

Like Chicken for Deadfucks (excerpt) **by Andre Duza**

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Anonymous man awoke to pinpricks of white-hot pain. Having no recollection of his surroundings, himself, or how he got to be where he was, he fell hard against the warm leather seat-cushion, his fingertips massaging his clammy brow in small circles as if it might initiate recall.

A quick survey of the area returned bits and pieces of information. It was the dead of night, he had been asleep, or unconscious in the passenger's seat of someone's car—for how long he had no idea—sitting idle in the rear section of the 24-hour Megamart's vast parking lot, back where the dumpsters lined up to gobble up refuse next to a trio of loading docks.

Brachiosaur-necked lampposts laid bright eyes on the lot-markers—X, in this case—blinking faintly in effigy of shoddy workmanship from 19-inch screens mounted on each side, and halfway down its neck.

A door, facing Anonymous man—from now on he was going to go by X; being a black man (somehow he just knew), it seemed strangely appropriate that he adopt the lane marker (X) as his temporary identity—from 100 feet away, past a few scattered cars, and patches of dried blood, looked to have been left open by the skinny wigger clothed in store colors who had just went back inside after his smoke break. He spent the bulk of it

taunting the zombies behind the electrified fence and laughing at the ever-malfunctioning parking-lot guides.

Lot Escorts they were called, holographic companions—they came in all races, genders, and physical types—that, for \$125 a month, would escort the client to his or her car should they forget where they parked, or in case it was dark and they didn't want to make the journey alone. If there was trouble, the escort reacted by speaking in a commanding tone, something along the lines of

“Step away from the customer!”

or

“Stop, or I will be forced to alert the authorities!”

There was talk of a “Classic Hollywood” series coming in a year or two.

To X, the whole place looked infected with pesky apparitions hailing from all walks of life, appearing and disappearing, some lingering longer than others, some stuck in perpetual stutter, some going through their normal routine and making small-talk with the empty air next to them as they walked to an empty spot, waved, then vanished.

One had walked right up to X's window: a fat, overly accommodating woman. He didn't see her until she was right up on him. He turned and there she was. She looked right at him, past him, and waved. Something about her fake sincerity gave him chills.

Like many businesses, the Megamart's parking lot was surrounded by 15-foot electrified fencing made up of concertina wire and topped with a jagged coil of barbed wire that extended the entire length and came to life like a chainsaw smile when touched.

On the other side, hundreds of full-blown zombies stood back, perusing the live menu with slack-jawed intensity, zeroing in on the meaty parts. Thanks to the malfunctioning escorts, they were riled up, their collective moan upgraded to a deep-throated growl and seasoned with frustration. 800,000 volts reacted with lively bursts of electric blue admonishment to the touch of cold dead limbs and digits, of the few who refused to be denied, small fires here and there awarded those who could hold on to the fence the longest.

At the entrance, double-reinforced scaffolding erected in the shape of a 25-foot watchtower lined with giant floodlights, housed three glorified rent-a-cops who took turns picking off zombies who wandered too close to the steady pageant of vehicles going in and out. It was mostly people restocking canned goods and various foods that boasted of prolonged shelf lives. There really wasn't any other reason to come outside these days.

Instead of jump-starting his memory, the lack of cohesive relevance sent X spiraling into phobic territory. He let his head fall forward, his brow smacking the dash with a thud. He repeated it again and again.

Suddenly, the click-clack of footsteps approaching from the rear... real footsteps. There was a distinct difference.

Through the fogged windows, X noticed a police officer who had just noticed him too and was approaching to investigate, nightstick twirling in his hand with reticent authority. He walked right through an escort dressed in a military uniform.

X also noticed that the back seat-rests had been pushed forward and were lying on top of the back seat as if someone had forced their way in through the trunk of the car. It gave him his first real clue as to how he might have made it past the guard-tower around front.

The officer was close enough now that X could see the letters on his nametag: Officer D. Mira.

X quickly deferred to the rearview, as if he just now realized that it existed and was thrown for a loop by what he saw looking back at him.

Half jumping, half falling, X sprung from the car, from whatever it was in the rear-view mirror, and in turn, sent Mira back into a defensive crouch, his service revolver now in place of his baton.

"Don't move!" Mira's tightened chords blared.

Somewhere deep inside his own mind, X was pinned down by unseen hands that taunted and teased him with prolonged periods of sight, sound, and sensation, sans the ability to respond and react on his own.

Via his actions, X seemed to comply to the officer's demands without hesitation; however, he was frozen in residual shockwaves of mule-kick reflex action and fleet-footed understanding of a second tenant who occupied his inner space and of the ghastly warped thing in the rear-view, pock-marked with bullet-holes—hundreds at least—and exaggerated to devilish proportions.

Like everyone else these days, the thought of becoming a zombie had crossed X's mind at some point, creeping up with icy fingers sharpened to a point, replacing the fear of death itself as the motive for nonsensical countermeasures, like fanatical commitment to religion, and the acquisition of unnecessary things to clog the wheels of logic.

