

Make A Difference

By Gus Prouty | 1496 words

My legs scream in protest as I climb the unending staircase. “Of all the times for the power to be out,” I mutter into the emptiness of the stairwell. The heavy door to the outside combined with the weight of recent events finally gives me pause, and my throbbing muscles a brief reprieve. Am I really expecting to make a difference out there? The custom built launcher suddenly feels very heavy on my back. “You have to be careful with these Dean. We only had time to get ahold of two of them, so you will have to make your shots count,” the Doc’s words ring in my head. Two shots, that’s all I have. But I’m not the only one in danger. Innocent people died because of this thing. If I can’t stop it here, then they won’t be the last. “Besides, they don’t call me eagle eyes for nothing,” I brag to the door. Shifting the launcher on my back with renewed purpose, I step through.

My bravado almost instantly evaporates at the sight that stretches out before me. The city’s in ruins. Downtown awash in flames, lighting the towers of smoke rising higher than any skyscraper into the cold sky. The air filled with the thick acrid smell of death and the constant sounds of war. Explosions boom, helicopters whirr, and the few people still alive out there try desperately to escape. And there, in the middle of all this chaos, it stands defiantly. No one has the faintest idea where the creature came from. All we know is it lumbered out of the bay at around dusk and began tearing into the city. The military arrived soon after and here I am, standing on the roof of an apartment building holding a specially made rocket launcher, wondering what deity I ticked off to land in this position.

I shift the launcher to my hands and take a firing position at the edge of the roof. No sooner have I knelt down than I hear a tremendous crash as a tank goes flying directly above my head. It careens over the building before disappearing from view. I stare, eyes lingering on the spot where the tank vanished. But I won't let it stop me, can't let it slow me down. If it does I might never get going again. So I steady the launcher and take aim at the monster's head. The flames of destruction flicker all around it, reflecting off its hide. I try to aim for its eyes. The Doctor told me that these rockets are thermobaric explosives, more powerful than the rounds the tanks and choppers have, still I figure going for a weak spot can't hurt. So I wait, looking for my perfect opportunity.

Now is the moment. The creature looks up, its attention focused on the incoming helicopters. I start to squeeze the trigger... but pause. Something about the creature's eyes catches me off guard. I see something in them that I don't expect, intelligence. I can't be sure of exactly what tips me off, but all the same it's there... a glimmer, a flicker of something more than animal ferocity. A mind as old as it is savage but also cunning, almost skillful in the way it leads the troops around, trying to confuse and out flank them. I see this in all but a moment, and then I pull the trigger. The round takes only five seconds to reach its target, but it's already too late.

My hesitation costs me my moment; the creature's head goes back down as the rocket soars harmlessly over colliding with the building behind it. The liquid fuel projectile does its job using the air around it to fuel its explosion, resonating with a resounding bang. The shockwave blows out all the glass on that block and the monster's head snaps forward from the blast, as if someone has given it a hard slap on the back of the head. The building itself starts collapsing, falling forward and burying the unaware

creature in debris. “Jesus.” I know these air fuel bombs pack a punch, but that’s unreal. For too brief a moment I entertain the thought that the collapsing building has killed the thing and my job’s done. The sound of shifting concrete quickly puts an end to that idea. Not only is the thing still alive after the surprise assault, but it has worked out where the missile came from. And it doesn’t seem to like being shot at. Bursting from the rubble in an explosion of debris, it drops to all fours, bounding toward my position with long loping strides. I stumble backwards scrambling to load the final round, even if I won’t have time to fire it.

The sound of chopping blades jerks my eyes skyward. There I see them, the angels of my salvation. The same helicopters that distracted the thing in the first place, they’re finally in close enough to start their attack. Opening up with heavy machine guns they unload round after round into the creature. For its part the monster never even slows down, just turns with surprising grace, its hide soaking up all of the pilot’s ammo without so much as cracking as it approaches the airborne irritants. When it’s finally close enough the thing swats at the choppers, as a cat might swat at a bird. Most pull up in time but one straggler is too slow and the monster catches the tail in its claws dragging it down to earth. This process repeats for the next few minutes, the pilots swooping in low for an attack where the creature waits to greet them. I begin to suspect it’s actively luring them into its grasp.

Soon only one copter remains. The pilot must realize it’s over because he makes a break for it, buzzing directly over me in an attempt to escape. However the thing will not let his foe escape so easily. I see its leg muscles tense and my jaw drops as it jumps, clearing the building I stand on in a single bound, catching the chopper in its claws before

the pilot even knows what's happening. I see my chance once again. The thing turns around ready to finish the job the copters interrupted, letting loose an earth rending roar that shakes me to my core. I find that I'm bellowing one of my own as I fire the final rocket straight down the creature's throat.

In retrospect, I'm extremely lucky my aim was true. The limited space inside the creature's mouth meant that the explosives didn't have enough air to properly detonate, a fact that likely saved my life. A thermobaric explosion at that range would have surely killed me. As it happened, I was only blown back off my feet and showered with small debris. The creature fared worse. The force of the blast jolted its head back but it kept coming colliding with the building. The thing's head lay limp across the roof from me. I try to move, but I know almost before I make the effort that my luck has run out. My leg's been shattered from the blast and I won't be walking anywhere soon. The monster does not seem to have this problem as its eyes snap open, locking on me.

At this moment, looking up at the two fiery orbs fixed upon me, I finally know with clarity what makes me so certain of the thing's intelligence; it's the eyes. They have the same look I've seen a hundred times before, the look of a soldier, a warrior who has seen shit that would destroy most men's souls. This thing knows the horrors of conflict, not on an instinctual level, but an intimate, personal, and intellectual level.

Maybe it sees that same look in my eyes, or maybe the rocket did more damage than I think. Regardless, the creature lets out a sound almost like a deep sigh and lifts itself from the building. Its lower jaw hangs at an unnatural angle, blood dripping from the wound, but somehow I know this will not be a mortal injury. It will be good as new soon enough. It gives me one last look before turning around and heading back toward

the sea. Just like that, as mysteriously as it had appeared, it is gone. I just lay there awhile, still trying to take in the events of the night. At some point I click on my radio receiver and let the folks back at base know it's time to pick me up, but it will be awhile before they find me. With little else to do, I look towards the sky as the great pillars of smoke rise ever higher. It may sound strange, but the last thing I think about before I let sleep finally take me is that creature, and the hope that I will one day see it again.