frame and I upgraded every piece in the vehicle before covering the windows with old fencing and placing large plate steel on the front bumper and rear as well as a metric ton of lighting. There was nothing slim, sleek, or streamlined about the monstrosity of a vehicle. It was large and loud and slow as molasses in December but she just wouldn’t die. Yep, me and the frankentruck were a mated pair. She’d been far more faithful than my wife, the Evil Empress of the Galaxy ever was. Maybe after my divorce I’ll marry the frankentruck. At least she’ll never cheat on me unless the right auto parts store is open. Sigh.

 Somewhat regaining my composure I could hear Izzy, the Shacks dispatcher, droning through the truck mounted radio but not my shoulder mic. “MJ Shack to Braxus, come in Braxus”, her voice echoed in the truck’s cab. Wincing a little at the volume I picked up the mic and put the frankentruck in gear.

“Braxus here, Shack, cancel responding units, threats been neutralized. Returning to the Shack.”

Izzy’s voice came back tiny through the speaker, “Braxus are you having flashbacks again or did you slip something in that crap you call coffee? What threat?”

It was at this point that I realized I must have reached that golden moment known as senility. Yep, hero ex-cop and combat medic, smarter than your average bag of hammers, I realized that my terror-filled shriek of “shots fired” had not gone out over my trusty handy dandy radio because the shoulder mic had malfunctioned again. Hence why I was hearing Izzy in the truck but not from my shoulder mic. This was a wonderful evening in paradise.

“Braxus to base, nevermind Izzy it doesn’t matter, I’m on the way back eta 20 minutes”, I said, turning the corner out of Thornaby Circle and heading up Martindale Rd. I could hear Izzy’s return snort, tiny but true through the radio.

“You’ve gone and started trouble again haven’t you? You’re always such a shit magnet”, she proclaimed. “You better get back, Seg’s throwing things again and orders are piling up”. Seg had been the manager of the Momma Johnnies I worked at before Covax and had stayed the manager and leader once it basically became a FOB or Forward Operating Base because none of us with real experience wanted the damn job. But he was an honest leader who looked out for his people so we didn’t fuss, well not too much anyway. Hey, it is a time honored and much respected custom of the mudfoot in every conflict across time to kvetch about their leadership. It is a custom as holy as the Euchrist ok?

 Turning onto Kernersville road and approaching the main armed checkpoint leading back into town I replied over the radio, “Yes, dear”. Hearing her indignant squawk and then silence I knew I had scored a point in defending against her unwarranted verbal jab against my beloved coffee. Rolling slowly towards the checkpoint I was speared in the eyes by the huge spotlight one of the Guards just absolutely had to aim directly into the cab of the frankentruck.

It was like being hit by a small sun going nova full in the face. I locked down the brakes of the truck and held my middle finger out the window towards the spotlight, and the son of a cow manning it and yelled, “turn that damn thing off before I climb up there and hand you your lungs”! Amazingly, just when I started feeling my eyeballs begin to melt behind my closed eyelids, the spotlight snapped off and one of the guards stepped up to the driver side window of the frankentruck.

“You made it back Braxus, I’m disappointed in you”, Senior Guard Henson said to me.

“Why whatever do you mean, Oh Great and Mighty Guardsman who cannot figure out I just friggin’ rode through here a few minutes ago”, I asked, maybe a little peevishly.

Ok, so it was kind of childish but that spotlight was really bright and these yahoos really did enjoy giving us a hard time. SG Henson laughed.

 “See any Durocks out there”, he asked. “I bet two cans of beans and a blanket you wouldn’t make it back.”

I thought about this for a minute before my last three brain cells decided to work together instead of skittering around inside my skull like rabid gerbils on crack and realized that SG Henson had known there was a Durock loose in the direction I was heading and hadn’t warned me. Now, I have something of a temper issue. I’m not proud of it and I work really hard to control it, but when my temper starts getting out of hand my face turns as red as my hair and my hands start this fine trembling, mainly because I’m resisting the urge to do something extremely and exceedingly violent. I believe SG Henson saw this reaction and suddenly realized that not only had he lost a couple of cans of beans, he was close to wearing his scrotum as a hat.

“Let him through boys”, he yelled and hastily backed away from the Frankentruck before sprinting back behind the barrier. Hopefully he was the one who now had embarrassing stains near the groin region of his uniform. It would be the least I could do to return the favor. Really folks, I’m a giver!

I calmed my breathing and forced myself to drive slowly through the gate and down the road instead of introducing SG Henson to my favorite combat knife. Sighing softly as my anger faded I drove on to the Shack and hopefully the end of a bad shift as the greatest forty three year old delivery boy in the world.