He'd seen people turn after being bitten. Akin to an erosive virus, it was a slow, excruciating process that started with nausea, fever, chills, violent mood swings, and dementia, none of which he had yet experienced.

His subconscious suggested that it might be demonic possession. Before Jesus, and the zombies, he would've laughed at that.

“Who...er, what *the fuck* are you!?” Mira barked, maintaining shaky composure that started and ended with the handgun that he held out in front of him, elbows locked straight. “And how did you do...what you did?”

“I...I don't know. I don't remember anything before waking up in the car,” X said, his hands upturned, arms spread, beckoning, his mangled visage waxing innocent as if he expected some give in Mira's stance as a result.

X took a step forward.

“I SAID DON’T FUCKING MOVE!” Mira growled, and sunk deeper into his ready-stance. “I suppose you don’t remember killing those cops back in the bus station, then?”

Watching X with experienced eyes, slightly reddened due to fatigue, but sharp as a hawk, Mira leaned his head to the side and spoke into the communicator on his lapel, “This is Mira. I’m in row X of the Megamart parking lot on Lansdowne and Garrett road. I’ve got our cop-killer. I repeat. I’ve - got - our - cop-killer. Send back-up.” Eyes rolling up and down X’s gruesome body. “Fuck it, send a meat-wagon too. He’s in bad shape now, but that’s nothing compared to what he’ll look like when I’m done with him.”

“Mira, this is Drake,” a voice blared up at him from his lapel. “Are you out of your mind!? This mutherfucker just took out twelve of us BY HIMSELF!! Just hold tight ‘til we get there.”

“Yeah! No shit,” Mira barked back, “two of ‘em were good friends of mine ... yours too, Drake.”

“Don’t you dare, Officer!” exclaimed an unfamiliar voice, tainted with an accent that bore some distant relation to police-speak.

His gun still pointed at X, who stood with his arms in the air, eyes reading disbelief as he surveyed himself from the feet up and back down, Mira considered doing the right thing and waiting for back-up. He played out the scenario in his head and found

little satisfaction in the outcome. He wasn't dumb enough to actually believe in the system. Especially not now.

"Who the hell is this?" Mira replied speaking at his lapel.

"This is Detective Makane, Officer. Now you listen to me. I understand your anger, but this case is bigger than that. You do anything to keep me from questioning that asshole and I'll..."

"Do what you have to, Mira!" Sergeant Dell interrupted. "Just don't you take your eyes off that scum. I'm on my way."

"Stay outta this, Sergeant!" Makane demanded. "You and your men have no idea what you're dealing with."

"I'm sorry, Detective. It's not usually my style to step on someone else's toes, but this guy took down 12 of my men."

"Thirteen, actually," X teased in a voice vastly different from, yet equally genuine to, the one that resonated from his diaphragm only moments ago. With its distinctly feminine cadence, and deep Appalachian drawl, it made Mira's hands tremble and constrict around the butt of his gun when he realized that it sprung from this teenage boy who stood before him. Mira put him at 17 or 18 years at most.

"Wh...what did you say?" Mira inquired tentatively, like part of him cringed at the thought of hearing that voice crawl from those lips again.

“Goddammit officer!” Kane yelled via the lapel-receiver. “Just get out of there. Now!”

“I said that I killed 13 little piggies, you dumb cunt. You forgot to count yourself.”

Mira had only begun to squeeze the trigger when he saw hundreds of what looked like bullets punch free from X’s torso, legs, and face and zip to a livid hover at either side of X’s head and shoulders. Pulsating with aggression and taunting with half-lunging feigns, the living swarm restlessly awaited their cue from X, who was clearly caught in some kind of trance.

Mira fired three times. In retrospect, it seemed like a stupid move, what with the bullets—which they clearly were, bullets—hovering in a sentient mass all around this kid.

X buckled and tensed in an orgasmic flutter in reaction to Mira’s attempt to bring him down. The most it did was energize him.

Turning to face Mira, X lurched, and coughed. With his tongue, he fished something small and round with a deadened glow and smeared with residual streaks of red up from his throat, rolled it between his teeth, and spit it at him.

Mira cried out when his own recycled bullet bit him in the gut and dug into his soul. It was the worst pain he had ever experienced.

He pulled his hand away from his stomach and watched the dark stain in his uniform expand before his eyes. Dying was the last thing Officer D. Mira expected to happen today when he woke up. In fact, he awoke looking forward to using his new vibro-shock baton to crack some zombie skulls.

Mira did his best to ignore the pain and react as he was trained. It was all he knew.

He lifted his gun and pointed.

X, who was still entranced, had plenty of time to react. Pain chased Mira's body in a weird path, which it traveled at a pause-and-go pace, on its way to a full stand. It was almost comical how long it took.

Mira was fading, swaying to a seductive song called creeping death. He managed to squeeze the trigger one last time, half involuntarily.

The brutish verve of hundreds of bullets pounded Mira from every angle as he spun away and danced into the dark uncertainty. His last thought, that there might be no afterlife, worked with his relaxing muscles to guide his last meal out into his underwear.

