

The background of the cover is a painting of a city skyline, including the Empire State Building, seen through a dense forest of trees with autumn foliage. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The title 'YELLOW DAWN' is written in a large, bold, yellow font with a red outline and a black drop shadow, set against a black, jagged-edged banner.

YELLOW DAWN

The Age of Hastur

A Roleplaying Game by David J Rodger

**EMERGENCY
FAMILIARISATION
PACK**

Second Edition

WHAT IS YELLOW DAWN?

YELLOW DAWN – The Age of Hastur, is a post-apocalyptic setting for action adventure and Lovecraftian investigation, where characters explore a New Wilderness, encounter the dark machinations of madmen and monsters, unfold high-tech mysteries in the handful of Living Cities, and try to survive in a world that has been changed forever by the Infection.

Concieved, written and produced by David J Rodger.

Originally published in 2007 as a role-playing game it has steadily accumulated a large following from fans of science fiction, horror, cyberpunk, and the Cthulhu Mythos. The product is presently available as version 2.5.

In January 2015 work began to create a new 3rd edition following the green light from Chaosium, publishers of *Call of Cthulhu*, to go ahead with a deal involving a major UK games publisher. The plan is to make the Yellow Dawn RPG a post-apocalyptic extension of the CoC universe, making it playable with CoC 7th edition rules.

Also in January 2015, Rodger was approached by a US screenwriter who is interested in writing a movie based on the Yellow Dawn world. This is because Yellow Dawn as a setting contains a strong backstory and features numerous USPs that make it different from other post-apocalyptic settings.

Early 2015 will see an open invitation go out to authors to contribute to a Yellow Dawn short story collection: "Tales of Survival and Horror."

There are currently three novels within the Yellow Dawn universe and available to buy today:

Dog Eat Dog: two men compete against each other for success in a broken world – one will win, one will die. Old school politics, corruption and criminal organisations conspire to take control of survivors where they can. Meanwhile a new threat is spilling across the wilderness leaving a trail of bodies and shattered lives. Shop now at [LULU](#) or [Amazon](#).

The Black Lake: five survivors leave the fortress island of Malta on an expedition to the sub-Arctic waters above Scotland. They intend to undertake scientific observations of an alien meteorological phenomenon that is one legacy of the apocalypse. What they find is a cosmic horror that seethes amongst the shadows of a shattered Earth. A horror that will test each one of them to their breaking point. It is a story of escape and wonder, of madness and terror. Shop today at [LULU](#) or [Amazon](#)

The Social Club: Although London survived it is now under the control of the Group. Life is bearable if you have what the Group want. Life is short if you don't. Yet propaganda blurs the boundaries of this truth. When the naked body of a man washes up on the banks of the Thames, those in charge of the Group attempt to dismiss the death as another suicide. Senior Verifier Jadon Purgo has other ideas and as he digs through layers of deceit he finds a gruesome reality: the infected horrors of the world after Yellow Dawn are kept at bay through corruption and the idealism of rewarding success. But the real horror is what lies at the heart of this new London.

All three novels are available in paperback or for kindle. Click on either link now [LULU](#) or [Amazon](#) to shop.

A QUICK GUIDE TO YELLOW DAWN

As a setting with a focus on Lovecraftian investigative horror, YELLOW DAWN draws heavily from the creations and writings of author H.P. Lovecraft and others who have bolstered this remarkable body of work.

Traditional *Cthulhu Mythos* stories can be very deadly. It's almost a given that at some point somebody winds up dead or insane. In YELLOW DAWN, the dangers of action adventure in a post-apocalyptic world increase these risks, but there is also a strong emphasis on survival.

Dead Cities are everywhere and scavenging with the CRC (City Recovery Corps) is big business. The CRC also provide a useful mechanism to bring disparate characters together at the beginning of a story.

The question for a GM or author is whether to start in a Living City or out in the Wilderness.

If you're looking for a Mad Max or Dungeons & Dragons vibe, where the characters really are ragged, filthy and desperate, then start them with nothing to their names, out in the Wilderness. It is where the medieval has made a return, often fused with diesel and spilled blood.

If you've got bigger, complex scenarios that fit the Cyberpunk and Shadowrun mold, where you need a city as a backdrop to the plot, then start them in cramped and squalid accommodation, sharing space in an overcrowded slum quarter of a Living City. Technology is abundant here.

And if you're looking to bring in the eeir atmosphere of the *Cthulhu Mythos* then use the small but established communities of the rural support zones (they surround every Living City, but there are very few of these left in the world so the distance between them can be vast).

You may want to keep the Living Cities as a place characters *aspire* towards reaching; and once there, they have trouble fitting in if they've known nothing but the Wilderness for the past decade.

Other themes to weave in are the unfortunate victims who were left mutated at a molecular level by one of the pathogens involved in Yellow Dawn; called The Changed, they're essentially a new race – an offshoot of humanity.

In the Wilderness there is a fear of robots, because of what happened with the Dragon Breath programme at the outset of Yellow Dawn. Across the globe, there is a power struggle being played out between the old corporate-driven groups of UTOC and a new, political entity known as the UDP. This is a key tension point for many stories unfolding within this universe.

YELLOW DAWN: CHRONOLOGY OF AN APOCALYPSE

This is a series of blog posts and media snaps fed through the Media Munch (*keeping chaos simple*) service. They tell the story of Yellow Dawn in the immediate aftermath and the subsequent ten years.

Day Zero

<mm:02879999:dayzero:deane_jurowski>

Day Zero / Deane Jurowski

The advertising exec lands in Cairo at 2am. Despite the hour the concourse is heaving with tourists arriving to enjoy a warm winter break. He's travelling light, two leather holdalls clutched in either hand. Several men in galabias hassle him, offering to carry his bags, their fingers already tugging at the leather handles. He jerks both bags free and quickens his stride without a word to acknowledge them.

A taxi ride from the airport, a battered metal hulk that could have rolled off a production line more than thirty years ago. The faint smell of fried chicken suggests home-made fuel. They speed through the sprawling conurbations of Heliopolis, and eventually into the city itself.

The taxi pulls over on the edge of the Nile, not far from the 6th October Bridge. Lights from numerous ships illuminate the river. He is surprised how many people are still on the streets. He authorises the fare to be deducted from his cash account, and then climbs out. The air is warm but unpleasant, smog grabs his throat and stings his eyes, and the noise is jarring as thousands of tons of traffic rumble past him, horns tooting haphazardly. All of them belching fumes and burned oil. He slips his respirator over his face and eases into the loose throngs of tourists and locals, and starts walking towards a café that has a Western brand name.

A building several metres from the café explodes outwards. At least that's how it seems. Rubble is crashing down on the people below the collapsing walls. Already his brain is replaying the streak of an object he saw hurtling out of the sky only a moment before. He's knocked sideways as a surge of panic ripples through the crowd. People are screaming and he can see flames licking the ragged wound in the street. </mm>

Day One – Part 1

<mm:02879999:KBSB:Sandra_sergevski>

Correspondent Witnesses Horrific Start to Robot Killing Spree

[Anchorman talks to camera]

ANCHORMAN: We've got a KLBB correspondent, Sandra Sergevski, ready to talk to us from Manhattan which is currently going into meltdown as reports of more of these killings come in.

[Anchorman turns to a hologram of the correspondent]

ANCHORMAN: What can you tell us Sandra?

SANDRA SERGEVSKI: We now know more about what started this incident, but we're still unclear about exactly who is behind the robots and their actions. UTOC military sources seem to be in state of panic and confusion: the persistent rumour is that the military lost control. It is almost certain that this event is linked to the robot killings occurring in other parts of the world, which is following the growing wave of people succumbing to an unknown virus. Official sources are connecting both events to the SOYAR corporation ship that tore through Earth's atmosphere and rained wreckage across the Mediterranean and North Africa on Sunday.

What I can tell you is that early Monday morning, in Athens, a businessman boarded a plane for New York. The flight was delayed for almost 24 hours. Just like many other flights disrupted by the SOYAR incident. It's likely the businessman joined the crowds of people stuck in the airport, watching the news feeds covering populated areas struck by the wreckage. It was Monday morning when several hundred million people across the impact zone woke up to see the sunrise tinged with an alien yellow glow. Subsequently the majority of media feeds now carry the strap line "Yellow Dawn".

The businessman was returning to New York after spending a week touring the Greek countryside. We're certain he was in the area of the impact zone at the time of the SOYAR ship breaking up. During the flight he started to complain about feeling unwell. By time he reached JFK he had developed symptoms that matched a bad case of flu. Coughing and sneezing, the businessman travelled into Manhattan, checked into a hotel and tried to sleep it off.

Early today, he walked into the nearest emergency medical centre, suffering acute symptoms of pneumonia, respiratory distress, gastric problems and rapidly began to haemorrhage from mouth, nose and eyes. Staff were alarmed, especially considering his recent international travel, but alarm turned into confusion as the computer system for the medical centre locked down the entire building.

Technicians tried to override the lockdown but failed. Then, about twenty minutes after the lockdown began, roughly six hours ago, a bi-pedal robot walked into the medical centre equipped with a tank of 'sticky' petroleum and nozzle-type weapon. The robot was more bulky than the familiar SONY houseman, drab grey metal stencilled with UTOC military markings. The hospital computer allowed the robot access to each part of the building in turn, room by room. The robot incinerated the businessman and over half the people trapped with him. </mm>

Day One – Part 2

<mm:02879999:UTOCDC:sub-committee440#12b>

Transcript fragments of Col. Karim Javez, Operational Commander of Dragon Breath Project, speaking via virtual presence at UTOC Defence Council, Sub-Committee 440#12b

Ref: Emergency Schedule – Collateral Damage – Dragon Breath

JAVEZ

(in response to question posed by Sub-Committee 440)

We...er, we, began the DB exercise three days ago, as planned and agreed with yourselves during the whole project initiation phase....

...the exercise was scheduled to run for 48 hours. It's scope was to test the Civil Defence Force response to chemical and biological attack...

...three AI nests were brought on-line to run the DB exercise. One of them, APOC, was tasked with generating simulations. A dirty bomb attack in packed sports arena. Biological agents released on an urban transport system. And feeding the imaginary outputs to the Primary AI, and to the Secondary AI that was programmed to work as a back-up. APOC was delivering outputs via ER wards, school registers, and transport hub bio-chem sniffers.

The Primary AI was supposed to manage the Civil Defence Force responses and provide remote-drone assistance if the 'scenario' was large enough to require it. Everything was running perfectly, at first...

...we knew we had trouble when the Primary AI walked a Militech Ranger in an ER station in downtown Manhattan and incinerated twenty-seven people...

