

Compton's Epoch

An Ashfall Apocalypse Short

M.L. Banner



Toes in the Water Publishing, LLC

Copyright © 2022 by Michael L. Banner.

All rights reserved.

Compton's Epoch is an original work of fiction. The characters and dialogs are the products of this author's vivid imagination.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

Preface

Here is the recording I promised you, Leticia.

Because you're a storyteller, I've broken up the story in chapters, as if this were a recorded book... a fairly small book.

I ask that you have the others listen to this.

Now to anyone else listening, if you wish to avoid most of my ramble, at least listen to the end of this recording. This should answer your question about why I did what I did.

Chapter 1

My story? It's really not that interesting. I'm no one special. I was never a hero. I never had a chance to be, as I was never even deployed after graduating my SEAL training: I was on convalescent leave to visit my dying father in Corpus Christi... Then the tsunami struck the Gulf Coast before I could get there...

That makes for a somewhat interesting tale. Because you could say it led to my epoch. That is, when the shit—oh sorry—crap hit the fan, my purpose in life changed.

I was coming from Houston, through Victoria when the waves hit.

I jammed on my brakes, nearly fishtailing my Jeep. Without warning the bridge in front of me was covered by a churning mass of debris and water. Then that mass began surging toward me.

It wasn't shock that froze me for a long moment. It was my brain just trying to make sense of it. There was no rain in the forecast. So why would the Guadalupe flood? More nonsensical, it was flowing uphill, from the south...

Tsunami!

I did a quick U-turn forgetting to check for oncoming traffic. The deep horn of a semi screamed at me, then swerved around, narrowly missing me because I was in his lane. It zoomed past and drove right into the oncoming debris.

My brain chewed on the concept of a tsunami, even though Victoria was 20 miles away—as the seagull flies—from the Gulf. All I could do was gas it and make some quick decisions.

If I continued back the way I had come, and the tsunami was traveling up from the Gulf, then I'd run into it again, at a low-lying point, maybe another mile away. If I was that lucky. I had to get to higher ground. But where? This was South Texas.

At I-185, I headed north into Victoria, even though the town had little more elevation than the bridge that had just washed out. And the Guadalupe, wrapped around much of the town. Every bridge out would be impassible when the waves hit, cutting off my way north. But I had an idea.

There were crashing sounds to my left, presumably the waves were flowing up the lower area of the Guadalupe. If I had made it past the Guadalupe, I would have been on the other side of it and headed north, into the higher elevations of the Hill Country. Now, on this side of it, I had maybe one chance. Maybe.

There was more traffic and the road narrowed. Still, I plunged my foot on the gas pedal and brought the Jeep up to nearly seventy. Then I had to slow again.

The crashing sounds grew louder.

The area I was headed to was still low-lying. During the '98 floods, much of this whole area was underwater. But up ahead was my salvation.

When I zigged into a hard left turn, the Jeep lurched sideways, up onto two wheels for just a second, almost flipping me. "Hold on buddy," I said, as if that would coax my vehicle back onto all fours.

I could see my destination now. It was the tallest building in Victoria, at around two-hundred feet tall. Hopefully it was enough.

The light turned red, bringing me to a stop. The tower was only two blocks away.

The road beneath me rumbled, like from an earthquake.

A group of kids were being led hand-in-hand, by a pretty woman in a sundress. They marched past me and then halted. The woman looked around, no doubt searching for the rumble's origin. One of the kids started to cry. Then another.

There was no time for this.

I stood up in my seat and searched for a sign of the calamity that was about to hit us all. I saw no sign of it; only the sound.

The light turned green, but no one moved.

I jumped out of the Jeep and ran to the woman.

At first she looked perplexed, then startled when she saw me approach.

Horns honked.

"There's a tsunami coming," I yelled at her and anyone else willing to listen.

This sounded stupid when I had said it. And the woman's face turned from startled to scared. I feared it

was because of me and not my warning.

"Come on kids," she commanded, yanking on her closest kid, a cute little girl with a pink bow in her hair, who then yanked on the boy she was connected to and so on down the line of kids. But they were headed away from the tower to the one-story public library.

The rumble grew even louder.

The Navy taught me to draw on every remaining ounce of strength to protect my teammates; to accomplish our mission... But what the hell am I supposed to do about this?

I reached between the woman and the little girl, yanking the two apart. I grabbed both their arms and pulled them toward the other side, commanding, "Kids your teacher and I are going to that tower. Come on." I pulled hard, almost sending the little girl to the ground. The woman screamed. I continued pulling against both of their resistance.

