

# If There's A Hell Below, We're All Gonna Go

By Stephen Allan

Hillary woke in the motel room to the sound of sirens. He sat up and grabbed the Remington shotgun lying in the bed beside him. He pumped it. Red lights flashed from behind the heavy curtains like bright artificial flames. In his drowsy state, his first thought was of the looters; but he realized he was too far north for anyone to be crashing through storefronts. He left the city when the levees broke. Used his light and siren and got out fast.

He checked the clock. 3:00 a.m. He brought the shotgun to the window and peeked out. A Honda Civic was crushed against a concrete barrier. Smoky waves of orange flames flowed from it. A fire department hose team was taming the fire. Hillary moved away from the window and checked the bump in the rug. Satisfied that the cash was still there, he tried to go back to sleep; but only lay there until the gray of dawn.

When he realized he wouldn't be able to fall asleep again, he sat up and turned on the television. Everything was about the hurricane. News reporters talked about the devastation and loss of life. Hillary lit a cigarette and watched.

Video showed Hell on Earth: thousands surrounding the Superdome, looters carrying away televisions and groceries, roving armed gangs and dead bodies floating facedown. There were reports about the lack of government response and the failure of the local police, many of whom had abandoned the city. Hillary glanced over to his detective's badge sitting on the nightstand. *Fuck 'em.*

Then Hillary saw him, wading chest high in the water holding a half-full garbage bag and a suitcase of beer. Jasper.

"Son of a bitch." Hillary thought the little prick had died in the fire. What good was the arson job if Jasper didn't burn? He was the only one who could rat Hillary out about the stolen cash. Hillary knelt down to the slit he made in the carpeting the night before and pulled out the money belt. Seventy-five thousand.

There was no luck in hoping the fucker would drown. Hillary would have to finish the job. He would have to go back into the city.

Hillary's aluminum boat glided through the floodwater up Asylum Drive toward the brick bank that held his mortgage. As he approached the building, he noticed the broken windows and a tall man with a rifle standing watch. Hillary twisted the Evinrude's stick back to the right and slowed the boat. Inside were three other figures standing around the giant vault door. One of the men held a sledgehammer and pounded on the vault. Hillary idled the motor and reached to his hip where his police-issued semiautomatic lay. He pulled his weapon out an inch as the rifleman called to the others. All four men came out of the bank. Hillary took his .9mm out, but aimed it down at the water.

"Don't be stupid," Hillary said. "Just keep as you were. I ain't here to stop you."

"You a cop?" the one with the rifle asked.

"That's neither here nor there right now," Hillary said.

"Fucking police ain't nothing no more," the rifleman said. "We the ones in charge. We the ones deserve respect. Carrying your gun around like you still something,

white man. Guess what? You ain't. You can't come in here and fuck with us no more. There's no law. We the forgotten down here, law don't care 'bout us."

"You may be right about that," Hillary said and spit into the dirty floodwater. "I don't give a fuck what you do, as long as you don't shoot me in the back. Take the place for all it's worth, what do I care?"

The rifleman looked at Hillary, as if judging the cop's fate. He finally nodded.

"Get, old man," the leader said and motioned for his men to follow him back into the bank.

Hillary revved the boat's engine and continued down the street as a dead man floated past. The cop looked away from the floater. The body was destined to rot in the humid sun and there was no sense in pulling it into the boat. Let the demons and angels fight over the poor fucker's soul.

Jasper's place was around the next corner, so Hillary cut the engine and paddled the rest of the way to the house. All the shades were drawn. Hillary watched for any movement in the windows as he glided to the front steps. He tied the boat with a loose knot, and then grabbed the shotgun. He walked onto the front porch and knocked on the door. He moved to the side and waited for an answer. Nothing came, even after knocking twice more. He tried the knob, but found it locked. He was walking to the side of the porch to find another way in when the front door erupted into splinters. Hillary jumped over the porch and into the water. He went under and came back up covered in the shit floating in the vile water. He found his footing and aimed the shotgun at the front, waiting for Jasper to pop his head out.

