

# DOGS OF WAR

Sample file

RICHARD CLAYTON | ALEX GREENE

JOHN NEWMAN | ROB VAUX AND CHUCK WENDIG

**M.R.E.**

Been bad since I been back. Nothing's right anymore. It's like I went over, did my time, got stuck in three consecutive tours of duty, and while I was festering in some desert crap-nest everything went off the rails. I like to think that maybe somewhere the Real Me is living the life he was meant to live. Wife didn't cheat on him; didn't default on the mortgage. Maybe the Real Me has good dreams instead of bad ones, the dreams of the just instead of the nightmares of the guilty.

REALITY, THOUGH; IT JUST DON'T WORK LIKE THAT.

I go to sleep every night, and just as I'm falling asleep I see the faces at my window: the Iraqi boy with the paper hat; the old woman, all her teeth gone to rot; Sergeant Adams; Jake Kowalski. Sometimes they come in my room, sit on my chest, and steal my breath.

I wake up every morning remembering bad dreams. But it's not the war dreams that bother me. It's the dreams of the big red barn. Tall under the full moon. Windows like eyes. Big door like a big mouth.

I know where that barn is.

Meals-Ready-to-Eat: MREs. Different shit in different rations, and "shit" is the operative word. Sloppy Joes look like runny diarrhea. The vegetable lasagna looks like runny diarrhea. The chili macaroni stuff well, that looks like runny diarrhea given over to grubs and maggots.

Sample file

I do like the Cajun rice and sausage, though. Thank God for small favors.

They say it's probably PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Not that I get much help for it. For all the rah-rah-go-troops fanfare, the VA says they just don't have the money. Plus, it's not like I got a leg blown off at the knee or anything. Not like Gomez. Today I decided I'm going to tell somebody else besides the shrink. Fuck it. I'll tell Gomez. Yeah, he'll laugh at me. Probably punch me in the shoulder, call me a pussy or something, and I'll ask him what the word for "pussy" is in Mexican, and he'll tell me to shut the fuck up because he grew up in Wichita and not Tijuana. I'll tell Gomez.



The FRH's, Flameless Ration Heater, heats up the MREs. Fill it with water, and the shit heats up. Sometimes you put the FRH into a sleeve and stick the MRE over top it. I've seen some where you just hold the heater underneath it, and I've heard tell of others where you just drop the whole MRE into the bag. I guess it's got magnesium or something in it that makes the heat. Bastards get pretty hot. They gotta be to cook through all that runny diarrhea.

I thought it was off the rails before but that wasn't true. No, now it's really, definitely, undeniably off the rails. Gone south. Off the reservation. AWOL, FUBAR, SNAFU.

Tried calling Gomez, but he wasn't picking up. It was late, figured he could be asleep. So I went to his house, this little ramshackle roach motel just outside town. See, we're brothers, in the way that we both got shot at together and shot the enemy together, and so that means he trusts me enough for me to have a key. So I went in.

Jesus Christ, Lord Almighty, it isn't a dream. It isn't a dream. There they were. Sitting on Gomez' chest: Kowalski; the Iraqi boy; some goddamn pirate CD and DVD merchant out of Baghdad who I hadn't even remembered until now. They were sitting on his chest, had his mouth open, and were pulling the breath out of his throat in threaded tufts like it was yarn or fog or something, working it with their dead fingers. Gomez' eyes were open, pupils gone to tiny pinholes. I made a sound and banged my knee on a side-table. A lamp crashed to the ground. The things,

whatever they were, hissed at me and fled through the window. The closed window. Clean through the glass.

Gomez woke up. And we talked into morning.

He's been seeing them since he came back, too. And he's been dreaming of the big red barn. The barn down off Mill Street.

I told him we better call the other boys. Been too long, I said. You come back from a bad place and a bad situation, and sometimes you push everything about that awfulness to the margins, even the few things that were good. Like your brothers.

Shouldn't have let it go that long. Gomez agreed.

Before we called Danny Boy and Maynard, Gomez said something, something that still gives me chills.

He said, "I guess demons follow you home."

MREs, we call them all kinds of other things: MRE Antoinette; MRE Osmond (or "Donnie and MRE"); Meal, Ready to Excrete; or Morsels, Regurgitated and Eviscerated. Some say they're "three lies for the price of one"-it ain't a meal, it ain't ready, and you damn sure can't eat it. I knew a guy who called the package of hot dogs the "fingers of death," since they looked like... well, gross gray fingers, like the fingers that tried to pull the living breath or soul or whatever out of Gomez' open mouth.