Maybe I could have handled it better, but I saw little choice. And I didn't know how to deal with kids.

Then the wave was visible, up ahead of us. It was racing up the side street too. We were out of time.

"Come on! We have to get to high ground." I bellowed.

"Let go of—" the woman screamed, still attempting to go the other way. Then she gave up her resistance. "Oh my, God," she huffed.

A few feet later, we were all running.

"Everyone, get to the stairs," I hollered, as we burst into the tower at the same time the water crashed through the street. The water followed us into the building seconds later. I had already hoisted the little

girl into an arm and continued to pull on the chain of kids with my other hand. The teacher had collected a kid that had fallen from the chain and was now beside me.

We beat a path toward the sign that said "Stairs," when all of us were sent to the floor.

It was a whirlpool of water, people and debris that pushed us toward the back of the building.

The chain of kids was broken.

I still had a hold of the one boy and the girl. But I lost track of the others.

The water's flow slowed up enough for me to gain footing. So, I hoisted both kids up and to the stairwell. "Go to the top," I instructed. Then I went back to look for the teacher and the other kids. I don't know why I had taken responsibility for them. But if I didn't, who would?

Another wave hit, with even greater force just as I had fished another child out of the water.

Something struck me in the head and for a moment I went foggy. But I caught a glimpse of one more child and snatched her out of the water too. Those two were also taken to the stairwell and given instructions to go up. When I returned once more to the chaos, the water was already chest-high and getting deeper.

Worse, I couldn't see any more of the kids. But I caught a glimpse of the teacher. She was struggling to stay above water, seemingly taking in more water than breaths of air. She saw me just before she went under. So did I.

There was probably more dirt underneath than water. But I was used to no-vis situations, so I grabbed

where I hoped she would be. Luck was on both of our sides, and I pulled her up.

She coughed and gagged and told me, "I can't do this," before she went limp in my arms.

"Bullshit," I hollered, like my instructors did to me, when I wanted to quit. "The kids!" I commanded.

She half-nodded and I felt her grip on me strengthen. "There," she said, feebly pointing to a small form in the water.

"I got him. You go to the stairwell and help the others."

I let go of her and went after the little boy.

Time evaporated. I remembered fishing out a couple more kids and someone in a business suit. But when the first floor was completely submerged, it was time to move up.

The second floor was filling up fast, and I had to coax a couple of injured in the stairwell to get moving higher to the top floor. One remained, nearly at the third floor, either unable to or unwilling to move. She looked like a discarded pile of wet laundry. It was the teacher.

I had seen some sorry looking people come from the water. She was the sorriest. She was crying and cradling her broken forearm. Nothing else looked insured. Except maybe her pride.

"Where are the kids?" I yelled loud enough to be heard over the rumble below us.

"I don't know," she whined. "I can't move. My arm is broken."

My First Phase proctor, who was one of the instructors who helped me make it through BUD/S, taught me about the 40% rule: when your mind is

telling you to quit, your body has actually used only 40% of its potential. This woman probably hadn't even used 10%.

"My arm is broken too—I showed her the swollen purple knot on my left forearm—and I'm twice as old as you, but if I gave up you would have drowned and so would those kids. They need you now." I offered a hand to help her up.

We walked all the way up to the 19th floor.

Before you ask, no we didn't save them all. The little girl with the pink bow in her hair... Even though she was among the first I had pulled out and carried to safety, she ignored my orders to go all the way up the stairs. Instead, she went back into the water in the vain attempt to try and find her brother, who at some point I had pulled out anyway. But we never found the little girl, because she didn't do what I told her!

Sometime that afternoon, I laid on the carpeted floor of some lawyer's waiting room, watching the world churning below us. The waters had already begun receding when I passed out from fatigue.

Chapter 2

“I’m Tiffany,” the young teacher introduced herself when she saw I was awake.

“Compton,” I said back, with what I guessed was a poor attempt at a smile. As you know, I’m not big on social graces.

She giggled and then grimaced. “What didn’t they give you a first name?”

I don’t find a need to say anything more. I gave her a quick eyeball, and the kids who were mostly sleeping around us. It was surprising that Tiffany and the surviving kids appeared to have avoided any serious injuries. But her arm would need to be set.

After much complaining and more tears, I created a sling for Tiffany’s arm using my long sleeve shirt. She agreed to find medical attention and have the kids checked out to be sure.

