



## Survivors: A Novel of the Coming Collapse

By James Wesley Rawles

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**This lightning-paced instant *New York Times* bestseller asks the question:  
What if the world as we know it ended tomorrow?**

**WHAT IF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT ENDED TOMORROW?**

The America we are accustomed to is no more. Practically overnight the stock market has plummeted, hyperinflation has crippled commerce, and the fragile chains of supply and high-technology infrastructure have fallen. The power grids are down. Brutal rioting and looting grip every major city. The volatile era known as “the Crunch” has begun, and this new period in our history will leave no one untouched. In this unfamiliar environment, only a handful of individuals are equipped to survive.

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# 1

## Urgency and Exigency

“Weapons compound man’s power to achieve; they amplify the capabilities of both the good man and the bad, and to exactly the same degree, having no will of their own. Thus we must regard them as servants, not masters—and good servants to good men. Without them, man is diminished, and his opportunities to fulfill his destiny are lessened. An unarmed man can only flee from evil, and evil is not overcome by fleeing from it.”

—Col. Jeff Cooper

FOB Wolverine, Task Force Duke, Zabul Province, Afghanistan  
October, the First Year

Andy was awoken by the sound of mortars. His many months in Afghanistan had taught him the difference in sound between outgoing and incoming mortars and various artillery. These were distant mortars, so he knew that it wasn’t friendly fire. Andy already had Operation Enduring Freedom camouflage pattern (OCP) pants and interceptor body armor (IBA) on, and was snatching up his M4 carbine and helmet when the take-shelter warning siren sounded. He popped out the door of his containerized housing unit (CHU) and jumped down into the entrance of the heavily sandbagged shelter, just a few steps away. Moments later the two lieutenants from the CHU next door piled in behind him. One of them took the precaution of scanning with a flashlight the floor and walls of the shelter for scorpions. He found just one and stomped it without comment.

The mortar rounds started to come in, with a succession of sharp blasts that shook the ground. There were about twenty impacts, arriving in a span of ten seconds. They could see the flashes of the explosions reflected on the wall opposite the doorway. The closest round impacted about one hundred feet away—close enough that shock waves could be felt.

As the rounds came in, Andy Laine said a silent prayer. He knew that only a direct hit would endanger him, but it was still unnerving, since he had less than a month left in-country.

“That may be all she wrote, sir,” said one of the lieutenants dryly.

Laine agreed. “You’re probably right. Just another shoot-’n’-scoot deal.”

At the far side of the forward operating base (FOB), they could hear the echoed commands from the Arty boys, and then the deep-throated crumps of outgoing mortars. They sounded like big 4.2-inch mortars, just three rounds. Andy marveled at how quickly the counter-battery radar team could pinpoint the insurgents’ firing location and direct return fire. Less than a minute after the enemy rounds impacted, the reply was sent, no doubt with considerable precision. It was no wonder that the mortar duels with the *jihadis* had become less frequent in recent months.

As they waited for the all-clear horn, Andy leaned against the sandbag wall and stretched his calf muscles, more out of habit than because of any stiffness. At six feet two inches, with a runner’s physique, he weighed just 180 pounds, and prided himself on his flexibility. When doing physical training (PT) with his units in garrison, he was always among the most limber.

The next morning, along with dozens of his fellow Fobbits, Laine did a bit of gawking at the damage done by the mortars. It actually wasn't much. One round had shredded the corner of a CHU and another perforated a tent with dozens of small holes—the largest about three inches across. All the rest of the mortar impacts had no effect, leaving only black marks on the ground and some scattered shrapnel. A couple of the newbies to the FOB posed for pictures in front of the damaged CHU. "So what? Big deal," Andy muttered to himself as he walked to the company headquarters.

At thirty-one years old, Andrew Laine was the typical lean and fit U.S. Army captain. He was on his second deployment to Afghanistan. His first had been to Iraq. On this new deployment, his assignment was "branch immaterial." Although he was branched Ordnance Corps, he was assigned as a staff officer in a Stryker battalion, an infantry unit equipped with sixteen-ton wheeled armored personnel carriers (APCs). With the heavy manpower requirements of ongoing deployments to Afghanistan, it was not unusual for officers to get assignments outside of their usual career path. "The needs of the Army" was the reason often cited when making these assignments.

Andy and his older brother Lars had grown up in the shadow of their late father, Robie Laine, a Finnish-born Army officer who retired as a full colonel. Their father earned his U.S. citizenship by joining the U.S. Army, and eventually retired to a small horse ranch near Bloomfield, New Mexico. Robie had been raised on a farm and was convinced that he should retire on a farm. Their late mother was an American of mostly Swedish ancestry. She had died of breast cancer when the boys were in high school.

