

Black Friday

Friday morning, round about midnight thirty. It was early, it was cold, the line extended beyond the sight of even the most spirited believers. We watched and we waited, three hours to go now. There were three of us, each standing grand and proud against the elements all working against us; the cold, the wind, the insatiable recognition of those around us- we were where they all wished that they could be, the front of the line, a highly superior position to find ourselves in. There was chatter, a constant droning on of voices, of pointless speech, all persons involved plotting, planning, scheming.

There was a seeming method to the madness of it all, though each one had their own internal madness to counteract. I looked to Jefford and Wilkins, my two 'partners' in the ordeal, on such an important mission, our rise to our own self proclaimed fame would be our and ours alone to keep. The time was easy now, calm and relaxed, it was merely a matter of waiting it out, hoping to see if you could fare well with those around you, see if you could survive.

We had our plan ready, I was logistics, the conqueror of all, ours was the best and brightest plan yet, no other could compare, and we knew it, the last three years of much the same mission letting that much on. Though that truth was a hard pill to swallow, everyone around us thinking the same thing about themselves, selfish bastards that they are, no one is better than the three of us, the dream team.

Many outsiders scoff at the notion, they question the reliability of the method, the strength of the teamwork, the endurance of the contest, the practicality of the fight. *Is it worth it*, they ask? I say yes, how could it not be, the search for the ultimate achievement in a good deal, a proper asking for a proper device.

Prior planning prevents piss poor performance as I had always heard, this was the ultimate in human sacrifice, at least as close as any American will ever come; Precious time, energy, sleep, and money all set aside in the course of a few

hours, all for the biggest head rush any of us had ever known, perhaps the elements of a battlefield in some far distant land the only thing conceivably to compare.

It was a mindset more than anything, a thought process honed through years of human intelligence, the intelligence of marketing, advertising, a game of swift consequence, many knowing it to be true.

The keyword for the three of us, as well as most of the others standing in the line here with us- though they don't understand it quite like we do- is game, a challenge, a calling. It is a thrill seeking adventure, the adrenaline rush alone is one that only the most grievous acts of humanity can compare to in giving. Why wait when we could be in the numbers, the first ones, the few, the proud, the brave, the ones who suffered together, suffered one another in order to claim our prize, our spot in the all elusive rank of self arranged power.

They say that America is a wealthy nation and that we are in the midst of the hardest times we have seen in a while, but I would beg to differ. Wealthy, sure, even Wilkins is a fair bit better off than the rest of us, perhaps the wealthiest of the group around us, he is a well liked medical doctor. Jefford and I are merely working class stiffs, those who truly benefit from this night of terror and excitement. Wilkins admits, he does this merely for the sheer exhilaration of the experience, it is a chance to play a part, be something he's not; an animal, a violent soul, a chance take life instead of fix it.

If there is any economic downturn, I do not see it, by the vast volume and climate of people here, it is hard to believe that there is any such thing as bad off, although the man walking around asking everybody for money would seem an anomaly to that thought process- what an annoyance he is anyway, can't he see we're too busy, preoccupied with ourselves?

Anyway, back to the story, less than thirty minutes to go now, we're getting close. We are the first three at the door, with a ravenous group behind us, all of us ready to leap up at a moments notice and make our high speed attack, garnishing

whatever it is that our hearts desire at this moment in time.

We look to one another, the dream team, we speak slowly, going again over who was to do what. My duty, logistics still, make sure that everybody is where they should be, they know their roles while there, they can only fail themselves at that point. There is no real 'team,' of course, that is more of a wishful thought as once the floodgates break, all the world suddenly becomes chaos, it is every man for himself.

It is dubbed materialism by the outsider, though again they do not see as we see, they are not on the same level as us, the soldiers of economic growth. They call us insane, and we are a damn sight near it, but everyday life cannot be judged less insane than what we are now doing here. How many people everyday do things that they later regret? How many of them wage silent wars, protests about the things that their counterparts could only wish to partake in.

There are only a few more minutes until the doors open, but let it be known that materialism is a bit of a misnomer. This is not about 'stuff,' this is about accomplishment, this is about surviving another black friday. The sheer pressure of desiring the things that no one else has, that's a secondary opinion, a driving force to who we in this stagnant, steadfast line of warriors are. To me, true materialism lies in the things that we don't have!

Success, at last, the doors are opened, we were on our feet and ready to move as soon as we saw motion by the front doors, the employees- counter-warriors- preparing the way for their own war. They desire control and order, we thrive on the sheer animal instinct, the law of finders keepers, he who gets to it first must never surrender to he who is just milliseconds too late.

As if a rocket car, we are off, the three of us, followed quickly by those less fortunate behind us, the plan now well in motion. I see out of the corner of my eye, people going for carts, baskets, I scoff at the amateurism of the maneuver, no time to waste on a commodity like a cart, this is pure barbarism, kill or be killed, there is no room for any fancy supplement to the idea.

The whole mass of people moves forward, it is hard to breathe for the first few feet, I can already feel others instruments of destruction upon me; fists, hands, all pushing, pulling, prodding, hoping to gain an unfair advantage, it cannot be allowed. I fight back, though, you must learn to save your energy, too much fight too soon and you'll wear out before you actually accomplish anything.