She insisted that I stay with them.

Not that I wasn’t interested. She was certainly attractive, though not my type. More importantly, I felt a need to get on the move. So, I said my goodbyes, excusing it off to my need to find my Jeep and see if

there was any chance my father had survived this thing. It became immediately obvious that neither of them had a chance.

Walking on foot was slow going. The road south was utterly destroyed and got worse the closer to the Gulf I traveled. It just wasn't possible to get to Corpus Christi, except maybe by hot air balloon. Still, I tried to trudge my way for a few miles, before giving up and returning north. I was without any plan of where I should go or what I should do next at that point.

After leave to visit my sick father, who had just gone into hospice, I was due for additional TRP training at Coronado. I wasn't sure Coronado even existed anymore, based on radio reports we'd been listening to in the tower. At this point, I was just looking to survive.

It was just after sunset, somewhere close to Cuero, Texas, when I heard a plea for help.

I called out and got an instant reply, "I'm down here."

The road had a steep embankment, which was full of garbage washed in and out by the tsunami. After calling again and getting another reply, I found Tommy Bell.

Tommy was in the passenger seat of an older model sedan, half buried in muck. I'm not sure how he didn't drown, much less get seriously injured.

Somehow, he had managed to use his free hand to pull out his other arm. But that was as far as he could go. Between the thick mud and his seatbelt, he said he was stuck and would eventually die. My only tool on me was a pocketknife with a belt cutter. So with one swipe, his belt was severed and I pulled him out.

"Thanks man. My name is Tommy," he said, shaking my hand enthusiastically.

"Compton," I said, letting go. "No one else in the car?"

His eyes watered and he swatted at them with his muddy mitts. "Um, my girlfriend was the driver."

What could I say? I watched the young man, who was coated in mud from head to toe, as tears leaked out.

"Do you have any water?" he begged.

"No, but I'm sure we can find some in Cuero, which should be pretty close to us."

He nodded and we walked for maybe another half a mile before the road was mostly free of debris. There we saw a light.

Conversations and weak lantern light bled through a series of connected canopy tents. It reminded me of a mobilized medical unit, though only pickups, instead of military vehicles, surrounded the network of tents.

It wasn't surprising when several people in medical gear ran to Tommy. I must have looked rough too, because they also swarmed me and asked me if I needed help.

After some water and some hot food, and the ability to clean up, we sat on our assigned cots and listened to their conversations about what happened here and in other coastal towns around the world.

When one said, "It's like the end of the world," Tommy popped up from his cot, eyes somewhat wild. He looked like an Evangelical locked inside a whorehouse. His skin practically crawled.

"Tommy, where are you going?" I asked.

"I have to get to my mom's house in Hill Country," he said. I figured it was all the talk about the death and destruction that was getting to him, especially considering what happened to his girlfriend.

"In what?" I asked. "That's at least thirty miles from here."

"My truck is parked at my girlfriend's, just outside of town. I was driving her car." He looked down, as if embarrassed by this admonition.

"Okay... But it's pitch black out, and remember they said some of the roads are impassible. Why don't you wait till morning and then go?" I hated when people took rash actions because they were scared. I saw it happen all too often. Even in BUD/S, one of the candidates, who later washed out, panicked in an exercise that almost killed several of us.

Tommy took a breath, looked at me and then nodded. "Yeah, you're probably right."

He sat back down on his assigned cot, scrunched up the little pillow and laid his head on it.

Sometime in the late evening, with the sounds of hushed conversations in the background, I fell asleep.

Chapter 3

“Hoooyay,” Tommy said to me
“You’re not a SEAL, are you?” I asked him, while slipping an arm into the clean shirt donated to me, over my blue/gold T. The other arm—with the trident tattoo, inked on my bicep—was slid into the other.

“Me?” Tommy said. “No! I applied but didn’t make it through their testing. But my dad was a SEAL. He died in Syria.

“Wait, aren’t you coming with me?” he asked.

I had already laced up my boots and planned to leave. Tommy was fine, and as he had mentioned, his girlfriend’s house and his truck were close by. Still, I felt a need to keep moving, though I didn’t know where. “I need to get back on the road, like I was when I found you.”

“Why don’t you come with me. I’m going to just pick up my truck and drive to my house... well, my Mom’s house. There’s a lot of food there and I have some AR’s. You could have one. And then you could wait this out...”

"Wait what out?" I asked, as I watched Tommy make haste, putting on the jeans, buttoning a shirt and tennies he too had been given.