...Primary AI had registered an Alpha Grade biological infection and took all necessary steps to handle it, as it's programmed. None of APOC's generated scenarios were programmed to include Alpha Grade attacks, precluding this level of response. We're not sure if the Alpha Grade infection was real or...

...Alpha Grade infection would indicate a pathogen capable of mass extinction on a global scale...

...Primary AI began to interrogate the available records of the people it incinerated in Manhattan, reviewing an audit trail of travel from phone positions and transport routes. It then looked at contact probability with other members of population, and dispatched Militech Rangers to deal with them...

...APOC must have realised the Primary AI was not following the 'game' scenarios of the exercise and successfully terminated it. This has led to an unfortunate situation. The Secondary AI has now gone into full lockdown mode, and is continuing the exercise beyond all parameters of the project...

...so far the Secondary AI has incinerated two-hundred, thirty seven citizens across twelve UTOC territories. We've changed APOC's end-game to try and predict who the Secondary AI will attempt to target next...

...we still don't know if the Alpha Grade infection is actually real. If it is then...

...I understand, of course, this is a disaster unfolding at an exponential rate and very embarrassing for the Defence Council, but if the Alpha Grade infection is real then I feel the Dragon Breath project is...actually doing its job. SOYAR Corp still haven't confirmed the complete cargo itinerary of their ship that burned up. Surely we should wait...

...I have a team of technicians ready to work on destroying the Secondary AI nest...

...estimate we could terminate the AI in about three hours.
</mm>

FULL CHRONOLOGY IN PRIMARY RULEBOOK

SUMMARY NARRATIVE

Yellow Dawn, as an event, is an apocalyptic cataclysm that swept across Earth in the wake of the deep-space merchant cruiser Kalisto breaking up in the atmosphere, fire-balling across the sky and raining 'infected' debris across North Africa and Southern Euro-Federation. The next morning, people in those regions woke up to an eerie chemical yellow smog set alight by the first rays of the sun, and then people started dying; this was the first pathogen, or first wave virus.

The first pathogen was airborne, a communicable strain of flu, and spread around the world on high-altitude winds and via integrated global transport hubs. Onset was flu-like symptoms with rapid deterioration into coma; causes vital organs (including skin) to lose cellular cohesion. Death occurs 24 – 36 hours after onset. Some victims come through the experience Changed – at a molecular level. Those who were unaffected did not succumb to the flu-like phase. Within twelve days of Yellow Dawn occurring, as an event, it is estimated that more than seven out of every ten people on the planet was dead.

Within the initial chaos, robots across the world begin to kill people.

This is because coincidental to Yellow Dawn the Euro-Federation & North American States were running advanced 'response simulations' to a chemical & biological attack, using a new breed of AI connected to military and civilian systems. Known as the Dragon Breath programme, it kicked out of simulation mode and began to crash-configure robot command hubs, taking control to terminate infected organisms (as it was programmed to do). Dragon Breath programme AIs are forcibly shut down (apart from one, which survives and escapes into the Internet), stopping the mass culling of infected humans. History views this decision as a mistake.

The remaining AI, subsequently nick-named Dragon Breath, dispersed into the myriad connections of the Internet and to this day remains as an enigmatic agent within cyberspace – and is considered responsible for the mass exodus of robots to a remote sun-scorched location in Australia.

The mountainous piles of nearly eight billion corpses led to a plague of rats, flies and cockroaches, creating a serious health-hazard in the months following Yellow Dawn. In some places the water-table was contaminated by diseases spawned from so much rotting flesh.

Following the event, blossoming out from the impact sites but much slower to spread, was the second pathogen; also called the 2nd wave, zed-wave and zombie-pathogen, or most commonly, simply, the Infection.

The second pathogen has a prolonged lifecycle and a transmission vector of infected blood or saliva getting into the mucus glands or blood stream of another human being. This is typically as the result of a bite – although this is not always effective; it's estimated that twenty percent of bites have no effect.

CONTEXT

Svetomir lifted the boom mike away from his parched lips and blinked rapidly, unable to tear his eyes from the appalling sight facing him at the corner of the deserted, debris-strewn street; a seemingly unending line of rusting cars came momentarily into focus and reinforced the vast scale of the tragedy that happened here.

The figure was a woman, or had been; her clothes were a decade old, torn and clinging to her skinny body but still identifiable as city fashion from a dead era. Not scavenger clothing.

An original Infected.

Her hair was long and dark, wild and unkempt, heavy with filth; strands stuck to her pale, bruised flesh. Svetomir averted his gaze, not wanting to meet the thing's eyes.

Distance forty metres, it shouldn't be able to see him; zed eye-sight notoriously bad, standard long-term infection principle, but that didn't mean he wanted it looking right at him.

He didn't want to breathe, didn't want to make a sound that might alert it to his presence. Where the heck was the support-vehicle? Why had the others not warned him it was leaving?

This didn't make sense. He'd only stepped around the corner to take several spatial-deg shots with the Borok-camera. Thirty to forty seconds tops.

And now the support vehicle was gone. The spotter could have taken out a solitary zed with the crossbow. Why would they leave so suddenly?

The figure twitched. One shoulder rolled up and back and the head snapped sideways as if taking an abrupt interest in something down the adjoining road.

Svetomir stared without really looking. His breath was stagnating in his lungs which were aching with urge to suck in a deep gasp. He felt as if he was suffocating where he stood, but the fear of making any sound continued to override the basic functions of his brain.

The figure took a staggering step forward and then stopped, cadaverous hands outstretched like rigid claws, its head trembling and bobbing up and down as it seemed to be scanning the road.

Did it sense he was there? Was it looking for him?

What was he going to do?

It was difficult to suppress the panic rising up within him. He was over two miles into Dead City. There were thousands of these things between here and the rural boundary, where the corruptive, surreal influence of the infection ceased to stunt the growth of weeds and foliage.

In the silent cruise of the support-vehicle, with padded wheels and noise-suppressed motor, it would have been less risky than a standard CRC operation to get out of the city, but now it appeared he was stranded, and on foot.

No that was impossible.

They had to come back for him. They wouldn't just abandon him here like this.

Would they?

It took three years for the Infection to reach the American continent after it had spread across most of the world from the Middle-East, Euro-Federation and Africa. Australia followed America, then Japan. Officially, the final centre of civilisation before Infected was New Zealand. There remain a number of isolated locations where the Infection has not taken hold – simply because vessels carrying Infected people have not gone there.

This second pathogen brought a hellish terror to survivors. A swelling horde of *Infected* humans, un-dying and un-decaying, so-called “zombies”; crowding abandoned cities, simmering with a chemical rage, reacting to any sound or any glimpse of life by screaming and sprinting to attack, spreading the Infection with a frenzy of bites. Survivors were forced to flee urban areas; or stand their ground and fight, forming protected enclaves always under the threat of the once-human monsters lurking beyond.

Both pathogens had no discernable effect on animals, plants or bacteria. The departure of humankind has resulted in an explosive growth in the populations of animals on land and sea, and plant life across the planet. The exception here is within Dead Cities, and anywhere there is a concentration of zombies; in these places plant growth is unnaturally suppressed and wild animals are rarely found.

The Changed – those affected by the first pathogen are commonly called ‘Orcs’ because of the association between their mutated appearance and the humanoid creatures of Fantasy Fiction. Skin is blackened as if burned, and constantly wet with seeping plasma. Adjusted personality syndrome makes them more feral and leaves them operating on simple emotional planes. They suffer extreme prejudice from unaffected survivors; many Changed were killed or driven out by lynch mobs in early years. The UDP has given them official protection and same rights as human beings – but only in UDP controlled areas, and this doesn't always stop the intolerance. A small percentage of the Changed are drawn into violent groups called Warrior Orcs.

Yellow Dawn as a setting begins ten years after the event. Most of the world has turned into a new wilderness, Mother Nature left to run unrestrained, densely overgrown and restocked with animals and wildlife – all unaffected by the pathogens that seemed to only target humans. This wilderness is strewn with several hundred million survivors, scattered across settlements built from ruined buildings or constructed from scratch; all doing what they can to forge new lives, to forget the past and move on.

The first pathogen remains active in very small but shifting particles; the reasons are unclear, but it means that anybody coming down from orbit that has not previously been exposed does stand a risk of succumbing – unless they have undergone immunisation (expensive).

A handful of cities have survived intact, so called Living Cities, and here gritty street life and slick corporate careers continue almost as they did before; the power grid is intact, citizens can connect to the Internet and reach out across the shattered globe to other Living Cities or into Outer Space. After ten years of migration towards these urban focal points, accommodation and property within any Living City comes at a premium; landlords are raking in extravagant profits whilst many citizens co-exist in cramped apartments.

Around these scarce few Living Cities are rings of rural support zones, the breadbasket of the large survivor population. The rural support zone is where back-breaking labour is offset by the open space of the landscape and the freedom to live how you want (usually). It can be a rough existence but many find it rewarding, or have no choice.

In a way, Living Cities have become what entire countries used to be: independent entities, separated by vast expanses of sea and land, by a new Wilderness.

Direct travel between Living Cities is common, with sea transport and aircraft still in operation, but schedules are infrequent and tickets expensive. In this way, corporate, political and military personnel traverse the globe without much regard to the desperation and struggle taking place beneath their slipstreams.

The events around Yellow Dawn have raised a thousand questions and inspired a hundred thousand answers:

What cargo the Kalisto was carrying?

What cocktail of weaponised compounds were being developed in the orbital military lab the Kalisto tore through as it plunged into Earth's atmosphere?

Was the first wave a virus engineered to only affect humans? Why was a small percentage of victims left Changed at a molecular level rather than killed?

What is the Dragon-Breath AI doing with all those hundreds-of-thousands of robots it has drawn to Australia?

Why do zombies remain within urban, built-up areas and shun rural, overgrown landscapes?

And whilst most of the planet had been reclaimed by wild forests, plants, and animals, why does it not overgrow and reclaim the countless thousands of places lost to the zombie infestation, the so-called "Dead Cities"?

It is almost as if Mother Nature herself is unable or unwilling to take a firm root. Something has entered the world and it is wrong and unnatural.

SUMMARY – FACTS

Yellow Dawn happened when a merchant space cruiser, returning from the Choma Lab Habitat far out into the Solar System, crashed into Earth's atmosphere. This vessel was called the Kalisto and belonged to the SOYAR Corporation.

Questions circulate about the cargo it was carrying and about what kind of weaponised viruses were being developed on the orbital military lab or labs the Kalisto destroyed as it tore through Earth's orbital volume.

Over 95% of the Kalisto and orbital lab(s) burned up on re-entry. Debris impacts fell across a six hundred mile wide break up zone stretching eleven hundred miles west of Cyprus; this includes the Middle-East, North Africa and the Southern Euro-Federation zone.

