

**EVE
OF THE
DEAD**

**A TALE OF
APOCALYPTIC TERROR BY
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ONLINE EXCERPT

The five survivors have just escaped from a rescue station that had fallen into a state of chaos. They have decided to leave the city to seek shelter elsewhere.

The two vehicles sped down the road at nearly eighty miles-per-hour through the outskirts of town as the sun began to set. The clouds in the sky appeared a deep red as the sun crept into the horizon. The men in the vehicles were able to see a few zombies in the streets, but their numbers decreased the further they drove from the inner city. There were more trees and wooded areas on the outskirts of town, but there were still quite a few shopping centers and gas stations spread out along the sides of the road.

Sean suddenly slammed on his brakes as Scott's car whipped sharply into a parking lot on the right side of the road.

"What the hell?" Mark exclaimed. He braced himself against the dashboard as the van jolted to a stop.

"What is he thinking?" Sean asked, looking up at the large sign in front of them, which read, "Wal-Mart Supercenter." Underneath the large sign was a smaller sign that read, "Open 24 Hours." Sean pulled into the parking lot, following Scott's car, which was already several hundred feet ahead of them.

"Forget it, man," Mark yelled as he spotted a large crowd of zombies lumbering around in the immense parking lot. "There's too many of those creatures!"

"What's Scott doing?" Luke asked as he leaned forward in the back seat. Scott's car sped right through the crowd of ghouls, smashing violently into several of them, sending their stiff bodies flying across the parking lot. His car broke quickly through the crowd of ghouls and came to a screeching stop directly in front of the gate to the Garden Center. A moment later, Sean drove up beside him. Luke stood up and poked his head out through the sun-roof.

"What the hell are you doing?" Luke demanded as Scott rolled down his window. Joe fired off a shotgun blast through the passenger window at a nearby zombie. The creature dropped limply to the pavement, a pool of blood forming around its head.

“Follow me,” Scott said calmly as he motioned for Sean to wait behind him. He revved up his engine several times before letting go of the clutch. The car’s tires squealed as smoke rose from the burning rubber. A moment later, the car crashed through the gate, breaking the chain which had held it locked in place. He slammed on the brakes just before the car reached the two glass doors of the store entrance.

“Come on!” Scott yelled as he and Joe jumped out of the car and motioned to Sean to drive in closer. He grabbed a small shovel from a nearby gardening tools display to use as a makeshift melee weapon. Sean parked the van behind Scott’s car, and he and the other two passengers jumped out.

“You’re crazy, man!” Luke exclaimed, pointing at the mob of zombies that were sluggishly approaching.

“Close the gate!” Scott yelled. “Come on, help me!” He pushed one side of the gate as Mark closed the other side. Joe picked up the broken chain that was lying on the ground and tried to put it back on the gate.

“That’s not gonna work,” Scott said. The broken chain wasn’t long enough to reach around the bars of the gate.

Mark slung the assault rifle off his shoulder and fired a three-round burst into the herd of walking corpses. One of the creatures fell as the bullets plowed through its skull. He pulled the trigger again, but the gun only made a clicking noise. Realizing the magazine cartridge was empty, he slung the rifle strap over his shoulder and drew his pistol.

“You guys watch the gate,” Sean suggested, running off down an aisle which was filled with gardening tools. “Don’t let them get in!” His voice trailed off as he disappeared behind the aisles.

Luke reluctantly joined the other three men at the gate. “This will never work! How the hell are we going to get out of here?”

“Just shut up and hold the gate,” Scott ordered as the crowd of ghouls came menacingly close to the fence. A moment later, several of them had already reached the gate and were reaching through the bars at the young men. Their cold, pale arms flailed around wildly, trying to grab onto some fresh meat.

“Hurry up with that!” Mark yelled out to Sean, who was still nowhere to be seen. One of the cold, disgusting hands grabbed

Mark's face, but he slapped it away. He stuck his pistol between the bars of the gate and fired several shots at the creatures.

Suddenly, Sean popped out from behind a shelf. He was carrying a coiled up water hose.

"This should hold up for now," Sean said matter-of-factly as he uncoiled the hose. Scott helped him tie the water hose tightly to the gate while the others held it steady. Once they secured the hose firmly in place, the men stepped back away from the gate and watched the horde of ghouls as they tried in vain to get through the gate.