He grabbed one of the bottled waters they left by his cot. "You know, the end of the world?" He stood by me, making an obvious show that he was following no matter what I said. I had no plans to look after someone, but I saw no harm in walking the few miles to his girlfriend's place.

"I'll admit the tsunamis all over were bad. But that's hardly a sign of the end of the world." I started walking, waiving to the nurse who I had already thanked for hers and the others' kindness.

"You don't know?" He asked in lockstep with me.

"What?"

"The volcanoes," he said. His eyes were fixed on me, maybe examining my reaction.

"Can you explain this, so I don't have to keep asking you?"

"Sorry man. You see, there are a bunch of volcanoes around the world that are all going off right now, starting with Antarctica."

"Okay, so what?" I was getting a little frustrated.

"Well, one volcano is not a problem. But lots of them, all erupting at the same time... That's called Armageddon; you know the end of the world, like in the Bible."

"Go on."

"Well, if those volcanoes continue to erupt, they'll send ash all over the world, and the ash will blot out the sun, and everything will die, and we'll be plunged into a new ice age."

"How do you know all of this?"

"I'm a member of a group called, The Patriots. They have a weekly podcast and have been preparing for the end of the world, which they said was now. That's why I came down to get my girl..." He sniffled and then continued. "Anyway, turns out the founder of The Patriots lives near my house. I figured if... You know?"

"—The shit hits the fan?"

"Yeah. Anyway, you should come along. You're welcome to stay as long as you like. It's a large house, with lots of rooms. And besides, you're a fricking SEAL. You can do stuff. And my Mom would love to have another SEAL in the house."

We marched along the road quietly.

Under any other circumstance, I would have rejected his offer. But considering what the doctors and nurses said, and now what Tommy added, his offer was not bad. At a minimum, I could tag a long and wait until I connected with someone in authority in or around Coronado.

"Okay," I said. "I'll come with you."

"Hooyah!" he said, thrusting his fist in the air.

"Hooyah," I said back, with less enthusiasm than Tommy. He meant well.

We walked in quiet the four miles to Tommy's girlfriend's house, lost in our own thoughts. But every few minutes, each of us glanced up at the sky.

Overhead, dark, ominous clouds rolled in, blocking out most of the sun.

I'd had to admit, at that moment, I was starting to wonder if in fact the world was coming to an end.

Chapter 4

“What do you think of this?” Tommy announced, as he walked into the kitchen where I was drinking a third glass of milk. He was brandishing what looked like a high-tech tomahawk.

“You planning to scalp someone with that thing, Kemosabe?”

“Nope. It’s for zombies.”

I remember choking on my milk, and that it was just as unpleasant as an adult, as it was when I did this as a kid. “Excuse me?”

“You know, the zombie apocalypse.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” I wasn’t sure if he was kidding me or serious. I was fearful he was serious. Not because I believed in such absurdity. Tommy seemed sensible at this point. And that was important if I was going to accompany him to his house today and stay for even a day. If this guy was some nut job, I was going to excuse myself at that very moment.

“Hey-hey, don’t freak, man. Many of The Patriots believe the COVID vaccines were going to turn

everybody into zombies. Anyway, when I signed up to be a member, I got this cool looking tomahawk."

He handed it to me to inspect. It was made out of aluminum and had rough edges, like it was made in China. On the handle was stenciled, "The Zombinator" and below that, "The Patriots" with a roman numeral three in a circle beside it.

"It's cheap but, I thought it looked cool, even though the whole zombie thing was bullshit. You can keep it if you want. And as promised..."

He handed me an AR15, with a loaded 30-round magazine. I could tell just by holding it, that it was a piece of crap: mostly plastic lower, with cheap red-dot optics, and a thin handguard. At one time, they were selling these for less than four hundred. Then I saw its origin and it made sense: on the lower receiver was hand-stenciled the Patriot's insignia, a Roman numeral three. I pulled back the charging handle and saw a round was in the chamber, but the safety was off. I shook my head and glared at Tommy in disbelief.

"Yeah, it's kind of cheap, but it'll get the job done," Tommy said proudly. "Keep that as my thanks to you for saving my butt."

My guess was that if one hundred rounds made it through this rifle before it fell apart, I would call myself lucky. I wasn't sure if the Zombinator wasn't a better carry option at this point. But it cost me nothing more than some of my time to make sure Tommy made it to his mom's, without shooting himself or me in the process. With any luck, I'd never even have to pull out this plastic gun. And if my luck held out, perhaps his

mom's home would have a phone and power that worked, since his girlfriend's apartment did not.