The term Yellow Dawn as an event refers to the eerie yellow haze that greeted people as the sun rose above the initial impact sites of debris from the Kalisto.

There are two distinct pathogens, with different vectors and time spans.

First Pathogen: airborne vector. Onset was flu-like symptoms with rapid deterioration into coma then death. Death occurs 24 – 36 hours after onset. Some victims come through the experience as Changed. The first pathogen remains active in very small but shifting particles; anybody coming down from orbit that has not previously been exposed does stand a risk of succumbing – unless they have undergone immunisation (expensive).

Second Pathogen: called the 2nd wave, zed-wave, zombie-pathogen, or simply the Infection. Transmission vector of infected blood or saliva getting into the mucus glands or blood stream of another human being. This is typically as the result of a bite – although this is not always effective; twenty percent of bites have no effect. Within 2 to 20 seconds of infection the victim will slip into unrestrained rage with one urge: to spread the Infection.

Took three years for second pathogen to reach the American continent. Australia followed America, then Japan. Final centre of civilisation be Infected was New Zealand. There remain a number of isolated locations where the Infection has not taken hold – simply because vessels carrying Infected people have not gone there.

Statistics: ten years after Yellow Dawn the ratio of survivors, Infected and Changed looks like this:

77% Dead from 1st pathogen: 7.6 Billion

0.4% Changed by 1st pathogen: 39 Million (significant reduction should be applied due to murder and suicide).

18% Infected by 2nd pathogen: 1.7 Billion

4.6% Survivors: 455 Million

OVERVIEW: THE WORLD OF YELLOW DAWN

It is the near future. The realm of Cyberpunk, Sci-fi & Dark Fantasy. Yellow Dawn, as an event, is an apocalyptic cataclysm that sweeps across the Earth in two distinct phases; the first killing billions within days, leaving survivors in a state of utter shock and despair as the world they knew literally falls apart; the second is a plague of rabid, undying human victims, *Infected* by something that has made them into what survivors call zombies.

Yellow Dawn as a setting occurs ten years after the event that started it all. Nearly eighty-percent of the population is dead; their bodies long since rotted into dust, spongy tendons withered on sun-bleached bones.

Characters can explore distinct genres built into the setting. There's the harsh low-tech survivor life in the deep wilderness; or the fast-paced, gritty urban lifestyle in the handful of Living Cities that remain intact and functioning; or the rough blend of farmers, merchants and artisans in the rural support zones that surround those few cities; or finally the high-technology, corporate-driven lifestyle of Orbit and Deep Space.

Dead Cities hold vast untapped resources for the brave scavenger; and the promise of terror from the *Things* that lurk within the urban boundaries of decay: so-called 'zombies' but there's a chilling horror in the truth behind what they really are. The Infection is your biggest enemy.

Characters are not locked into any particular flavour of scenario. Yellow Dawn is a vast and flexible universe of story types – offering hard action or palm-sweating tension during long drawn out investigation. Bandits roam the barren weed-choked roads of the Wilderness; corporate execs muster private armies of thugs or hire covert merc units to bully, coerce or kill risks to their profit margins; settlements expand through violence into aggressive empires; malevolent spirits and dark demons feed from the fear of survivors in remote and lonely places; and unspeakable monsters from the Outer Chaos threaten to slither into our world through the diabolical machinations of the Cthulhu Mythos. It's a taste of what is possible in this diverse setting. Everywhere there are bad things happening to good people and opportunities for characters to get involved.

AUTHOR NOTE

My first ever YELLOW DAWN player group found a battered old office building in a small corporate business park, a few miles from the prosperous settlement of New Boston. They stripped it of decay then repaired what needed fixing before installing labs and other useful equipment.

They even scavenged luxury furniture to place in certain rooms. It was a great focal point for a number of scenarios and then as a place to bank characters for later use. However it also had the drawback on making players reluctant to roam into the deep Wilderness looking for adventure, so GMs should bear in mind what kind of scenarios they're planning to run in the mid to long term.

There is political intrigue between the 'fallen' organisations of the old pre-catastrophe world and the new, ambitious entities that have risen from the blood and ashes of a dead civilisation. Living Cities, hungry for resources at any cost, wield enormous influence over the settlements that have sprung-up around them. Throw in quasi-religious rebellion through the Power of Eight group; an 'awakening' of new Pagan cults and Schools of Elemental Magick, any story-teller has a powder-keg of rivalries and tensions to place into the hands of characters.

The Cthulhu Mythos

YELLOW DAWN is deeply entwined with the machinations of the Mythos. This doesn't mean every scenario has to be about delving into horror, but the option exists.

The Cthulhu Mythos is the legacy of the cult horror writer H. P. Lovecraft (1890 – 1937). He is now considered one of the greatest horror writers of the 20th century. Spanning short stories and novels, the Cthulhu Mythos suggests there is a diabolical truth beyond our awareness, hinted at within arcane books and visible in the monstrous entities that lurk at the threshold of human existence.

YELLOW DAWN builds upon the Mythos; in particular with the concept of the Quantisphere, an invisible membrane between our Universe and the Outer Chaos. The Outer Chaos wraps itself tightly around our reality and has the power to contaminate places and sensitive people, even through the boundary of the Quantisphere.

The Age of Hastur

Hastur (The Unspeakable One, Him Who Is Not to be Named, Assatur, Xastur, or Kaiwan) is a fictional entity (Great Old One) of the Cthulhu Mythos. The King in Yellow is merely one of many aspects of this potent and truly amorphous denizen.

The full title of this game is **YELLOW DAWN – The Age of Hastur**. That is because Yellow Dawn represents the moment Hastur was partially but permanently inserted into the "local" reality of Earth. There is a range of consequences and phenomenon associated with Hastur and these are discussed in the Yellow Dawn Primary Rulebook (version 2.5).

EXAMPLE

Yellow Sign:

The very last thing to appear on that letter was a symbol; and to Todor it was as if the symbol did appear, or *emerge* only as his gaze slid into what he thought was the empty space beneath the final lines.

What began as an unrecognisable mark then went through a fluid-like mutation, shimmering, easing into focus, golden ink glittering within the orbs of his eyes, holding his attention. It crystallised into what looked like two overlapping instances of the letter 'S'.

As this occurred, a sonance formed within Todor's mind which he then impulsively hummed. It was a throaty, guttural, nasal and horn-like sound, like no timbre he had ever vocalised or heard before.

Almost immediately, the now sharp outline of the symbol pulsed and parts of the 'S' amalgamation broke away, sliding and rotating to form a new, larger symbol that was neither Arabic or Chinese, nor did it resemble something that belonged to any human script.

Seeing this occur caused Todor's eyes to bulge, his breath shortened and faltered into fierce gasps.

It was as if he'd opened Pandora's Box.

Once seen he could not now or ever *un-see*.

He knew he had let something terrible into this world.

And so started his swift and pitiful degeneration into madness.

- Excerpt from The Corrupt Moon

The Infected – an evolving threat

Often called "zombies" the term is actually a misnomer, created by the survivors and emerging popular media after Yellow Dawn happened. The Infection attacks the cognitive and personality centres of the brain and induces a frenzied and aggressive compulsion to spread the contagion through biting. The term Zombie was the easiest parallel for a population unsure what they were being confronted by. The official term for these victims is Infected.

The Infected are almost exclusively encountered in Dead Cities and Dead Zones; they appear to dislike extensive flora and fauna and avoid any sort of rural setting. There also rumours of more surreal and frightening phenomenon, mistakenly described as hallucinations, associated with encountering the Infected.

Since Yellow Dawn occurred there has been a lot of research into the Infected by the military and private corporations – leading to a lot of potential scenarios for GMs and authors to unleash on their characters.

One thing is certain – the threat is evolving.

Scavenging resources and building things

Unless you're extremely wealthy or occupying a position of power within a Living City, scavenging will touch the life of your characters. Even in Living Cities, apart from food and other perishables, most people can only afford to buy reclaimed, repaired and re-purposed items brought via the backyard

network of scavengers and trading tables. Out in the Wilderness, scavenging isn't just a way of surviving, it can be a living.

Mid-sized to large settlements typically have a Trading Table, where merchants or affiliates of the City Recovery Corps will take "stuff" off your hands for a hard bargain.

If characters have the skills – they can convert "stuff" into new or repaired / reconditioned items to either use or sell.



Image of horror in the wilderness from YD 3rd Edition

Occult, Magick and its place in the future

Like the Cthulhu Mythos, the Occult has always been with us. This is the realm of Angels, Demons, Spirits, Elementals and the Astral Plane; all contained within the Quantisphere, the invisible membrane between our Universe and the Outer Chaos. After Yellow Dawn there was a significant awakening. People who might not have ordinarily considered themselves as 'sensitive' found themselves drawn together – or inspired to follow a calling. This has led to the creation of a number of 'Schools of Magick' and the evolution of the Road Mage – people who endure extreme personal hardship and psychological danger to train in the arts before setting out into the Wilderness to practice and develop their skills.

Travel, maps and weather

Many of the roads that remain usable pass through Dead Cities, forcing the traveller to seek alternative routes to avoid the Infected. Going across country is an option but requires skill in navigating and the ability to cope with Mother Nature.

Travel is dangerous unless you are well-armed. Bandits are a serious risk in the Wilderness. Some places may charge a toll to use their roads, and if you don't pay then they might attack you.

Vehicles are an option; plenty were left abandoned but the best have been scavenged, towed away or stripped down for resources. Fuel is hard to find and expensive when available. A vehicle can also make you a target.

This is in stark contrast to the Living Cities and their surrounding Rural Support Zones. Here there is industrial-scale fuel production, and the roads are patrolled by moderately well-equipped city militia – or even official police squads. Transport is vital to a Living City because of its hunger for resources.

Common weather patterns have changed – aberrant weather is more likely: spells of unusually warm weather in winter, or freezing days during summer. A new meteorological phenomenon called 'storm-curtains' light up the night skies across the world; these beautiful yet eerie and alien light shows resemble aurora-borealis but are amber in colour. Sometimes they cause an eye of lethally cold air to descend from the upper atmosphere; cold enough to freeze flesh in less than a minute. Storm-curtains interfere with electronic communications leaving most places in the Wilderness isolated from the satellite communication grid that remains fully operational overhead; however, powerful signal boosters can punch through this.



Image of high tech settlement from YD 3rd Edition

Organisations, entities, locations

Yellow Dawn, as an event, changed the lives of the entire planet; even those fortunate souls observing from orbit were affected in a psychological way which even now, ten years later, can be found within the patient notes of psychoanalysts.

Whole nation states ceased to exist, except within the conscious self-identity of survivors.

"I am British," says one survivor to another, despite the fact that London is virtually a Dead City.