Gunshots sounded from the back of the house. The bullets missed Hillary, but hit only a few inches away. He didn't anticipate Jasper having any friends. Hillary swung around and volleyed with his own shots, but only hit the side of the house. Whoever had shot at him had moved.

He heard the blast from the porch before he felt the hot sting in his side. Hillary let out a cry as he turned around to face the porch and fired blindly. He heard a body drop.

Hillary climbed out of the water and onto the porch, ignoring the pulsing hurt in his side. The dead gunman was face up. It wasn't Jasper. Hillary recognized the guy - a minor dealer from down on Bourbon Street, one of Jasper's pot buddies. Hillary took the revolver beside the body, but it was empty. He threw the gun into the water and looked into the house. The front door was left open. Hillary checked the foyer and entered with his shotgun ready.

"Police," Hillary shouted. "Come out with your hands up."

He walked through the house, checking each corner he came to.

"Stop right there and drop your gun." Jasper's voice came from above. Hillary looked up. The scumbag was holding a sawed-off on him. Hillary did as he was told and let his weapon fall out of his hands.

"Ain't no fucking cop coming around here for routine patrols," Jasper said as he walked down the stairs. He looked into Hillary's face and smiled with recognition.

"Well, you may be police, but this ain't official business is it?"

Hillary remained silent.

"Yeah, I know you. The fucking thick neck from Vice who stole all that money; the one with the girl's name. Shirley? Marley?"

“It’s fuck you.”

“Doesn’t look like I’m the one’s fucked,” Jasper said, walking toward Hillary. “You thought you could shoot a couple of big time dealers in front of me and get away with that shit? Man, you’re lucky the world came to an end around here, ‘cause I’d have been on somebody’s front door ratting you out; somebody big, willing to part with a little reward money.”

Jasper kept inching toward Hillary, until he was within reach. Hillary grabbed the barrel of the shotgun and twisted it out of Jasper’s hands. Jasper brought his foot up hard into Hillary’s crotch. The cop dropped to his knees, but was able to keep a hold on the weapon.

Jasper ran into the kitchen as Hillary struggled back up. His balls were on fire and he couldn’t stand up straight. Gritting his teeth, he aimed the shotgun toward the kitchen and fired until all the shells were gone. There was a sharp cry, followed by an agonizing moan. Hillary hobbled into the kitchen and found Jasper slumped against the bottom drawers of the kitchen counter.

Hillary stood over Jasper. As he threw the empty shotgun down, he pulled out his Berretta. But before he could get a shot off, Jasper jumped up with a long kitchen knife and sunk it into the cop’s belly. Hillary dropped the gun on the counter as he grabbed knife and pulled it out of his stomach.

Jasper stood up and reached for the Berretta. Hillary looked into the knife drawer and saw a meat cleaver. As Jasper slipped his hand around the pistol, Hillary brought the cleaver down on Jasper’s wrist, separating it from its arm. The gun fired once from the reflexive twitch of the trigger finger, shooting the .9mm off the counter and onto the floor. Jasper held his stump up and blood spewed an arc into the air. Hillary knocked Jasper onto the floor and went for the gun - and the hand still attached to it. He pried the severed hand from the weapon and threw it on the linoleum.

Hillary aimed the blood-soaked gun at Jasper.

“Turn around.” Hillary said. His voice was strained, as if the words were forced out of the mud.

Jasper was on his knees, wrapping his stump in a greasy dishtowel.

“My fucking hand.” It came out in sobs of anger and pain.

“My fucking balls,” Hillary said as he adjusted himself. He kicked Jasper in the ass. Jasper fell onto his side and rolled over on his back.

“Shoot me like a dog?” Jasper said. “Ain’t man enough to kill someone on his feet, gotta wait until he’s on the floor?” Jasper’s eyes rolled and his head swayed a bit as the dishtowel turned red.