No, this close to the door, you *take* a few hits, make do with what you've got, this is not the time or place for battle, the non conquered subjects are still lined in the isles of misery, every one of the counter-warriors standing by in a feeble attempt to control the uncontrollable, most of them cower away sooner rather than later, leaving us free to fight our war.

I see a man go down ahead, his loss, and so close to the door. In any other circumstance, I would stop to help out, help the fellow man, but not today, this is war, casualty is simply part of the process. He is trampled by countless feet, causing many to stumble, there is a cry for help from him, seething with pain, despair, anger, and the will to survive. He falls silent, man down, he barely began this fight and he has already lost. I put the sight out of my mind, I keep my speed up, keep moving forward, now in the main isle of the store, I look cautiously to my watch, ten minutes, then the three of us- hopefully- meet up again to leave.

I dart to the left and the right quickly, avoiding bodies, many around me already starting their fights, grabbing, shoving, taking, collecting. I see Jefford and Wilkins separate, their missions clear, I wish them the best, they are all alone and on their own now, off to gather gadgets, gizmos, toys, apparel, whatever else satisfied the mission.

I make my move, keeping straight down the front isle of the store, people moving all about me in a mass frenzy, though they all believe that they know what they are doing. I see it suddenly, a man running with a cart- one of the amateurs,- heading straight for me. There are people on my right and the safety and cover of candy racks to my left. He fast approaches, I duck left swirling out of the way just in

time to feel the front of his cart barely miss my right leg. The wind settles, I look out, still chaos, *my war now waged*. I hole up where I am at, taking a place in cover. I look to my watch, three minutes in, seven to go, I'll just have to wait it out here.

God speed I think to myself about my two fellow fighters.

I stop for just a moment, taking in the sight, the terror, the battle. I wonder quickly if this is what the D-Day landing would have been like had there been no firearms or explosives, just carts, people, and shelves of things?

I can feel my adrenaline rushing through my veins, a sweet liquor, giving me some sort of heightened awareness, I know all that is around me, I can hear the shouts of fighting words, the slap of dropped product, the scattering of shoes on the once polished tile flooring. I can see the ground littered already with refuse, remnants of packaging, and even in a few spots, of spilled blood. I stop quickly and give an offering of strength to the warriors in this battle; one minute to go.

I now see Wilkins, I dart out into the danger zone, the one I had been protecting myself from for the last few minutes, I look quickly around, lines already forming. To my left, a man, dressed in red, a counter-warrior, one who wants order, control. I look at that order barbarian behind the register and figure that he'll do. He has only one true warrior already there, checking out. I dart into the line, turn my back to the goings on at the register- the counter-warrior will make sure nothing happens- and begin to wave frantically at Wilkins.

I see a number of people eyeballing me; I am barren, I have nothing, I am open to attack, weak, vulnerable. I assume a stance of defense, ready to fend off any warrior wishing me harm. I cringe at the remembrance of the warrior already down by the front door. It is then that I see Wilkins running towards me, arms full of material things, though he neither is a materialist, simply a warrior, a bargain hunter, an smart buyer.

He hurries to me, it has now been ten minutes, there is no sign of Jefford, poor soul. I say a silent prayer for him, he was a fine warrior, but he has been taken away

into the abyss, the madness that lies just a few yards away. Wilkins begins his interaction with the counter-warrior, hoping to be done with as quickly as possible, their control and order a laughable offense in this world. I stand as overwatch, ready to fend off any attack from behind.

I then hear a scream, Wilkins hears it too, so does the counter-warrior. We all pause and look, ready to take defensive action. Then, many screams, people panicking, running in all directions. I brace for impact, for battle. Nothing happens, but I can smell it, then I can see the damage before it is even an actual thought in my head, pepper spray. People running, holding their eyes, their mouths. I nod in appreciation, as my own eyes begin to burn, of the warrior who deployed this counter weapon, a surely winning tact.

Wilkins finishes up with his interaction with the counter-warrior and we head for the front door, which by this time is slathered with many counter-warriors and the most feared enemy of all, the police. They are standing above the mangled, lifeless, and now deceased body of the black friday warrior, an erie sight to behold.

Me and Wilkins hurry outside and make our way to the car, we lost Jefford somewhere along the way, but it didn't matter, he knew the stakes, he knew what he was getting into, the price of admission of this ride is that of your life itself. You give your *everything* to the game of black friday, your dignity, your morals, your beliefs, you give it all. There is no right or wrong, there only is! It is the ultimate experiment of the axiom of survival of the fittest, only the strong do survive.

Wilkins unlocks the car, I get in and wait, the parking lot only the threshold of refuge. Wilkins follows suit, shutting the door behind him. I take a deep breath, slowly disengaging from the battle mode, no longer a warrior, I am now me again.

“Well, that went over quite well, if I do say so myself” Wilkins notes.

“Yes, yes it did, no problems at all this year” I add, smiling and nodding pulling my seat belt down and clicking it into its connector “let's go home.”