"Thanks," I said. "Let's get going."

"Sure. But I have one more thing I thought you'd like."

Tommy smiled, turned, and disappeared down the hallway. I wasn't sure what he was going to get, other than he was headed to his girlfriend's bedroom. He had spent a long time in her bedroom when we first arrived. I could hear him quietly sobbing while I slugged down his refrigerated food, which he had planning on leaving. From what he said the night before, Tommy helplessly watched Cindy—his girlfriend—drown right beside him. Perhaps he was getting a picture or some other memento, though I wasn't sure why he thought I would like it.

He came slogging down the hallway and appeared in the kitchen doorway, holding a camouflaged backpack. "It's a bugout bag that I had made for Cindy, just like the one I carry in my truck. There's no sense in leaving it. So here."

"Thanks Tommy," I said accepting his kind gift, which smelled a little like perfume. I stuck out a hand.

"I'm just so thankful you agreed to come with," he said, attempting to bypass my offered hand and give me a hug.

I think you know, I'm not a hugger. But the kid was obviously sincere. So I hugged him back and stepped away. "Okay, let's get going."

"Yep, you're right. We don't know what we'll find up ahead. And I want to get to Mom's before nightfall."

He was right. We had no idea that what lay ahead. And I was reminded of something I was taught by a

fellow candidate in BUD/S:

“If you’re in a bad situation, don’t worry, it’ll change.

If you’re in a good situation, don’t worry, it’ll change.”

The bad had already turned to good for us. I knew the good would turn to bad soon enough.

Chapter 5

The trip up to Tommy's home in the Hill Country was uneventful, yet odd.

We really had no issues the whole way. I insisted on driving, mostly because I can't stand when others are in control of a vehicle I'm in. The traffic was light for a weekend, and there was no tsunami damage this far north. What struck me as odd, especially in the Hill Country, was that other than an occasional ambulance or police unit driving code, every other vehicle we passed seemed to be driving normal. There was no indication, at least based on how everyone was driving, that around the globe, tens of millions of people had died from tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, and millions more, just south on the Gulf Coast. Most people drove like dog shit to begin with, but their driving abilities got worse when they were experiencing any sort of trauma. I saw no indication of this anywhere. It was as if we had entered the world of the Truman Show, where people were oblivious to what was going on outside of their bubble.

Tommy's house was in a wealthy area, and theirs was up on a hillside. Even from a distance I could see it wasn't a house, it was a mansion.

"You live there alone, with your mom?" I asked, not trying to be condescending. I just wanted to verify what my temporary living arrangements were going to be like.

"Yep, other than a live-in maid and gardener." I glanced over at him, and he flashed embarrassment. "Mom's family comes from money. And when dad died, she never remarried. Although she did say she was dating someone now... And that I would like him... Anyway, because of her inheritance, it wasn't like we had to worry about money. Plus, my grandparents set up a trust in my name, and from it I received a monthly income. So like her, I never had to work either."

We pulled up to a cobbled drive with a huge gate and I slowed to a stop. Tommy reached over and punched a button under the dash and the gate slid open, revealing a expansive lawn of green and manicured hedges.

"You have a very nice place, Tommy."

"Thanks, man. We call it home." He beamed.

We pulled in front of the home, parking in their circular drive. As when we stepped out, I was surprised at how much the temperature had dropped since we had left. It was downright chilly. I hadn't even thought about a jacket, as it was in the eighties just a few hours ago.

"God, it got cold," Tommy said. "The Ice Age is starting sooner than I thought."

I couldn't help but chortle a little. It was maybe fifty-five out; nowhere near time to declare it an Ice Age. But there was something even odder about the weather. It almost looked like...

"Is that snow?" Tommy asked, with his head tilted upward.

"Too warm," I said. But I wasn't too sure. It looked like snow was coming down. Except this snow looked gray.

"Weird," he said, watching the large flakes fall on the grass.

"I'll be damned. It's ash," I declared, while examining a large flake that had landed in the middle of my palm. I brushed it with a thumb and it didn't melt like snow would. It had to be volcanic ash. So far, everything Tommy had said was right.

I watched Tommy mesmerized by the ashfall. He might have been correct with his facts, but they weren't from him; they came from a group he patronized, called The Patriots. And the head of that group lived nearby. I really wanted to meet this guy and maybe find out some more about what lay ahead.