"Good job," Mark said. "It looks like we're okay for now."

The five men made their way through the Garden Center toward the automatic glass door entrance. As they approached the door, it slid open for them automatically.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Scott exclaimed. "The doors are unlocked."

The men walked cautiously into the large store. It almost seemed like a dream to them as they entered the colorful arena. It was as if they had stepped out of a dark, nightmare world into a brightly lit land of toys and goodies. All of the lights were on inside the store, casting a warm fluorescent glow upon the bountiful supply of goods hoarded within its walls. Pleasant, upbeat music played frivolously through the store's ceiling-mounted speakers. Racks of clothing, aisles of beauty care products, jewelry cases, toys, and electronic gadgets were spread out as far as the eye could see. The five young men stood staring wide-eyed at the bounteous treasures which lay before them.

The once bustling superstore of consumerism had somehow managed to evade detection from the city's vicious gangs of looters. Maybe it was because the store was so far out on the outskirts of the urban sprawl that it had simply been overlooked by potential raiders. Or maybe some people had previously attempted to get in, but had died in the process and had joined the army of walking corpses that now surrounded the place. Either way, it didn't matter to Scott Walker. He had finally found what he had been searching for. The place was now his for the taking.

"Let's go shopping!" Scott exclaimed with obvious excitement in his voice. Mark and Joe cheered loudly, giving each other a high-five.

After a few moments of celebration, the three men quieted down as they noticed that Luke and Sean were not quite as thrilled. Sean stood rigid, his eyes darting around nervously, as Scott raised his shotgun and loaded a shell into the chamber. He broke the silence with a cock of his shotgun, and an empty shell bounced and rolled across the tile floor.

“Jesus Christ,” Joe blurted out as he spotted a large group of people in the distance. They were the walking dead—clearly identifiable by their all-too-familiar stride. More zombies appeared from the clothing aisles, joining in the advance toward the five men. Some of them pushed empty shopping carts, mimicking a common action of their former lives. A few of them carried various items they had picked up from the store aisles.

“Let’s get the hell out of here!” Luke gasped, his voice trembling. Several creatures emerged from the nearby aisles, blocking the exit to the Garden Center.

“Wait a minute!” Scott exclaimed with excitement in his voice. He fired a shotgun blast at a nearby zombie, blowing its body backward into a pyramid display of paper towels. The paper rolls scattered across the floor of the store.

Mark turned and faced the creatures that were blocking the exit. He fired again and again, some of his bullets hitting their target, and some bouncing off the concrete walls. One of the zombies dropped as a bullet tore through its forehead. Mark waited for a moment, aiming carefully at another ghoul’s head as it approached. He squeezed the trigger, but the gun only clicked. He squeezed again, but the gun wouldn’t fire.

“Damn it!” Mark cursed. “I’m out of ammo!”

“Let’s leave this place!” Luke yelled.

“No!” Scott cried. “Follow me to the Sporting Goods!”

“You’re insane!”

“Trust me,” Scott said as he darted off through the store aisles.

The other four hesitated for a moment, frozen in horror as the army of zombies closed in on them. Then Mark tucked the Glock into his pants and took off running behind Scott. The other three men snapped out of their trance and dashed off toward the Sporting Goods without a second thought. They sprinted past two slow-moving creatures that tried to grab them, but the lone ghouls just weren’t fast enough for the agile young men.

When they reached the Sporting Goods, it became apparent why Scott was so eager to go there. He was hovering over a glass display case, wide-eyed with anticipation as he surveyed its contents. The other four men looked around at the wide selection of goods on display. Two large display cases caught their attention—one contained a rack of rifles, and in the other one there was a rack of shotguns. The wooden racks were encased in glass.

“Over here, Mark!” Scott cried. He was standing behind a glass checkout counter with was stocked full of ammunition boxes. As his brother walked up behind him, he pointed through the glass at a stack of boxes with the words “Winchester 9 mm” printed on them.

“Great!” Mark exclaimed. “But how the hell are we gonna get them out of there?”

Scott looked up at his brother and grinned. He lifted the butt of his shotgun and smashed it through the top of the glass counter in a single swift motion.