Mira's own slug hadn't even left the barrel before he expired, on his feet, dancing to the beat of lead projectiles, and crumbled to the ground when they were done with him, nerves twitching, electrons firing Hail Marys.

Weaving in and out of the mother-mass, the living-lead chased each other into braided formations upon their return to their host-body (X) who accepted their heavy-handed homecoming with open arms.

Just like that, X awoke from the trance.

Now that he was himself again, and armed with selective recognizance—waking in the car, the escorts, the approaching cop, waking just a second ago to a burning sensation all over his body—X was able to deduce that he was most likely responsible for whatever happened to the police officer (Mira) who lay broken at his feet. And he was instantly reminded of the bigger threat.

FUCKING ZOMBIES....

They were everywhere. Their collective moan, so pervasive that it drove a few folks to suicide, was hypnotic at times. X could see in their eyes, how bad they wanted to come through the fence and eat his ass. They seemed to look at him differently than they did the escorts, as if they knew.

Vying for the top spot in the background din, the haunting wail of police sirens bounced from building to building and out into the open where X stood searching for somewhere to hide. Around front, the rent-a-cops in the tower—he could see the top 10 feet from where he stood—had their hands full with an aggressive faction of zombies that had begun to rock the tower to get at them. Still, the front gates were locked, the fences all around him humming with current. X was trapped.

Forgetting, for the moment, his brief collection of memories, X focused on his best option—blending in with the late-night shoppers in the Megamart—and took off running toward the back of the building.

He took a moment to catch his breath. He had underestimated the distance between where he originally stood and the stockroom door and ran the entire length at close to top speed.

When he turned the knob, it gave.

The stockroom was damp and cold. The generator's unabashed rattle drowned out any noise he made, so once he realized that he was alone in the room, he didn't worry much about stepping lightly. He hurried to the door on the other side, and teased it open to a crack.

As was usually the case at this time of night, the store was fairly empty, which seemed to give the music more room to reveal the overhead speakers' poor quality and add to the surreal atmosphere.

What X could see from where he crouched at the back corner of the store—an extremely overweight single mother dressed in ill-fitting designer knock-offs and large gold earrings with the words 'Bad Girl' written in cursive, and mounted on the gaudy triangular frame, and her obnoxious young son who she ignored completely, except when he wandered out of her sight and she yelled out his name "DARIUS!!!!!!!!!" at the top of

her lungs; zit-faced employees stocking shelves and talking smack about the store hottie, a fine, young brown-skinned thing, who sat facing a large monitor keying in irregular items up in the manager's booth that was situated high above the colorfully stocked aisles at the back like some administrative watchtower; a group of college students complete with the obligatory stoners (two of them) who snickered at shit like 'butt shank portion,' 'turkey necks', and store substitutes for popular brand name products, 'Mega-tussin,' and 'Mega-jock itch cream'; and the broken-down store security drone resting among two older models that didn't work either in their station a few feet from him—gave him incentive to further explore the Megamart as a potential pit stop.

X had not yet seen himself since the last blackout, and what he looked like was suspiciously left out of his recent memory. Still, he maintained a crouch to avoid being seen as he made his way to the nearest empty aisle—Tools and Hardware—and fell on his ass between two columns of stacked boxes marked Sure-Grip.

He tried to steady his breathing, to escape reality by losing himself in the holographic celebrity spokesman that stood before a pyramid of stacked socket-sets and a state-of-the-art riding lawn mower that could hover 6 inches off the ground and cut grass with lasers. Then there were the animated mascots that touted this product and that from their respective packages, talking over each other with repetitive sales-pitches that eventually bled into one voice that X was pretty sure instructed him to **“KILL THEM ALL!”**

You can start with that fine young thing up in the manager's booth. I bet her shit even smells like roses."

Voices in his head were one thing, but these were external. Could it have been a personalized ad via retinal scan, or facial-recognition software built into the package itself? Tools and Hardware weren't usually known to use profanity and vulgar sexual references as part of their repertoire, though. That was left to the porn section, which was over in aisle 7. Every store had one, usually cordoned off by a swinging gate, turnstile, or some sort of invisible barrier rigged with an alarm that sounded when anyone under 18 crossed it. It wasn't unusual to see a group of precocious adolescents sneaking a listen to all the "Ooos and Aaaahs" coming from within as they huddled at the entrance until an employee, or an angry mother, shooed them away.

To be continued....

Andre will be appearing and doing a reading at the upcoming HorrorFind Convention in August. You can find out more about Andre at his website: <http://www.houseofduza.com>.

***Like Chicken for Deadfucks* will be featured in the upcoming anthology, *Undead*, coming mid-late 2005 from Permuted Press: <http://www.undeadanthology.com>. The story itself is also an excerpt from Andre's completed second novel, *JESUS FREAKS* (*jē'zəs frēks*), n. see **ZOMBIE** (Publisher as yet undetermined).**