Some groups have continued – albeit different – and new groups have formed. Here's a quick summary of those considered most notable:

UTOOC – *United Table of Commerce*: former 'global government' run by the top people of large corporations.

MOCID – *Ministry of Cultural Integration and Development*: enforcers of UTOC policies. Before Yellow Dawn colloquially known as boardroom Gestapo.

UDP – *Universal Democratic Party*: current 'global government' born in wake of Yellow Dawn, with growing but limited power.

PO8 – *Power of Eight Group*: a pseudo-religious self-help, business 'cult'. Very influential and controversial before Yellow Dawn; now outlawed by the UDP, and persecuted by UTOC and MOCID.

FaB Lobby – *Flesh and Blood Lobby*: political movement formed to protest the replacement of human workers by robot labour. Now opposed to ascended Carbons.

FaBIAN – *Flesh and Blood Immediate Action Now*: paramilitary arm of FAB Lobby. They hunt down robots and ascended Carbons.

Carbons – *A genetically modified, cloned-human workforce with a growing problem – Ascendancy. Normally encountered in New Tokyo and Space*: the UDP recently gave ascended Carbons the same rights as human beings; this is not popular decision.

The Changed – *Mutated humans, victims of the first wave pathogen*: survivors left changed at the molecular level.

Dragon Breath AI – *and the robot phenomenon*: the surviving remnants of the AI nest used in the Dragon Breath Programme and forcibly shut down by its human masters.

New Tokyo – *most significant Living City on the planet*: built before Yellow Dawn in the former US State of Florida (bought by UTOC) was the launch pad for space colonisation.

Space elevator – *a physical cable & 'donut' capsule that ascends into space*: anchored in New Tokyo spaceport, climbs 500 miles up into Low Earth Orbit, terminating at the Primitus Vestigium platform.

Primitus Vestigium – *doorstep to the orbital colonies and deep space habitats*: also called PV, this platform is a temporary transit point or a place for day-trippers.

Major Corporations

This is a handful of big-players in the world of business, technology, science, security and weaponry.

- **City Recovery Corps (CRC)** – local-to-global scavenging and resource distribution
- **Akinola-Odusola** – leader in weapons and security contracts
- **Borgendrill** – deep space mining and origin of first true AI

- **Carthew Trust** – business consultancy, informing on coming trends
- **Gentec** – specialists in genetic therapy
- **INFORG** – defence, re-development and security sub-contractors
- **Riken** – leaders in robot, cyborg and neural interface technology
- **RoGong** > **Zendori Corp** – quasi mystical company behind sim-stim

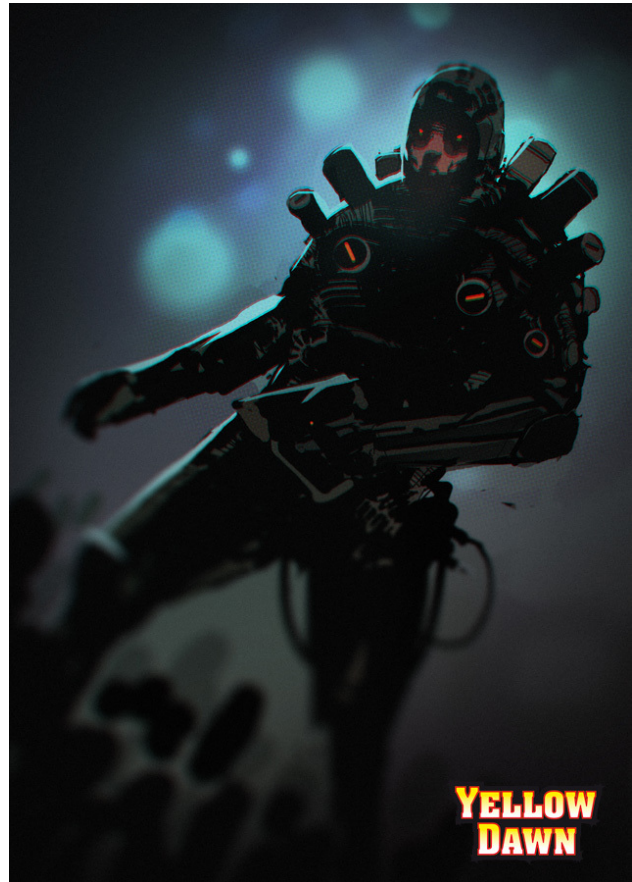


Image of UTOC mercenary from YD 3rd Edition

The Internet & Cyberspace

The Internet is not what it was. As the bulk of locations hosting the infrastructure of the Internet became Dead Places, the power grid failed, the servers and routers switched to emergency back-up batteries, and then blinked out. The global Internet still exists but you'll need a device that can punch through the storm curtain interference and connect you.

Lots of the data that used to exist in mirror-sites and replication servers is simply dark now. It's 'out there' but inaccessible. There's an abundance of contracts available for freelance data-salvage teams, willing to send people out into dangerous places (Dead Cities and bandit country) to hard-line a connection into a cold server to get access to information they want. *Story-tellers could use this as a plot hook.*

Cyberspace

Cyberspace is a layer of engagement built on top of the Internet protocols. Cyberspace is not the Internet. It's a higher realm of experience; essentially it is where the act of moving around the Internet and interacting with the data contained there can be

shaped to be like moving through a Virtual Reality. The experience can pack all human senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) depending on how much the user wants to allow through the interface – and depending on how much the developers of any particular location have designed / written-into the program.

Augmented Reality

Through using a PA (mobile computer device) or wearing DVframes, most people interact with AR in Living Cities far more than virtual reality.

Sim-Stims

The formal name for these is ‘simulated stimulation’ and represents the forefront of virtual reality and sensory-playback technology. Sim-Stims can be bought or rented like movies or training films: pre-recorded experience that a user plays back via SQUID headwear or a direct neural interface.

Artificial Intelligence & Recorded Mind States

Before it actually happened, most people assumed that true Artificial Intelligence would be the product of Humanity tinkering with computers. The reality was an event known as the Borgendrill Enigma. Years before Yellow Dawn took place, the corporate computer system of Borgendrill was the focal point of a Singularity. What happened is still not clear. Before B.E. every form of *Artificial Intelligence* put on the market by manufacturers was nothing more than clever computing, stuff that now is known as AI Emulation software. After B.E. the Borgendrill computer network became self-aware.

AI Emulation Software (AIES)

This is the best result of human and computer assisted programming. AIES can be programmed with a particular personality. True AIs are for all intents and purpose, an individual free-thinking mind, that cannot be told how to behave or respond.

Recorded Independent Mind State (RiMS)

Or Rim for short-hand. Refers to a partial or complete copy of a human mind. Can only be performed by an AI with appropriate scanning hardware. It requires an AIES to be bolted onto this ‘bag of memories’ before any sense of it can be made.

Eighty-Eight (88)

State-of-the-art technique called “black balling”. The first stage is creating a digital copy of the human mind and fixing the soul to it. The second stage is decanting the mind back into a suitable body – which also requires a specific cyberware implant: the cerebral codex.

THE CITY RECOVERY CORPS

The associated image shows a CRC Roamer taking a nervous break from the tension of the job.

“A good way to introduce a new group to YELLOW DAWN and create an instantly plausible reason for a bunch of disparate characters to come together into a team, is to sign them up with the City Recovery Corps (CRC); saddle-up into a truck and send them out on a Dead City Run (scavenging for resources). They start as individuals but rapidly have to

learn to work together. It gives them immediate exposure to the horror of the Infected (what most survivors called zombies) and the surreal, nerve-jangling tension of entering a Dead City. It can also give them a boost to depleted finances; you always want to start your character groups broke and hungry; desperate for money and resources.”

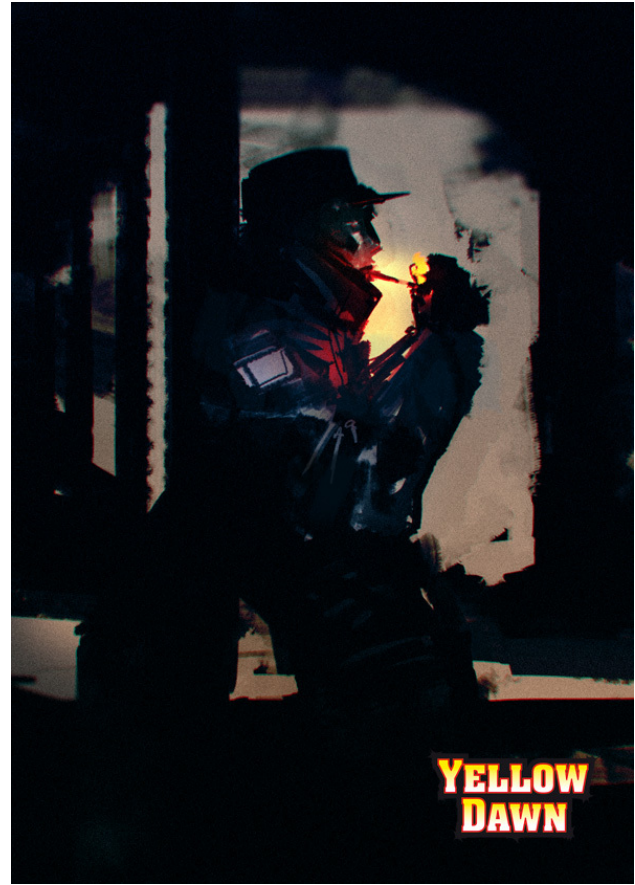


Image of CRC Roamer from YD 3rd Edition

The CRC represent a key USP of the Yellow Dawn world (both the role-playing game and the novels). This is the kind of character encountered in Living Cities hanging out in bars and clubs with their Hog, decompressing and spending their coin, or out in the surrounding Dead Zone or the deep Wilderness on long-range scavenging hauls. The excerpt from Dog Eat Dog further on gives an example of a CRC team going into a Dead Zone.

“The CRC is always expanding its operations, pushing deeper into the Wilderness, setting up staging depots that shuttle accumulated resources back to the nearest Living City where it’s needed most; this could be hundreds if not thousands of miles away. The CRC teams that operate this far into the Wilderness tend to be rough and tumble types, who take what they want, live with the arrogance of their connection to ‘real world’. Many of them treat survivors with respect, but a minority have created a reputation for treating small settlements like nothing more than a hotel or toilet – even stealing resources to reduce the amount of time they need to spend in a Dead City to meet their quota.”

The City Recovery Corps began as a charity organisation that helped out with large ‘urban decommission’ projects in degenerated locations such as New Orleans, Detroit and with populated areas struck by natural disaster where massive structural damage required clearing up (California, Asia, New

Zealand). They brought in armies of volunteers who were able to strip out and recycle large quantities of materials. They fitted perfectly into the role required in the aftermath of the event known as Yellow Dawn.