Mark rolled his eyes and popped the magazine out of his handgun. He dumped a box of bullets out onto the counter and loaded his clip while Scott opened up a box of shotgun shells from a display stack.

“This is no good,” Joe said. He was standing beside the rifle display, staring at the arsenal of weapons. “They all have locks on them.”

“Then we’ll need the keys,” Scott answered as he loaded some shells into his shotgun. He filled his pockets with as many shells as he could fit in them.

“Where’s Luke?” Sean asked, realizing that Luke was nowhere in sight.

Suddenly, the two ghouls that they had passed by on their way to the Sporting Goods section walked around the corner of an aisle. Scott and Mark let loose a barrage of gunfire, and the two creatures dropped like rag dolls. The four men stood poised as they stared at the lifeless corpses, waiting for more zombies to emerge from the aisles.

A loud crash of shattering glass thundered from behind them. The men spun around and saw Luke holding a hatchet. He had smashed the glass on the rifle display case.

“Where’d you get the axe?” Joe asked his cousin.

“From the hardware department,” Luke replied as he walked over to the shotgun display. He swung the hatchet as hard as he could and smashed through the glass containing the rack of shotguns. The shattered glass rained down on the linoleum floor, crackling beneath Luke’s shoes as he stepped back. He grabbed a double-barrel shotgun from a rack labeled “Rossi Squire 20-Guage,” and emptied a box of 20-guage shotgun shells into his pocket.

“Let’s take what we can and get the hell out of here,” Joe suggested as he walked over to the rack of rifles. He spun the circular display around, until he spotted a weapon that caught his eye. The rifle had a short barrel and a mounted scope, and the label above it read, “Steyr Arms Scout.”

Sean walked up beside Joe and surveyed the arsenal of rifles. A lever-action rifle with a mounted scope caught his attention. The label above the gun read, “Marlin 336A.” Sean picked up the gun and walked over to the ammunition counter. He picked out a case of .30-30 rounds for his rifle and tossed a box of .308 Winchester to Joe.

“We need to find the keys to those locks if you guys are going to be able to use the guns,” Scott advised. All of the rifles and shotguns had safety locks attached to their firing mechanisms.

“Let’s do it,” Mark said as he cocked his handgun enthusiastically. He scooped up the rest of the nine-millimeter bullets on the counter and dumped them into his pockets.

Sean and Joe strapped their rifles to their backs. They each grabbed a baseball bat from a nearby aisle, and Luke held onto his hatchet.

“I’m pretty sure the main offices are in the rear of the store,” Scott said. “The keys should be back there somewhere.” He pointed to a set of double-doors that led to the stockroom.

The five young men looked around cautiously before moving. There were several zombies walking toward them in the distance, but they were so far away that they didn’t pose any immediate threat. The men could hear footsteps from behind several aisles, and a several unseen zombies let out ghoulish moans.

Scott fidgeted with his shotgun for a moment, ejecting a jammed shell from the chamber, while the other four waited patiently for his signal to run.

Mark noticed a stack of ammo labeled “.223 Remington.” He grabbed a box, remembering that the M-16 was out of bullets. He stuffed the box of ammo in his pocket and glanced over at his brother.

Scott lifted his shotgun in one hand and motioned for the others to go. In unison, the group of young men made a dash for the double-doors, Scott taking the lead.

As they rounded the corner of an aisle, Scott bumped into a wandering creature. The ghoul stumbled backward, and Scott smashed the butt of his gun into the creature’s skull, knocking it to the floor. When the group reached the stockroom doors, they stopped running.

Scott and Mark walked up, facing the doors, while the others stepped back, their melee weapons braced for action. Scott and Mark held their guns up high and looked over at each other. Scott nodded at his brother, and Mark kicked the doors open. The two brothers charged through the doors, aiming their weapons this way and that, like a SWAT team making a raid.

The stockroom was dark, and all the brothers could see were boxes and a few empty pallets. It was quiet, and as far as they could see, there were no creatures in sight. The brothers crept cautiously through the maze of boxes as their eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness. The other three men followed closely behind with their weapons in hand.

“It looks clear,” Mark said as he flipped a light switch on the wall. The room flickered with dull fluorescent light for a few seconds, creating an eerie scene. Then the room went dark again for a moment and the overhead lamps bathed the stockroom in bright light.