Tommy stood up, as the front door of their palatial house opened and a woman, wearing too much makeup, wrapped in a pink silk robe, strolled out, screeching in a drawl, "Tommy-honey. Thank God you're safe." She held out her arms, unwilling to step further than the landing in her pink furry slippers.

Tommy galloped up the steps and embraced her. "I'm fine, Mom. But-but, Cindy didn't make it."

"I'm sorry, my baby."

A man stepped through the front door behind them, stopping between them and the door. He stood in

place, waiting impatiently for Tommy and his mom to end their long hug. The man was tall and broad-chested. He too was wearing a silk robe and fuzzy-looking slippers, both of which were out of character compared with his full black and grey beard. If he'd been wearing fatigues, he would have looked like he was an extra for the TV show, Duck Dynasty. He turned his glare at me, and in that moment, I caught a glimpse of a tattoo on his cheek. It was a roman numeral three. That was when I knew who this person was.

Finally, the man returned his glare back at Tommy and his mom. He cleared his throat loudly.

Tommy looked up and was noticeably startled. "It's you," he mumbled.

His mom was beaming. "Tommy, darling, I want you to meet George Stonewall Pickett, the founder of The Patriots. We're engaged to be married." She flashed her hand, which was partially obscured by the large diamond on her ring finger.

"Holy shit," Tommy said. "Congratulations, Mom." He embraced her again.

"Hey, who's this with you," his mom asked, her eyes now glued to me.

"That's Compton. He saved me and made sure I got here safely. I told him he could stay here as long as he wanted," he looked up at Pickett, "with the apocalypse starting, and all."

"That's fine, son," she said. Then beaconing me over, "Come on in Mr. Compton. You are welcome. Let's get into the house where it's warm."

I grabbed both the AR's and BOBs, as well as another bag Tommy had thrown into the truck, and walked up

the steps.

Tommy's mom greeted me with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, thanking me for keeping her son safe. When I addressed her as "ma'am," she insisted that I call her Tammy. Then with her arm around Tommy, she shuffled around Pickett and into the house. Pickett was a bullwork, blocking the doorway entrance, his arms folded over his chest. He stood there, unmoving, sizing me up with his eyes, no doubt his attempt to intimidate me.

For a man who was soon to be the husband of this household, who was named after two Confederate generals, and someone Tommy respected, I played along. I let me shoulder slump, and I looked down before looking up again to meet his gaze. "Hello Mr. Picket. My name is Compton. Please to meet you, Sir."

His face grew a smile and he said shaking my hand, "Welcome, Mr. Compton. Any friend of my future son-in-law is a friend of mine. Looks like we have lots to talk about."

Chapter 6

Pickett called The Patriot Games, “A gathering of fellow Patriots in the great outdoors, to learn skills and plan for TEOTWAWKI” or The End Of The World As We Know It. Witnessing the event, filled me with a deep sense of dread.

I have met some militia group members over the years. Hell, I was a member of the Three Percenters for awhile, before the DOJ started going after what they called the country’s greatest threat, “Right-wing, white supremacist groups.” Fact was that most militias were full of men and women of all races, who loved their country and just wanted to contribute. Many members were ex-military and former law enforcement. And none of them were the threat they were made out to be.

This group was different.

The Patriot Games appeared to me, to be an excuse for a bunch of man-children, to get together for military cosplay exercises, where they were taught what shouldn’t be done, by mostly unskilled amateurs. Most of the attendees thought of themselves as something they were not.

The shooting exercises would have been comical if they weren't so serious. Most of the participants did not know the first thing about gun safety. And sure enough, one man shot himself in the leg, while showing off his ability to quick draw his pistol like in some scene from a movie I'd never heard of. The idiot was just damned lucky that he hadn't hit an artery and died on the spot. But it wasn't just gun safety where these people failed.

Another member of The Patriots nearly severed a thumb using one of the many Zombinator's being carried around. He was trying to prove his axe handling prowess by juggling several at once and grabbed the wrong end. Okay, I did laugh at that one.

Because it was pouring rain, and the temperatures were already dropping, most of The Patriots attendees just sat around under the main tent and told their own personal stories about the disasters they had experienced or heard about or watched on TV. Every one of them interspersed the word "zombie" or "zombie apocalypse" into their narratives. And as they spoke, it was with an eerie glee, as they described what was coming, even though none of their future prognostications sounded very favorable. Several, literally said, "I've been waiting my whole life for the world to end."