Following the mortar barrage, Andy spent a frustrating ten-hour day of pushing paper for the battalion, which was greatly complicated by the process of the unit's upcoming redeployment to Germany. That afternoon, Andy chatted with Larry Echanis, the battalion S-1, the staff officer in charge of personnel. Echanis had been Laine's martial arts sparring partner for the past several months. He had taught Andy some Hwa Rang Do *katas*, and Andy reciprocated, teaching Larry his mixed martial arts moves.

Their battalion (or "squadron," in Stryker parlance) was a forward deployed part of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, headquartered in Vilseck, Germany. The incoming squadron was a sister unit in the same regiment, and also part of Task Force Duke. But Andy's squadron was headed back to Germany, in a regularly scheduled unit rotation.

Laine and Echanis had been discussing events back home. Lately, the war effort had been taking a backseat to tumultuous economic events emanating from New York City and the world's other financial centers. Larry Echanis seemed worried but was trying to be upbeat. He asked, "You think that this'll blow over, right?"

Laine put on a glum face. "At this point, there's no way. The whole system is breaking down. The global credit market is frozen, the sovereign debt problems have blown up past the GDP levels for most countries, and the derivatives have totally imploded. We're in a world of hurt. I think there'll be some major riots and looting soon."

Echanis bit his lip. "Well, that won't be a big deal for my family. Most of them live in eastern Oregon. Have you ever been through Ontario, Oregon? It's out in the middle of nowhere. The disruption will be in the big cities. Our town is three hundred miles from Portland, and more than three hundred and fifty from Seattle as the crow flies."

Laine shook his head. "I wish it was that simple. Sure, the riots will be in the big cities. The metro areas will be death traps. The suburbs will be only marginally safer. But you got to realize that these days even the small towns are dependent on long chains of supply. When the eighteen-wheelers stop rolling, *everyone* is gonna be hurting. It will definitely be safer out in the boonies. But you should tell your family to stock up on every scrap of food they can find. They need to get *out* of dollars and into canned goods right away."

"You really think it'll get that bad?"

Laine answered soberly, "I'm afraid it will. Does your family live in town or out on a ranch?"

"Used to be ranchers. All in town now, but we're Basques, so we still know how to live the old-fashioned way. My mom used to cook a lot of our meals in a dutch oven. I didn't even know how fast food tasted until I went off to college. There's no comparison to my mom's cooking."

"Well, with those skills, and living where they do, they'll probably ride the storm out pretty safely."

The conversation left Andy feeling uneasy about his plans for leaving active duty. Strapping on his MOLLE vest to leave his desk at the battalion headquarters, Andy turned to Echanis to say, "Well, when the going gets tough, the tough go *shopping*. I'm going to stop by my CHU and grab a duffel bag and then I'm off to the Haji-mart."

It was 90 degrees but felt even hotter, since Andy was wearing IBA and had the weight of an M4 carbine slung across his back, a PRC-148 radio, and numerous MOLLE magazine pouches. The only concession to being in a relatively safe area was that he was wearing a boonie hat instead of a MICH helmet.

As Captain Laine walked past the guards manning the HESCO barriers at the FOB's main gate, he read the signs on the Haji market windows just across the road. They proclaimed: "Very Best PriceS," "DVD," and "Cusptom TailoreR." As he walked in the door, the smell of the market hit Andy like a hammer. It was an odd mix of Turkish tobacco smoke, incense, kerosene, sweat, and overcooked lamb. It certainly didn't smell like the exchange store back at the FOB. Aside from the hint of JP8 jet fuel, which was a presence everywhere in the FOB, the exchange smelled just like any retail store in America: hardly any smell at all—almost antiseptic. In contrast, Ali's store reeked. An aging Italian-made air conditioner was roaring above the door but not keeping up. It was perhaps 10 degrees cooler inside than outside.

Nabil Jassim Ali gave his usual "Salaam, salaam, Mr. Colonel" greeting. The portly and balding Pashtuni flashed his yellowed, crooked teeth. He called all the American soldiers "Colonel," even the privates. It still made Andy laugh every time he heard it.

Eyeing the empty duffel bag slung over Laine's shoulder, Ali chortled. "Perhaps you are wanting to buy plentiful numbers of thingings, Mr. Colonel?" Laine nodded. Ali waved him in and added, "...

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