Luke picked up a heavy box from a dark corner of the room and moved it into the light. A label on the box read, “Campbell’s Soup.”

“At least we won’t starve to death,” Joe said with a sigh.

“Oh, we’re going to eat well,” Scott added. “Don’t you worry about that.” He looked around at all the boxes, wide-eyed like a kid in a candy store.

“How are we going to get this stuff out of here?” Sean asked. “We can’t just walk out of here with this stuff.”

“You’re right,” Scott agreed. “That’s why we have to stay here.”

“What?” Mark cut in. “Are you crazy?”

“There’s no way!” Luke cried.

Sean and Joe glanced at each other, shaking their heads.

“Look,” Scott said. “We don’t have a lot of options here. Those creatures are everywhere. We’re gonna have to deal with them anywhere we go.”

“That’s true,” Mark agreed. “But this place is full of them! We stay here and we’re just begging for trouble!”

“No,” Scott said calmly. “Look around. We have everything we could ever need here. And those creatures are so slow! We can hold them off easily.”

“He’s right,” Sean chimed in. “We held up fine back at the house. The only reason we had to leave is because we ran out of food.”

“But this place is so huge!” Joe said, shaking his hands in the air.

“We might be able to stand our ground against those creatures,” Luke said. “But what about other people? We’re not the only ones who need food and supplies.”

Scott opened his mouth to speak but Joe cut him off.

“That’s right! Even if we take care of those monsters, there are bound to be looters. And most of them are probably armed!”

“We’ll just have to deal with that when the time comes,” Scott said, raising his voice. He set his shotgun down on a stack of boxes and picked up one of the large boxes. He walked over to the double doors and placed the box in front of them. He stacked another box on top of it.

Mark tucked his pistol into his jeans and moved to help his brother. He picked up a heavy box containing a large television and stacked it on top of the other boxes.

“Oh, I see,” Luke said sarcastically. “We’re just going to barricade ourselves in here.”

“Yes,” Scott replied coldly as he lifted another box. “For now. We haven’t eaten all day, and I’m sure a little sleep wouldn’t hurt us either.”

Sean joined the two brothers and started stacking boxes against the doors.

“This is exactly what we’re trying to get away from!” Luke exclaimed, crossing his arms. “We’re creating a prison for ourselves!”

Joe dropped his baseball bat and picked up a box. He joined the others as they created a wall of heavy cartons.

“I can’t believe we’re doing this!” Luke protested. He sighed, standing rigid with his arms crossed tightly. He still held the hatchet in his right hand, watching the others with disapproving eyes as they stacked the last few boxes on the barricade.

As soon as the barricade was complete, the men heard banging noises on the doors. They stepped back and watched as the creatures on the other side of the doors tried in vain to push through. The heavy boxes held up well against the barrage.

Luke’s eyes darted back and forth nervously as he held his hatchet tightly in both hands. With each strike against the doors, he tensed up, backing further and further away.

“They can’t get through,” Sean said as he approached Luke with an outstretched hand. He patted Luke on the shoulder, trying to console him.

“I know,” Luke replied, swallowing nervously. “But if enough of them come—they will.”

“Don’t worry,” Scott said from across the room. “This will buy us the time we need. Once we find the keys to the locks on those guns, we’ll have enough firepower to really do some damage.”

“Great,” Luke mumbled in a blatantly sarcastic tone. “I can’t wait.”

Mark picked up a box cutter from one of the shelves on the wall and opened a nearby box. He dumped the contents onto the concrete floor. The metallic sound of sardines cans hitting the concrete echoed off the thick walls. Mark picked up one of the cans and popped the lid open with its little key. The strong odor of fish filled the room, and the other men scrambled to grab a can for themselves. They were so hungry that they just dumped the contents of the cans into their mouths.

Scott ripped open another container, revealing an assortment of cracker boxes. He eagerly tore into a box of crackers, dumped some sardines on them, and stuffed them into his mouth. The oil from the sardines ran down his chin onto his shirt.

After the men had stuffed their bellies full of food, Mark, Joe and Sean propped themselves up against a stack of boxes and dozed off to sleep.

Scott sat munching on crackers as he stared off into space in deep thought.