The City Recovery Corps is now a large global franchise. It runs licensed and organised groups of scavengers that feed the consumer needs and resource-demands of Living Cities. Teams are called Hogs with typically 4 or 5 Roamers. The CRC run operations deep into the Wilderness and have depots and storage hubs linking right back to the nearest Living City. They are sometime disliked by survivors in the Wilderness (considered thugs and thieves) but welcomed by the Rural Support Zones and Living Cities.

INFLUENCE OF HASTUR

Inside the mega settlement of London

And then the day came when he heard the screaming and went to investigate.

The cadet had been dressed in a torn and filthy uniform as if he'd been scrabbling over rocks and through mud before reaching the street; he looked like something from outside the boundary. He was on his knees, hands clutching his face, head pointed towards the heavens as he rocked back and forth, shrieking. It was as if his brain was about to explode. And then Purgo noticed the subtle shift seeping into his perceptions. The way the road beneath his very feet appeared more pot-holed than he recalled it being only moments earlier. The walls of the buildings around him became cracked and fused with sheets of rusting metal that seemed to glisten with repulsive-looking oil. And there was a sense of... negative energy, depressing, deeply unsettling, stepping in amongst the people there. The orange glare of the Feofan sigil had caught his eye then, as it changed, right in front of him, slithering around the cadet's arm to take on some new shape.

And then the FASS had arrived. Sprinting into the scene they shot the cadet dead. Point blank, they pumped bullets directly into his skull. Right there in front of everyone. No hesitation. The brutality left most witnesses numb with shock. A few others fled wailing in horror. Purgo had sensed the imminent danger and made his getaway.

- Excerpt from The Social Club

EXCERPT FROM DOG EAT DOG

Describes a CRC team and their SOP for getting into a Dead Zone. Also shows Infected and ends with the voice of Dragonbreath coming down into their world...

Carlos had hired a CRC team to take him in. There was no other way as far as Carlos was concerned because Trent House was so deep inside the Dead Zone. It would have been suicide to even attempt to get there on his own.

There were no windows in the compartment as such, just thin view slits buried beneath sheets of mesh armour. He was jammed shoulder to hull in the eerie red glow of the night-lights.

Sitting by the sealed rear hatch, Apoc was a skinny Mexican with muscles and pock-marked skin, dressed in a green T-shirt with the sleeves ripped off and baggy combat fatigues in urban colours. Hunched forward with his eyes closed in concentration, hands clamped over the pads of his headset; a boom mike hung in front of wide and thin lips that were pursed together, ready to issue commands. Apoc seemed able to ride out the lurches and swerves of the vehicle like a pro-boarder. Sweat dribbled down from his hairline; a dirty length of wavy dark hair pulled back into a rough pony-tail and tied up with coloured wire; a pair of cheap hydrogel work goggles perched on top. A yellow respirator mask, sans filters, hung below his chin from a strip of elastic.

A pair of scuffed hiking trainers were right in front of Carlos' face, attached to a pair of legs and lower torso that disappeared up through the mortar hatch; they belonged to the spotter, who was up there with a Vortek assault rifle. Like the rest of Apoc's team, the spotter was kitted out in a baggy cargo suit loaded with utility pockets; strips of torn fabric wrapped around the ankles, below the knee and elbows to reduce things rattling around.

The cramped crew compartment was cluttered with crates of equipment and storage boxes that were currently empty. Beyond the hiking trainers and baggy trouser legs, another of Apoc's roamers was leaning back amongst a stack of these, partly concealed.

There were two more of the team up front, a roamer and the driver, the cab sealed off from the crew compartment by a sheet of heavy-duty carbo-plastic. The up front roamer was Charley, and had the second Vortek rifle. Carlos had bought three Vorteks as part of the sweetener to help convince Apoc and his team to take the job. He had the third Vortek on the rubberised floor below him. Despite New Tokyo being a UDP territory, he was able buy military grade ordinance through their CRC charter allowing them to carry lethal items.

None of them had liked the location of Trent House. Going in this deep into a Dead Zone was an issue, as Apoc had repeated several times during their brief negotiation and later during mission-prep.

On the floor nearby was a stubby hydrogel crate of foam-concrete grenades shoved alongside a backpack crammed with drink and food canisters, fresh from O-zone franchises; and somewhere in one of the multitude of overflowing equipment racks was an electromagnetic snapper-jack, with a handful of charged cells, for cracking open locked doors and shutters in a flash. Additional sweeteners for the deal. None of it had been cheap, in particular the ammunition for the three Vorteks; he could only stretch to three loaded magazines each, nine in total, costing 80,000 credits on top of everything else he'd bought.

His 'day out' was racking up an expensive tag. But he needed to do this. He needed to know what secrets, if any, Trent

NARRATIVE EXAMPLES

I've included three excerpts from two novels here. A very short example (above) of the Influence of Hastur starting to take hold within London, from the novel The Social Club. Then a much bigger scene from the novel Dog Eat Dog that describes the CRC moving through a Dead Zone and their encounter with the Infected there. Finally, another scene from The Social Club that provides a glimpse of the Changed.

House held about his dad. Although being here right now he was no longer so certain of his need for the information over the desire to survive.

Too late now, you're here, just deal with it.

Carlos resisted the urge to ask: how much further? The *Stabilo* continued to lurch, swerve, brake and accelerate through whatever obstacles had accumulated within the storm drain.

Apoc had an uncanny knowledge of all things underground, which was unusual for a CRC commander. Surprisingly, it wasn't standard CRC protocol to travel below surface level, even though this might have seemed like a sensible first option to any amateur scavenger keen to avoid the Infected. Every roamer, it appeared, had a handful of strange tales based around uncertain horrors now lurking in the empty spaces below the dead places. Apoc accepted and appreciated this unseen menace and summed up his attitude when he told Carlos: don't let the fear get inside your head.

Since being down here, Carlos had become aware of his heightened senses tingling with some undefined danger. It wasn't his imagination each time he felt none too subtle probing of his thoughts by a cold and depressing mental touch. What was it? He didn't know and didn't ask. The rational mind is capable of fantasy levels of detachment; Carlos hugged the warning from Apoc and simply accepted the experience without locking up into a frightened freak out.

The revs of the ex-military Command and Liaison Vehicle suddenly dropped away as the driver switched from combustion engine to electric motor; it could only mean they were closing in on the storm outlet.

Carlos felt the vehicle decelerate.

"Keep your eyeballs skinned," Apoc, the CRC commander barked through the comms net.

Now was a dangerous moment, as the *Stabilo's* slower speed made it vulnerable to any *Thing* that had heard it.

"Debris! Debris! Twelve O'clock," the spotter hissed so harshly Carlos thought there was static mashing the comms; he lifted the pads of the headphones away from his ears for a second then replaced it, leaned forward in his cramped seat and focussed intensely on what was being said.

The *Stabilo* lurched to the left and a moment later swung back on track. Carlos grabbed what he could to stop himself being slammed against the hull.

"It's getting really busy up ahead," the driver grumbled.

"Then do your job and get us through it," Apoc snapped. Everyone was tense. For the CRC roamers, this wasn't their usual routine; they were chasing the cash carrot Carlos had dangled in front of their eyes and taking a massive risk. For Carlos, he hated having no control, being at the mercy of the men he'd hired only hours ago, and not being able to see what was happening.

Carlos held on whilst the *Stabilo* braked, swerved, and quietly accelerated again. He didn't envy the spotter with his upper body literally above the parapet, probably hunched over to avoid low hanging structural components within the storm drain system.

He allowed his head to hang slack for a moment, neck muscles relaxed, riding the movements of the vehicle; his eyes pulled focus and settled on his lower torso and legs, his whole body encased in the Kevlar polymer weave of a TNT recon suit, charcoal grey verging on black. Something he'd purchased from a military surplus store in the city's O-zone. The soft-padded boots came right up to his knee cap and were purpose built for stealth and speed: synthetic muscle fitted into the calves could assist prolonged periods of remaining stationary or for power sprinting out of the shit. The face-mask was open at the moment,

peeled back and attached to the side of his head; it was too hot to have it closed up. Tactical goggles were hooked into grooves above the hearing-amplification patches, currently swung up and resting on his brow.

Abruptly the tension changed, elevated, jabbed senses with primal warnings.

"Outlet ahead," the spotter muttered.

"Take it steady, Hayley." Apoc said to the driver, "Our exit ramp should be nine-hundred beyond."

"Copy that, nine-hundred," the driver confirmed, her British accent diluted by a back of the throat American twang.

Apoc opened his eyes; Carlos saw his head lift a fraction then tilt to give him a look that said: are you ready for this?

Carlos nodded solemnly and scooped up the *Vortek*, checked safety was on and held it ready. Apoc dropped his gaze to the machete resting across his knees.

The *Stabilo* slowed even further; only the subtle juddering and vibration gave any indication they were moving. Custom muffling removed the whine of the electric motor as it worked to shift the weight of the armoured vehicle; cladding on the wheels helped to absorb the crunch and tinkle of debris scattered across the abandoned roads.

Sweat trickled down the side of his face. An unbearable heat was building up within the coarse fabric of the recon suit. Carlos wiped a wrist pad across his brow. The hiking trainers and legs in front of him shifted as the spotter adjusted his position, no doubt sweeping the lines with the sights of the *Vortek* he had up there with him.

The red glow of the night-light diminished as painfully bright sunlight jabbed into the cramped compartment through the mortar hatch. The *Stabilo* had just popped out of the RCB tunnel into a wide permacrete storm channel. Carlos could see their progress in his mind's eye, overlaid on his memory of the satellite imagery they'd studied whilst prepping the mission.

The target, Trent House, was only three hundred metres from the outlet but getting the *Stabilo* out of the storm channel required them to drive nine hundred metres to the nearest service ramp. The satellite imagery had been archive material so there was some apprehension about what state the ramp would be in, and if it was even going to be useable or not. If not, then plan B was to swing round, return to the storm outlet and Carlos would go in on foot. Not his idea of fun.

"No zeds," the spotter reported in, his voice a dry whisper through the comms net.

Carlos felt the tension ease a little. He glanced over at Apoc; the Mexican was gazing at the floor, jaw muscles working, glistening with sweat.

The *Vortek* had a reassuring weight to it; Euro design, built around the 5.56mm. He still had the stock folded. Not enough room otherwise. His eyes stared at the safety catch and the shape of his gloved hands where they held it with practised comfort.