Hillary looked down. Without medical attention, Jasper would simply bleed to death. He didn’t want to wait that long. In a city of total silence, the gun’s eruption cracked into everywhere.

Hillary tried to keep his balance as he climbed back in the aluminum boat, but he fell. The combination of the kick to the nuts and the knife wound played havoc on his ability to walk straight. He sat up, keeping a hand on his gut to stop the bleeding. The knife had missed the cash in the money belt. Bad luck. The bills may have stopped the knife. Now he had to get out of the city and find a doctor.

He placed one shoe against the back of the boat and pulled the cord. He did it to near exhaustion before the motor came to life.

He directed the boat back down Asylum Avenue toward downtown. The heat and humidity of the afternoon made it difficult to breathe. Sweat ran off his face. He tried to wipe it away, but each time he removed his hand from the wound, more blood flowed out.

The adrenaline of fighting was seeping out of his veins. It was replaced by pain and weakness. His eyelids drooped and the hand steering the Evinrude slipped off the stick. The boat made a sharp turn to the right, causing Hillary to fall out of his seat. He tried to regain his footing, but the out-of-control boat made it difficult. He was forced to use both hands to pull himself up. Then he looked where the boat was heading: the red brick bank. He reached for the engine's stick, but it was too late. The boat struck the concrete steps at full-speed. Hillary was thrust forward against the bank's moss-covered wall. He dropped to the cement with the sound of cracked bones.

The pain was so horrible, Hillary wished he would just pass out.

The rifleman and his cronies ran out of the bank. Hillary looked up at the looters and saw the fear in their eyes. All the tough guy facades had drained away and Hillary realized that they were just kids.

"Christ," the rifleman said.

"Jimmy, what's that hanging out of him?" the one with the sledgehammer asked.

The rifleman crouched next to Hillary. "Intestines," he said.

One of the other kids pointed to a hundred dollar bill hanging out of Hillary's ripped shirt. "The dude may be fucked, but he's rich."

Hearing those words, Hillary tried to bring the revolver up and point it at the kid. He thought he had, but his arm lay still on the steps.

"Try it," Hillary said, blood seeping from the side of his mouth. The words slurred out like whispers, but he could tell the kid understood.

Jimmy stepped on Hillary's gun arm and pulled the weapon out his hand.

"Grab the money belt," Jimmy ordered. "Billy, man, take the cash from this corrupt motherfucker and dump him in the shit."

"Jimmy, the guy's a cop."

"I don't care who he used to be. He ain't nothing now," Jimmy said. "You forget, ain't nobody no one now in the floodwater."

Hillary tried to roll away from Billy as the punk lackey crouched down and opened his shirt. Billy took the money belt and stood up, handing the cash to Jimmy.

"Nah," Jimmy said. "You hold onto it for now." Jimmy took his sneaker off Hillary's arm and kicked the cop off the concrete and into the water.

As Hillary floated away from the bank, he felt the dirty water enter his body. He drifted toward the floater he had seen earlier. Its lifeless eyes stared into the roasting sun and Hillary noticed the unnatural orange burn of its skin. He knew he would soon be that same color. Maybe when the water was gone and people actually searched the area, they would find his body resting among some tree branches or the top of an abandoned car.

Hillary's nerves turned numb and the pain disappeared. He tried to spit the contaminated water out of his mouth, but the polluted taste stayed on his tongue. As he passed his fellow floater, Hillary noticed the television helicopter flying above. A cameraman strapped in the open doorway pointed his camera at Hillary. He tried to wave

for help, but slipped beneath the surface. Unable to hold his breath, he inhaled the dirty water. There was no fight left. All he could do was sink beneath the grime, mud and shit; and just let go.

*Stephen Allan has an MFA in Creative Writing, but he has yet to find anyone who's impressed by it. His stories have appeared in Spinetingler Magazine and on the Flashing In the Gutters website. Steve lives in Maine, where he is working on a crime novel. Read his random thoughts at [www.noirwriter.blogspot.com](http://www.noirwriter.blogspot.com).*