“I have to take a leak,” Luke said, glancing over at Scott.

Scott nodded silently. His mind was elsewhere.

Luke stood up and scanned the room until he spotted the employee restroom behind a stack of boxes. He approached the room with caution, expecting a zombie to pop out at any moment. He hesitated at the door for a moment, holding his hatchet up in one hand. Slowly, he turned the doorknob, and the door creaked open, revealing the dark restroom. He stepped back and waited, ready for action. But the room was quiet. Cautiously, he reached through the door and felt around blindly on the cold concrete wall until he found the light switch. He flicked it on, and the room lit up, revealing a small, dirty bathroom with a single toilet and a grimy sink. Relieved, he lowered his axe and walked into the room, shutting the door behind him.

After a couple of minutes, Luke returned to the front of the stockroom and found the three men still sleeping against the boxes. But Scott was gone, and his shotgun along with him.

“Scott?” Luke called out, cupping a hand around his mouth. The sound of his voice reverberated around the concrete stockroom. Everything was quiet except for the gentle snoring from Mark’s open mouth.

Luke noticed a dim light shining from an open door far across the other side of the stockroom at the end of a dark hallway.

“Scott? Is that you?” Luke’s calls received no answer. The room was far enough away that it would have been hard for anyone to hear him from where he was standing. He glanced back at the other men, but they were still fast asleep.

“Damn it,” Luke cursed to himself, clenching his teeth. He walked cautiously toward the hallway, stepping over boxes along the way. He entered the dark corridor tentatively, readying his hatchet with both hands.

“Scott?” he called out as his voice echoed down the dimly lit hall. When he reached the open door, he peered around the corner. It was an office, and the only source of light was a small lamp on the

desk in the middle of the room. Stacks of papers were scattered all over the desk, and file cabinets lined the wall at the back of the room. Luke walked up to the desk, but Scott was nowhere to be seen.

“Hello?” Luke called out nervously.

Suddenly, a loud crash rang out from the corner of the room behind Luke. He spun around quickly, raising his hatchet high into the air.

“Jesus Christ, man!” Scott gasped, standing in the doorway to a closet next to the door that Luke had entered. “You scared the shit outta me!”

“Sorry,” Luke said, panting nervously, his heart pounding with adrenaline.

“Look what I found,” Scott said with a smile, holding up a large set of keys.

“The keys to the guns?” Luke asked as his face lightened a little.

“Yep,” Scott replied. “And that’s not all.” He tossed something to Luke. Luke caught the item, dropping his hatchet to the floor.

Luke looked at the object in his hands, and realized that it was a revolver. The gun was fully-loaded with six .38 caliber rounds. He sighed with a breath of relief and tucked the revolver into the back of his pants.

“Let’s get the locks off of those guns!” Scott said excitedly. He rushed out of the office and Luke followed, leaving the little hatchet behind.

When they emerged from the hallway, they found the other men still sleeping against the boxes. Scott picked up Sean’s rifle first and tried one of the many keys on the big key ring. After several attempts, the lock popped open and fell off the trigger of the rifle to the floor.

“Good job,” Luke commended Scott. Then he handed his double-barrel shotgun to Scott.

Scott used the same key on the shotgun’s lock, and it opened on the first try. He handed the weapon back to Luke and picked up Joe’s rifle.

Luke cradled the shotgun in both hands as if he was holding a baby. He held his shiny new weapon up, examining every inch of the beautiful gun. Gripping the shotgun with his right hand, he held his left wrist out and slapped the gun across his arm, opening the break-

action on the barrels. He reached into his pocket and slid a shell into each of the chambers and clicked the action back into place with a snap of his wrist. He lifted the gun, aiming across the stockroom as he inspected the sights.

Meanwhile, Scott had unhooked the lock from Joe's rifle and was rousing the other men from their naps.

"You found the keys?" Sean asked sleepily.

"You bet," Scott replied with a smile. He tossed the unlocked rifle to Sean.

Sean and Joe loaded their rifles and inspected their new weapons, testing out the cocking mechanisms and looking through the sights.

"Looks like it's time for a shopping spree," Mark said, rubbing his eyes as he yawned.

Luke gave him a funny look, but the others smiled and nodded in agreement.

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