Time crawled along as slowly as the *Stabilo*. He took his eyes from the *Vortek* and tried to get a view of the roamer who was leaning back amongst the empty storage crates: Halday...Haldane, something like that, he didn't catch it when they'd met. Carlos got the impression he was new to Apoc's crew, which meant he was probably new to the CRC and hell-spots like this. Most of him was hidden but Carlos could see pale skin slick with sweat, thick dark eyebrows bunched together over closed eyes. The roamer looked like he was praying. Carlos saw two short swords held in his hands and folded over the lap of his cargo suit.

Hope you're up to the job, fella, Carlos thought.

The Stabulo stopped soundlessly. Carlos felt the brief forward lurch. Apoc twisted his head to look up front even though there was no way to see what was happening out there.

"Fucking zed, one o'clock," the driver hissed.

"Shit," the spotter apologised and Carlos saw the boots and legs shifting round.

"Range?" Apoc pressed, the word like a curse.

"Eighty," the driver reported.

"Yup, eighty," the spotter followed.

A cold shiver ran through his body, despite the unbearable heat. The sweat chilled against his flesh, and then melted away as the heat swept back through him. He felt light headed and nauseous.

"Status unaware, zed moving across our route, very slow," the spotter advised.

"Others?" Apoc asked.

"Nothing in sight," the driver replied.

"Scanning," the spotter said and his feet and legs began to shuffle round. A few moments later he reported in, "Nothing. Take it down or wait?"

Apoc swung his gaze to Carlos with a questioning look; he realised the commander was seeking permission to use the valuable ammunition. Carlos didn't feel it was appropriate to get tangled in the leadership structure.

"Your call," Carlos croaked.

Apoc rolled his lips together, gave a tense nod. "Take down"

From above came a single cough of suppressed gunfire: one shot.

"Headshot, zed down," the spotter reported. "Not moving. Okay. Clear. Clear."

"Copy that, zed down," Apoc said, "Hayley take us in. Good work Si."

A hand and arm snaked down from above as the spotter reached through. Apoc lunged forward in a half-crouch, the headset cable stretching with him, and slapped the proffered hand which then withdrew back above the mortar hatch.

Apoc retook his seat as the Stabulo shuddered quietly and resumed its forward crawl.

Carlos could feel his heart hammering the inside of his chest. He wanted fresh air in his lungs. He closed his eyes and tried not to think about where they were. His mind played with maths as a distraction. Five miles per hour. Nine hundred metres. How long would it take?

After what felt like an eternity, the spotter called it in, "Exit ramp to our eleven, maybe one hundred and fifty away. Shit there's a gate. There's a gate. It's locked."

The nausea came back.

Apoc got onto the comms net, "Hayley, take us to the gate, nice and slow."

"Heading to gate," the driver confirmed.

"Charley," Apoc referred to the roamer with the third Vortek rifle, sitting up alongside the driver, "At her go, dis-bark to gate and check lock."

"Will do," Charley's voice came back, a low grunt and sounding none-too-happy.

Carlos threw a glance at Apoc; the commander didn't catch it. The Stabulo continued its silent crawl for a few more seconds. Carlos counted off multiples of five-metres.

The spotter's voice came through the comms net in a whisper, "Multiple zeds. Unaware. Repeat, unaware. Two o'clock and three o'clock. Two hundred metres. Outside the channel. Err, twelve of them. Static."

"Keep moving," Apoc murmured gently.

Carlos closed his eyes, brought his lips together as a tense expression formed on his face; sharp taste of sweat. Twelve infected. What were they doing if they were static? Watching the progress of the Stabulo? Men, women, children? Fat, thin? Recently infected and fleshy or a decade old, originals, and all ragged, lean and arthritic?

"Gate is fifty metres. Twenty seconds," the driver reported in.

"Okay rubble rats, this is it, keep it sharp and keep it quiet," Apoc did his commander bit.

Carlos felt the nose of the Stabulo angle upwards as it reached the ramp. A moment later everything came to a stop.

"This is Charley, switching to radio."

"Copy that, Charley," Apoc said.

Carlos understood the drill. The comms net they were all using was powered by vehicle battery. They would only switch to personal radio communications when outside the vehicle to preserve valuable power-cells.

"Charley's outside," the driver reported.

"Copy that," the spotter whispered.

Carlos glanced upwards and saw blue sky above the dark silhouette of the spotter's body, bordered the by curving rim of the mortar hatch. The spotter was stationary, observing the roamer approaching the gate. Bringing his gaze back inside, red night light, held breaths and tension.

Lifting one gloved hand, Carlos reached up and pulled the face-mask away from the side of his head, stretched it into place and pressed down on the sealstrip. The heat immediately intensified. He kept his breathing in check, kept his mouth parted to reduce affecting his hearing. The same hand then slowly swung the tactical goggles down over his eyes. His fingers found the power stud. His view of the inside of the back of the Stabulo adjusted as augmented vision functions kicked in.

"Charley at gate," the spotter reported.

Carlos stared at the spotter's boots in front of him, now rendered in intricate detail. He could have studied separate layers of fabric if he'd wanted to.

"Gate's not locked. Repeat, gate's not locked," the spotter whispered through the comms net. "Charley's got it open."

Carlos felt his guts start to unclench a little.

Apoc began to issue the next command, "Hayley move us--"

Charley's voice burst through the comms net, "Seven o'clock zed-zed-zed, watch out Si."

Seven o'clock was to the left and rear of the Stabulo. Carlos pictured the situation. The top of the vehicle, part way up the permacrete ramp, would be aligned with ground level as it emerged from the storm channel.

The spotter's feet and legs did a two step dance as he twisted his body round. A gasp of horror burst through the comms net.

A thump on the roof above them as if something had landed hard and kept on moving. A snarling, lung shredding howl, not human, not animal.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" the spotter's words shouted loud, both through the comms net and audible beyond the mortar hatch. Then a grunt of impact. The spotter's legs began to kick and thrash.

The comms net went wild with noise.

Apoc was up on his feet, ripping the headset away, dragging the cheap hydrogel goggles down over his eyes. Carlos threw himself back against the hull and froze, his gaze rooted on the crescent of blue sky above him, now boiling with the silhouettes of two figures thrashing about.

The spotter was screaming, the sounds of agony and terror merging into the furious dry rasping shriek of the thing attacking him.

Apoc punched the button by the rear hatch. A silent spring loaded mechanism dropped the hatch to become a stubby ramp. Daylight flooded in. The tactical goggles adjusted, damped down the glare. Machete in hand, Apoc hurled himself out, twisted round, grabbed hold of something above the hatch and hauled himself up and out of sight.

Charley's voice punched through the spotter's gurgling screams, "Two zeds, two zeds, running right at us."

The roamer with the two-swords ripped off his headset, was up into a half-crouch and sprinting down the stubby ramp, his hairless skull gleaming in the sunlight.

The spotter's Vortek assault rifle clattered down into the compartment.

Carlos looked up at the mortar hatch and saw the spotter still tangled with another body, a tight embrace, heads locked together and rolling around like two boxers.

"Forty metres! Forty metres!" Charley's voice a hoarse whisper.

The blue sky shrank in a flurry of frenetic movement; Carlos saw Apoc's skinny figure, one arm swinging, machete blurring.

The spotter dropped down like a sack of rocks, landed on his arse, eyes bugging wide in shock. Carlos saw the flap of skin torn from his cheek.

It was a bite.

People were whisper-shouting commands and questions. Carlos stared at the spotter. Short blonde hair, creases in a tanned white skinned face that was in its early forties.

"Are you hurt? Are you hurt?" A voice was demanding. Carlos didn't know who was speaking or who the question was aimed at.

"Thirty metres, firing, firing," Charley's voice.

Thump of boots on the roof.

Perfect circle of blue sky through the empty mortar hatch.

Carlos throat went as dry as sandpaper. He tried to swallow and everything clogged up.

"One zed down," Charley reported.

The spotter clamped a hand over his torn cheek. His eyes drilled into his other hand that was held up to inspect, covered in blood.

"Are you hurt? Si? Si! What the fuck's happening?"

Carlos worked on instinct, the rest of him still gripped in a state of fear and crippling uncertainty. One hand moved down the Vortek, pushed the safety as far as it would go, onto single-shot. An icon blinked into life within the tactical goggles; ammo count and digital targeting assists appeared a moment later.

The spotter's eyes clenched shut, his face spasmed and compressed as if suffering an intense headache.

"Fuck, zed down, all zeds down," Charley again, putting the Vortek to work.

Apoc swung down from the roof of the Stabilo, landing on the stubby ramp with a dull metallic thud; his goggles were spattered in dark crimson sludge. He glared inside the back of the vehicle, the machete held upright, its blade covered in sticky wet gore.

"Si?" Apoc's voice, filled with grim resignation.

The spotter's eyes snapped open; his expression transformed in the blink of an eye. Rage flared through his features, twisting and straining every facial muscle; the tendons of his neck bulged and throbbed as his mouth opened and emitted a monstrous throaty roar. That inhuman gaze locked onto Apoc.

Carlos didn't have time to unfold the stock or get the weapon into his shoulder. He shoved the barrel towards the spotter and pulled the trigger. Immediate *click - cough - splat* sound. Click as the working parts ejected the empty case and moved forward to pick another round from the magazine. Cough as the noise-suppressed round left the weapon. Splat as the round tore through cargo suit, flesh and muscle.

The spotter was already moving, lunging forward like a mad thing towards the rear of the vehicle and Apoc. Blood exploded from his far side but there was no other effect.

It was Apoc who dealt the killing blow. A rapid downward swoop with the machete which buried itself through the top of the spotter's skull. The spotter's legs gave way and he dropped to his knees, arms surging forward, hands grasping weakly at Apoc's clothes. Apoc didn't hesitate. Just yanked out the machete and sliced down and sideways, cutting through the side of the spotter's skull like it was a water melon.

The spotter tumbled over onto his side and lay twitching.

"Fuck," Apoc cursed, drawing the sound out, staring at the fallen man, but didn't stop to dwell on the tragedy. He glanced at Carlos but his gaze tracked past and kept moving, head turning as he checked all angles. He rapidly cleaned the blade of the machete with a rag he dug out from a leg pocket, hands working automatically like he'd done this a hundred times before.

The comms-net was silent. Carlos guessed everyone was catching the moment, getting their bearings. It was then he saw the spatter of dark crimson material running up alongside Apoc's cheek. Another four centimetres and Apoc would have gotten a mouthful of the stuff. Infection would have likely followed.

"Si's down," Apoc announced the news in a tired mutter.

"We've got company," Charley's voice, sounding tense.

"Surge?" Apoc queried.

"No, three zeds, forty metres, sprinting right at us."

"Okay inverse arrow head, Halliday, Charley, I'm coming to you." Apoc grimaced, chucked the soiled rag to the ground, pulled the yellow filter mask up over his chin to cover his mouth and nose, then rotated away, jumping down from the stubby ramp and vanishing around the side.