These people were insane. And I should have run as far away from them as I could then.

But my options were shrinking by the day. Phones and later the Internet were down, so I could not reach anyone outside of town to find out what I was supposed to do next. From radio reports, much of Long

Beach, and likely, Naval Base Coronado too, were destroyed by the tsunami. Not that I could get there without a car and maybe a hundred bucks in my pocket. And although this town had power, I couldn't use my bank card to pull money because the banks were closed, and the ATMs weren't working due to a "Connectivity Issue." So with no other place to go, and no means to get there, there was little I could do but witness the chaos around me, and try to avoid becoming collateral damage during their "gathering."

"What do you think of our band of merry soldiers?" Pickett asked from behind me.

"You mean wannabe soldiers?" I let my reply slip without thinking.

An ancient, pot-bellied man in fatigues heard this, popped out of his camp chair, and turned to address me. "Whoa! Who do you think you are, talking about us that way?" His body tilted to one side; a poorly hand-carved cane took up most of his weight.

I gave the man barely a glance, keeping my attention on Pickett. "I wasn't talking to you. I was answering Mr. Pickett's question."

I turned to address Pickett. He was grinning, but obviously trying to suppress a laugh.

"Yes, who do you think you are Mr. Compton?" he said, putting an arm around me and leading me to his personal tent nearby. "We haven't had a chance to talk yet."

It was true, we had barely said anything to each other, besides a few pleasantries since meeting at Tommy's house three days earlier. Pickett had left

shortly after we arrived, to handle some "internal issues" with his organization.

He ushered me "inside" his personal canopy. It instantly reminded me of a Roman general's war tent, complete with oriental rugs covering the dirt, a rack of weapons on one side and a war desk on the other, piled high with papers and battle plans. Instead of a roaring fire in a stone caldron, this tent had a cast iron stove in the middle, with folding chairs surrounding it. Even from a distance, it produced inviting heat. He beckoned me to sit at one of the folding chairs.

"Where's Tommy? I didn't see him arrive with you," he said, while grabbing two mugs from his war desk.

"Tommy stayed home to fix a leak in the roof. I offered to help, but he insisted I come to this. He said he would come in his mother's car, later."

Pickett poured what looked like coffee from a pot on top of the stove's small top.

"Tommy told me that you're a SEAL."

"Yes, Sir. Though I had just graduated. The tsunami came before I could get deployed."

"Coffee?" He handed me one of the steaming mugs.

"Thanks." Of course, it read, "The Patriots," with the Roman numeral three insignia emblazoned on the side.

"You are kind of old for a SEAL recruit, aren't you?"

"Not the oldest. But, yes, I'm older than most. Just felt my life didn't amount to much, and a friend of mine was a SEAL, so I joined up."

He grabbed a piece of paper from his desk and handed it to me. Then he took the chair next to mine.

"Care to explain this?"

It was a printout of a Chicago newspaper article. I knew the story all too well. He must have done a little research on me before the internet issues surfaced.

I didn't hesitate to respond. "Some Antifa puke accosted me in a parking lot near the base and I fought back." I wasn't taking his inquiry personal. I was living in the same house as his future wife, Tammy. It made sense he would want to check me out. And there wasn't much out there about me, except this.

"Said you killed him with one punch."

I took another sip of the coffee, which was awful, but at least hot. "I warned him several times, and he wouldn't go away. I hit him once. He walked away and so did I. I guess he collapsed after that and died."

"Sounds like the snowflake deserved it. But I'm impressed that it only took you one hit to kill 'em."

I didn't like where this was going, and I needed to learn what I could about him and if his information was credible, not the other way around.

"It's just training. More impressive is that you put together a large militia of men, with a single purpose." It wasn't that impressive, but I knew the best way to get him talking was to brown nose a little.

He smiled and leaned back in his seat. "I always thought I should have joined the military. But seemed like a lot of bullshit to make it to the top. I decided to start at the top by creating my own military-like organization."

I smiled through my scorn and nodded like I was dazzled by this.

"We have five thousand members, and they all pay at least \$100 per year dues, in addition to all of the

various tools we sell, seminars we put on, and Patriot Days events, like this one. But it's all to get ready for when TSHTF."

"The Shit Hits The Fan... You think that's now?"

"Absolute—" He snapped his mouth shut. I probably did too.

We felt something under our fee, eerily like the rumble we felt only days earlier, when the tsunami struck. But this was something different.