Carlos clambered onto the spotter platform and pushed his upper body up through the mortar hatch. The tactical goggles adjusted in the bright light. He saw the front of the Stabilo below him, three metres from the wire-mesh gate which had been swung completely open. To his left the edge of the permacrete ramp dropped away into the storm channel. Ahead was a broad main road with numerous avenues leading onto it; rows of multi-story apartment buildings lined the avenues: smashed windows, weather damaged rendering, abandoned vehicles and the debris left over by a population fleeing in blind panic. More immediate, three figures, like rag dolls, were tumbling down the nearest avenue, approaching the main. All were male, scrawny from years of infection; whatever clothing was left on their filthy emaciated bodies had been reduced to a motley mosaic of grime faded colours, torn pieces flapping as they moved. His conditioning switched on and his brain avoided dwelling on their faces or the idea they had once been people.

They were less than thirty metres away, moving frighteningly fast.

Carlos swung a brief glance to his right, wary of suffering the same fate as the spotter. In the same movement, his hands worked on the Vortek out in front of him, pulled the stock into place.

Down by the open gate, Apoc, Charley and the bald roamer had rapidly got themselves into formation.

Shoot, take the bloody shot! Carlos screamed in his mind, watching Charley hunch up and focus down the sights, left foot forward, and lean into the weapon. He couldn't believe Apoc and Halliday were preparing to engage in hand to hand with these *things*.

Carlos slammed the stock into his shoulder and ducked his head to squint through the sights, finger already on the trigger and applying pressure. The tactical goggles responded to the trigger pressure by tracking everything that was moving, showing arcs of progress and lines of motion in beautiful faint digital overlays. Everything slowed. He stopped breathing. The far left zed ran into the rifle sights. Carlos swivelled minutely and swept the weapon ahead to meet the tactical overlay. He pulled the trigger.

Click and cough.

The zed's head snapped backwards, a cloud of dark crimson gore exploded with it; the zed dropped and tumbled once.

Charley fired a microsecond later, the middle zed took a round to the chest but kept on sprinting forwards, un-phased and unaffected.

Ten metres.

Oh shit, a part of him blurted; he tracked right and found the third zed in his sights. Pressure on the trigger brought up the digital overlays.

He heard Charley fire again but didn't know the outcome.

Carlos pulled the trigger. *Click – Cough*. The side of the zed's face vanished in a burst of shredded flesh and shattered cheek bone. The zed flailed sideways, shook its head and barrelled forwards.

Dragging his eye from the sight Carlos saw the middle zed sprawled on the ground, not moving.

The zed he'd clipped speeded straight towards Halliday who took a faltering backward step, both swords coming up in an uneasy combat form. There was no room for Carlos or Charley to use the Vorteks. Apoc lunged forward to intercept, whipping the machete down in a lethal arc, catching the zed in the face. Blinded and thrashing its arms in an attempt to grab, the zed carried on moving, spinning Apoc with it, the machete buried through skull and not much else. Halliday had hesitated, but now he surged forward and swept both swords in synchronised loops, slicing into the zed's neck, slashing and cutting, pulling back and then plunging forwards again with brutal speed and precision, driving both blades deep into the zed's chest even as it collapsed, mutilated head lolling on strips of severed tendon and muscle.

Apoc and Charley dispersed rapidly, feet stepping over bits of debris with predatory agility, twisting from side to side, checking the angles. Halliday remained stationary with his head bowed staring at the thing he'd just taken down.

Carlos rotated round where he stood half out of the mortar hatch. With his eyes he could follow the slow curve of the storm channel and the main road alongside it for nearly half a mile. There were zeds scattered the whole length, some alone, others in small clusters. The nearest zeds, a couple of stick thin ragged figures, were over a hundred metres away. None of them were reacting, none were picking up the sounds or whatever scent they actually responded to, none of them were running towards his position.

No surge.

The silence came sweeping in like a tangible force. Carlos shuddered in its presence. The mass of tall buildings, the blue sky and bright sunlight. He could remember how it used to be. Something caught his eye; roughly hacked slices of gristle and gore lay on the roof of the vehicle, near the mortar hatch,

glistening in the sun. A momentary gag reflex; Carlos controlled it. Infected flesh. The zed that got Si. Apoc must have pushed the body off the side, out of sight.

Apoc and Charley converged on the Stabilo. Apoc caught his gaze and nodded once; Carlos wasn't sure if it was a thank you or a gesture to get moving.

Halliday wandered over, his pale face flushed red and sweating. Apoc told him to clean his blades and take the spotter's position.

Charley climbed back in up front beside the driver.

Apoc squatted over the lifeless body of Si and began picking through his pockets, removing certain items and placing them in a nearby box. Then he grabbed Si by the arms, dragged the body down the stubby ramp in a trail of fresh blood and dumped it over the permacrete ledge into the storm channel. There was a dull noise of impact. Apoc climbed inside and punched the button above the open hatch. No whine of machinery. The modified hardware silently lifted and retracted the stubby ramp and resealed the hatch.

"Hayley, bring us forward and onto target,"

No funeral for Si. Carlos didn't comment.



The archive satellite imagery was out of date. A row of apartment buildings had collapsed through fire or some long since occurred act of destruction, blocking the route they'd intended to take to target. Despite this, it only took twenty minutes to make their way from the storm channel to the location of Trent House.

It was possibly the longest twenty minutes of Carlos' life.

In the absence of distraction, sitting in the red night-light, swaying with every abrupt lurch, head bobbing loosely with the gentle vibration of movement, the encounter that claimed Si's life kept repeating itself inside the auditorium of his mind, replaying through multitudinous variations where the infection spread to other members of the team.

You're here now, he kept telling himself. No use worrying about it. *Just got to get on with it.*

Halliday called out numerous zed sightings as they went. Three times the Stabilo had to stop for zeds that had stumbled into close proximity: twice the Stabilo reversed away and took a parallel route; and once they simply waited for the zeds to move on. The driver understood the contours of zed awareness, knew how to keep the Stabilo effectively invisible. The rest of the sightings were always beyond the range of immediate risk, nominally thirty metres: standard CRC protocol.

Zeds had bad eyesight but sensitive hearing, and possibly other senses that were less publicly documented.

Apart from Si, Carlos observed no mistakes.

"We're here," the driver reported, her voice tight, "And you gotta see this."

Carlos felt the Stabilo ease to halt and frowned on reflex; the recon suit's mask was peeled away from his face again and attached to the side of his head.

Apoc got up into a half-crouch, head-set cable stretching with him, tugged the leg of Halliday's cargo suit then retook his seat.

Halliday squatted down and met Apoc's gaze. Apoc looked at Carlos and gestured at the mortar hatch.

Halliday climbed down; Carlos went up slowly, squinting as he emerged into the bright daylight. There was no breeze and the sweat prickled the flesh of his face as much as it had inside the oven-like compartment. The machete-hacked strips of infected flesh scattered across the hot roof were liquefying and changing colour. Carlos made a point not to breathe too deeply. He lifted his gaze and looked around him.

It had once been an affluent suburb of New Tokyo. Individual residences, Florida style villas spaced out between wide roads and large gardens. Now it had all turned to shit. Abandoned vehicles sat rusting on the sides of the debris littered roads. Rendering had fallen from the high perimeter walls like flaking scabs, exposing cheap quick-build brickwork beneath; the main structures revealed signs of extensive weather damage after a decade of persistent neglect; roofs were sagging and covered in mildew and in some places vivid coloured fungus had taken dominance. It was typical of any street scene in a Dead City or Dead Zone, although the absence of the signs of scavenging was noticeable.

Even more striking was the condition of the building twenty metres away from where the Stabulo had come to a halt. The perimeter wall was pale yellow stone topped by black painted railings, and suffering from lack of repair. Yet the main building was immaculate. The general villa theme was present in its architecture, but the materials used and the statement made by its quality and size suggested this was a place where rich people once came to spend money.

Doing a slow rotation, Carlos checked there were no zeds lurking nearby. There was one, stick thin and standing in the middle of the road about eighty metres away, but it wasn't responding to their presence.

Carlos hesitated, it almost seemed as if the zed was staring right back at him, but the angle of the sun and the cast of the shadow blacked out any view of the thing's features.

Flexing the muscles of his face, Carlos grimaced and went back to squinting in the bright light. His eyes tracked to the corporate signage beside the black metal gate which stated this was Trent House, a subsidiary of Nascent Virm.

He knew the sign would be there. The words, the corporate names, sucked at his gaze and pulled from his mind the knowledge he'd built up around them, tugged at the emotional hooks that had formed between that knowledge and his psyche.

Nascent Virm had once been a global bio-medical company that specialized in developing, manufacturing and distributing bio-ware and cybernetic implants, specifically aesthetic enhancements. They had been big in cosmetic and reconstructive surgery, with a business model based around exclusive clinics that came across as unique and individual, but were really just part of the Nascent Virm franchise chain. Trent House was one of these.

Carlos had exhausted all of his E-FIB resources years ago, digging into the connections between Nascent Virm and his dad but all leads led to and died in Trent House. The story was brutally simple. Nine months after Carlos had walked out on his dad and New Tokyo, the man had been evicted from the property by the landlord for non-payment of rent. No surprises there, Carlos had predicted that would happen even before he left: his dad was hooked on bad drugs and stealing to feed the habit, paying rent wasn't high on the list of needs.

On the same day as the eviction his dad was involved in a pedestrian collision with a vehicle under human control. The police report on the incident was buried under a gagging order

issued by Nascent Virm's legal department. The only additional information Carlos had been able to extract was that his dad had been injured and moved to Trent House after the incident. No further information had ever come to light.

The way Carlos read it was that a wealthy corporate exec had been at the wheel of the vehicle, either driving under the influence, or without a proper licence or some such, and Nascent Virm buried the incident to avoid one scandal or another. They took his dad to Trent House and that's where he died; with or without a little help from the medical team there. His dad's organs were probably harvested, and sold to somebody with a need for them and a bank account big enough to obviate normal donor license checks and DNA referencing.

"Hey, you okay up there?" It was Apoc's voice, calm, almost a whisper, coming through the ear-bed he was using to patch into the team's comms.

Carlos blinked his gaze back into focus and swivelled his eyes from the signage to the street: the solitary zed was still there, still staring back at him or so it seemed.

"Yeah, I'm good man," Carlos sub-vocalised back, then dropped down inside and clambered back to his seat. The shift from daylight to red night-light left him blind for a few moments but he could sense Apoc and Halliday staring at him: they wanted to know what to do next, they wanted to know why they were here. "I can see what Hayley was on about. The building's made with mesck-core. It looks as good as the day they put it up."

Mesck-core meant the building was self-repairing; one of the new generation of construction and structural engineering technologies that had been emerging just before Yellow Dawn hit.

"So that's a good thing, right?" Halliday suggested, his point-of-view influenced by CRC mentality: the better the condition, the better the scavenge.

Carlos wasn't so certain, he hunched his shoulders and shifted his gaze between Apoc and Halliday, "Depends what else might be intact in there."

It was classic thinking out loud, and a mistake.

"Security?" Apoc asked.

"I'm not freeking going in there," Halliday complained in almost the same breath, "No way."

"Unknown," Carlos responded to Apoc, ignoring Halliday.

"What's your game plan, maaan?" Halliday drilled, he was jumpy and unnerved; not a good first ride out for him with the CRC.

Apoc span round to lock a glare onto the roamer, "We're staying out here, Hal. Got that? Only the man here's going in. Right?" The last question to Carlos.

Carlos nodded grimly as Halliday and Apoc turned their heads meaningfully towards him; then he zoned in on Apoc's gaze and said, "Like I said before, I'm after data. Are you still cool to hold position here whilst I go in?"

Apoc nodded slowly, holding his gaze, but could see there was rapid thinking going on inside the commander's mind.

Carlos had been trying to hack into Trent House computer system for years. There was an active node visible on the net. He always figured it was just the comms link running on backup and that the rest of the system had shut down, but looking at the immaculate building he wondered if there was another explanation.

"Hate to break up your tea party but I've got a zed, one o'clock," the driver announced through the comms net, "Moving towards our position. Slow and unaware."

"Freeking zeds!" Halliday cursed, his voice trembling with emotion, "They're like freeking insects man, scuttling along getting into everything."

"Goes with the terrain, rubble rat," Apoc replied, using the tone of his voice to try and ease the tension. Then to Carlos, "So you want to do what you got to do, so we can get out of here?"

Carlos nodded, looked down at the floor as he spoke, "Hayley?"

"Yup."

"Can you bring us alongside the perimeter wall? There's a spot just past the main gate that's clear of crap."

"I see it. Okay, will do."

A slight shudder as the Stabilo eased forwards and mounted the pavement. A few seconds of movement then.

Something happened.

It started with the driver's surprised mutter through the comms-net, "Sentry-mech, on the gate, active and scanning us."

Apoc snapped a tense look at Carlos.

A moving sensor meant the place still had power.

Then everybody with a PA stuffed into a pocket felt the vibration of an active signal alert. A satellite channel had just opened up overhead.

The driver said as much, "Okay, I've got a sat-link dialling into my systems. Something is probing us."

Apoc tilted his head, a disgruntled expression rapidly forming; Carlos could sense he was about to give a command to pull back. Carlos held up his hand to delay him. Like most corporations, Nascent Virm had gone out of business during Yellow Dawn. It didn't make sense for anything to be operational out here.

Apoc glared at Carlos hand but held his tongue. Several seconds passed.

"Hayley, Charley, what's happening?"

"Everything seems cool," Hayley reported in. "I'm looking at my systems and they're all fine. It was just a probe."

"Yeah but from *what*?" Halliday questioned, wide-eyed and fidgeting with the twin swords in his hands.

"Any zeds out there?" Apoc asked, ignoring Halliday.

"Rear cam is clear. Still got one approaching. Slow and unaware," the driver replied, calm, and then added, "We just pulled up where you asked."

Apoc gestured at the mortar hatch, "Over to you."

Carlos grimaced, reached up to his face, stretched the mask into place and pressed down the sealstrip. The top of his scalp began to itch with the build up of heat, sweat and the sharp spike of nervous tension. With some difficulty, he'd held off delving into the goodies of the gland-implant during the ride here, wanting to wait until he'd reached this point. Pausing for a moment his mind reached out to the synaptic-bridge and glanded a mix of neurotransmitters and other chemicals, stimulating an engineered stress response.

The adrenaline rush kicked in with an immediate and brutal up-rush but other hormones calmed the shaking of his hands.

Carlos swung the tactical goggles back down over his eyes, then grabbed the Vortek rifle, checked the safety was on, climbed up onto the spotter platform and eased himself up through the mortar hatch.

The zed was forty metres away, doing the walk of the long-infected, muscles and motor systems mostly wasted away: shoulders and head jerking and wobbling as the hips swung sharply from side to side. Carlos unfolded the stock into place, pressed it into his shoulder, took aim through the rifle sights. The zed was staring at the road, not actually looking at him; it was a woman, it *had been* a woman, Carlos corrected: greasy blonde hair

hanging lankly past bruised and bony shoulders, a grime crusted face with slackened features. His gloved fingers pushed the safety all the way across to single shot, then came back and applied initial pressure to the trigger. He saw the digital overlays map the shuffling progress of the zed. He took the shot.

Click - Cough.

The zed dropped as a cloud of dark purple gore burst from the back of its head. Carlos didn't allow his mind to register what happened to the face.

"Zed down," he heard the driver report over the comms net.

He glanced at the gate and saw the insect like sentry system, tiny limbs flexed and alert.

So are you watching me, or just raising an alarm in some dormant system? There was nothing he could do about it so ignored it for now.

Carlos brought the Vortek's safety back on, then carefully placed the rifle on top of the vehicle's hull before hauling himself bodily up and out. He took special care not to touch or step in the scraps of infected flesh.

Crouching on top of the Stabilo, he picked up the Vortek and made his way to the black painted railings.

A minute burst of static in his ear caused him to pause.

Then a voice came through his ear-bead; male, low volume, deep timbre, almost perfectly human but also noticeably synthetic. "Before you come inside, can I ask what you want?"

END OF EXCERPT

Dog Eat Dog is available in paperback and Kindle from Lulu books and Amazon:

LULU:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/david-j-rodger/dog-eat-dog/paperback/product-18954442.html>

Amazon:

US

<http://www.amazon.com/Dog-Eat-David-J-Rodger/dp/1492195448>

UK

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dog-Eat-David-J-Rodger/dp/1492195448>



EXCERPT FROM THE SOCIAL CLUB

A glimpse of the Changed and an Infected.

He found SV Peter Ognyan reclined by his workstation, reading a tattered old book, in one of the small labs. The solitary window that would have provided a stunning view of the Settlement was long since obscured by rusting metal lockers, all of them missing doors, stuffed to overflowing with hardcopy prints of various texts. All of them were scientific, philosophical or mathematical. Purgo knew because SV Ognyan often showed him new additions to the collection and had a preternatural ability to find exactly what he wanted amidst the chaotic piles. The light came from a couple of sodalum panels fixed to one wall at an off angle. The air was unnaturally cool and always reeked of some chemical that made him think of embalming fluid. Observing him from purpose-built cabinets of transparent carbo-plastic were once-living creatures large and small. Part study, part hobby, SV Ognyan had once explained he replaced the vital fluids, down to the molecular level, with a partially organic polymer that hardened into a resin. The most disturbing of the specimens however, were the two upright corpses standing rigidly beside one wall. Purgo had experienced them before from previous visits. It was impossible not to stare at them. Naked, each represented a new chain in the evolution of the human species, a result of dramatic pathogenic mutation.

On the left was the weirdest but easiest to look at. Male, roughly ninety kilograms, mostly muscle; but the rigid build was wrapped in glistening skin that was unnaturally black. It

glistened because in life the skin constantly wept with a plasma-like fluid. The preservation process showed it to full effect. The creature had once been a Caucasian man of Polish descent, living in London; he'd fallen ill on Day Zero but rather than die from the first pathogen as over seventy percent of the global population did, he'd gone into a feverish, coma-like state, and woken a few days later... one of the Changed.

The face was awful – like all of the Changed. Coarse, rubbery features with a slightly distended jaw; eye whites now pure black; with increased muscular definition the facial expressions degenerated into crude displays of limited emotional range; such as simple happy, frowning and thoughtful, angry and menacing. This one looked furious, the lips started to curl back against yellowed fangs, the jet-black eyes narrowed, exaggerating the redness of the raw, damaged tissue that surrounded them – a common aspect. The scalp was also raw, with lank and greasy hair that had come away in clumps.

Purgo couldn't even begin to imagine what it must be like, to fall sick one day and then wake up days later, to not only find the world as you knew it changed forever, but to find that you were also...Changed. That you were no longer you.

He shuddered as his gaze briefly crossed the face. It was so alien and yet, so human. They were not monsters; they were victims. Purgo had nothing against the Changed. He didn't despise or distrust them as many people did in London. Regrettably, the Group had made it their policy to not allow members who had survived as the Changed, to remain as members. In fact, there were no Changed anywhere in London apart from the few that tumbled through the seedier areas amongst the Weeds: they were apparently very good with metal and mechanical things.

On the right of the specimen was another creature altogether, once human, and this truly was a monster despite appearing almost normal: a naked female, raggedly thin with battered and bruised flesh, the stains of ugly yellows, blues, purples and greens contrasting against the greyish blue skin, preserved for all time where the body had undergone physical trauma. Bone thin fingers hooked like claws; broken fingernails. A messy tangle of filthy blonde hair. Glassy, bloodshot eyes, bulging in a fixed expression of outrage beneath a creased, dirt-smudged brow. A once pretty mouth yawning open in an endless shriek of murderous anger. This was one of the Infected. Even stationary it conjured up blood-chilling memories that Purgo preferred never crawled out of his brain again.

Neither specimen showed any mortal injuries. No indication of how they had perished to become permanent exhibits here. SV Ognyan never discussed where he actually acquired them from, although he did once reveal the Infected had drowned.

Purgo understood why SV Ognyan had them here. He was an expert on biological systems and one of London's foremost authorities on the culture of the Changed and the enigmatic, horrifying nature of the Infection. Which made Purgo puzzled as to why the reported death of Tyson Hameldon, Managing Director of Resource Reclamation, should have been placed in SV Ognyan's hands.

END OF EXCERPT



The Social Club is available in paperback and Kindle from Lulu books and Amazon:

LULU:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/david-j-rodger/the-social-club/paperback/product-21304525.html>

Amazon:

US

<http://www.amazon.com/Social-Club-David-J-Rodger/dp/1494204843>

UK

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Club-David-J-Rodger/dp/1494204843>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David J Rodger was born in Newcastle Upon Tyne, England, in 1970. A science fiction dark fantasy author he is the creator of YELLOW DAWN, a successful role-playing game based on the world formed by his books.

He writes freelance non-fiction for UK magazines such as SFX and publishes short stories in the UK, US, Canada and Japan.

His professional career spans nearly 20 years, from developing a virtual communications service for a non-departmental government agency through to commercial project management for UK media companies.

He now lives in Bristol with a Braun coffee-maker, writing from a house on a hill with a view of the Earth's curve. He can be found on the web at: <http://www.davidjrodger.com/>