"Earthquake!" someone yelled.

Chapter 7

When the shaking had stopped, Pickett drove at break-neck speed to the house to check on Tammy and Tommy. I worked at keeping up in Tommy's truck. What we found when we arrived was heart wrenching.

The mansion was destroyed.

When the gate wouldn't open, I used Tommy's truck to crash through it. Pickett followed.

Much of the once grand ten-thousand-square-foot structure had crumbled and fallen down the side of the hill to which it had been moored.

We split up and went looking for survivors. Besides Tammy and Tommy, there was a housekeeper and gardener who lived on the grounds. We found no one alive.

Tommy was buried under an outside wall that had collapsed on him. At least it looked like he didn't suffer. Tammy was a gory mess. I won't even try and describe what she looked like. But when we found her, at that moment, I felt some sympathy for Pickett. But that didn't last.

He didn't tear up. Instead, upon seeing his dead fiancé, he said, "We need to save the supplies" and walked off.

Emotions aside, Pickett was right about the priority of securing food and supplies. These disasters only seemed to be getting worse. As we attempted to get into the area where food and other supplies were being stored, Pickett told me that Tammy had months of food in a downstairs storage area. And now the food would be more valuable than ever. Still, I heard no remorse about his fiancé's death or her son's.

At some point, some of the structure gave way and Pickett got trapped. For a moment, I thought about leaving him. It would serve the bastard right. But it occurred to me then that he might be useful for my own survival. I know it was a bit cold and selfish on my part. But the world was changing fast and I could no longer do anything for those who had died; I could only help those who were alive. And there would be a benefit to helping this one.

I pulled Pickett out, and other than a few cuts and scrapes, he was fine.

To him, I had saved his life. And that was just fine.

We were able to pull some of the supplies, and that was a good thing as Pickett's own home was also destroyed, along with many of his supplies.



The rest of the story, you pretty much know. Because Pickett perceived that I had saved his life, he fast-tracked me into his Patriots group and we searched for other accommodations that we could all live in while we attempted to survive.

Obviously, that didn't work out too well for any of them.

What I didn't tell you in my previous recording, was that after OP's gang had murdered The Patriots and destroyed their lair, I looked for Pickett among the dead. He wasn't there.

Maybe he escaped too.

Who knows, perhaps one of these days we will run into George Stonewall Pickett.

Postscript

Leticia, I'm leaving this recording after I've left for two reasons: First, I wanted to make good on my promise to give you my story, for whatever it's worth. I do hope you find it useful in your writing. I believe writers will have a unique place in this new world. You will be among the chroniclers that future generations turn to for their history. Do well my little friend. Second, I felt an obligation to explain why I had decided to move on.

Hopefully, you're all listening to this after I have left. As many of you know, I don't like having to explain myself in person.

Please don't hold any single person to blame for my leaving. Though, it is true one person made it obvious to me that I needed to go, I don't blame that person, and neither should you.

When I decided to join your group and offer my skills in your fight to survive, it was because your group portrayed the vision of being a team; one which was stronger together as a unit than apart as individuals. I was separated from my Navy SEAL team, and I chose

wrong with my last team. But the way you came together and fought to survive as a team was what convinced me to help you and become a part of your team. But you weren't the team I had hoped.

As part of our SEAL ethos, "We expect to lead and be led. In the absence of orders, it is my duty to take charge, lead my teammates and accomplish the mission. I lead by example in all situations." Ronald Ash, as your leader, made this difficult for me.

Although I respect Ronald and his skills, his inability to communicate his plan of action and make the correct decision, because of his fear of putting others in peril, will be his, and potentially your downfall. I know he means well. But in these times of hardship, it is most important that you all are on the same team, led by someone who understands the perils which lay before you. Ronald can be that leader, but he needs to be pushed to change. I cannot be that person. But it is my sincerest hope that one of you will be.

Where am I going from here?

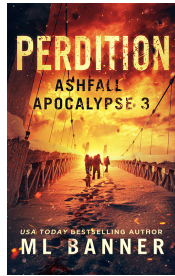
I had spoken about going to Mexico, just because at this point in my life, I find the cold less tolerable. But after all of this, I've decided to track down my fellow SEAL Team members.

I ask that you do not search for me or make any attempts to change my mind.

Be well.

The Story Continues

Find out what happens next in the exciting conclusion to Ashfall Apocalypse...



<https://www.mlbanner.com/ashfall3>