A lot of MREs come with these too-sweet candies. Call 'em "charms," in the way that they're bad luck charms, not good luck charms. You don't eat them because they're bad luck. Story says you eat them, and you're not coming back unless it's on a stretcher or carried on a blood-slick tarp. I always ate them, though. Like I was spitting in fate's eye.

The barn looked hungry. Like a tall red giant, or the face of one at least, all hollow-eyed and open-mouthed. Nobody lived here anymore, and the farmhouse just up the driveway looks like it's about to fold in on itself, deflating like a blown tire. But the barn? The barn seems like it has a new coat of paint. Wood doesn't have a bit of rot. In the moonlight, you can see the windows are clean and clear.

And as Maynard points out, you can see faces through the glass, watching us come. Their faces. The dead faces.

I have to tell Danny Boy to relax, to wait, or he's going to just start shooting up the place with that AR-15 of his. Maynard echoes the sentiment, and actually puts his hand on the weapon and has Danny Boy calm down a bit. That was always their deal; Danny on the cusp of crazy, crazier than a shit-house spider, and Maynard with the calm voice, the crass joke, the softening presence behind those wire-rim spectacles.

Gomez says he's going in. He's got his old M1 Garand-his grandfather's weapon, he says-and he marches right up to that barn. Well, I don't know that he marches, exactly: that fake leg of his is rough stuff, barely fits his stump thanks to the efficiency of the good ol' VA. But he limps with purpose and throws open the door.

And it's dark inside.

Even

with the flash-

lights on, it seems like the barn swallows the light. I see movement up in the hay rafters, but pointing the light up there earns me a glimpse of nothing. Maynard calls out, says he sees something down here, something "lookin' at him," but when we all throw our beams in that direction, we see it's just a deer skull and antler rack hanging on the wall. We laugh. It feels good to laugh. It doesn't last long. 'Cause that's when they swoop down, hungry.

At first I think it's just a few of them. The little Iraqi boy darts in front of me but I can't get a shot because Danny Boy is backing up and he's in my FOF, my field of fire. I see the old woman toward the door with a wooden cart, and with powerful arms she closes the door.

The flashlights start to flicker, wink out. One by one. Mine goes first. I feel feet kick me in the chest. Hands pull my wrists taut, leaving me spread on the floor like Jesus on the cross. My revolver's gone, and I don't even know where.

Before his light goes out, I see Maynard's down, too. I see Kowalski perched on his chest like a big vulture, drawing out his breath. Behind them I see a bunch of shapes getting closer. I see Private Keens. I see that merc motherfucker, Bobby Utrecht. I see two little girls. They're not dead like they were in Baghdad. Not blown to pieces. Not shot. Not bloody.

But they're dead, all right. Dead hands reaching. Then his light goes out. I feel my breath leaving me, tugged away in great vomited ropes. My cheeks go cold. My hands are numb.

PEANUT BUTTER  
(FORTIFIED)

NET WT. 1.5 OZ. (42.5g)  
Contains: Peanut Butter, Salt, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B6, Vitamin B12, Vitamin E, Vitamin K, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin D, Vitamin F, Vitamin G, Vitamin H, Vitamin I, Vitamin J, Vitamin L, Vitamin M, Vitamin N, Vitamin O, Vitamin P, Vitamin Q, Vitamin R, Vitamin S, Vitamin T, Vitamin U, Vitamin V, Vitamin W, Vitamin X, Vitamin Y, Vitamin Z, Vitamin AA, Vitamin AB, Vitamin AC, Vitamin AD, Vitamin AE, Vitamin AF, Vitamin AG, Vitamin AH, Vitamin AI, Vitamin AJ, Vitamin AK, Vitamin AL, Vitamin AM, Vitamin AN, Vitamin AO, Vitamin AP, Vitamin AQ, Vitamin AR, Vitamin AS, Vitamin AT, Vitamin AU, Vitamin AV, Vitamin AW, Vitamin AX, Vitamin AY, Vitamin AZ, Vitamin BA, Vitamin BB, Vitamin BC, Vitamin BD, Vitamin BE, Vitamin BF, Vitamin BG, Vitamin BH, Vitamin BI, Vitamin BJ, Vitamin BK, Vitamin BL, Vitamin BM, Vitamin BN, Vitamin BO, Vitamin BP, Vitamin BQ, Vitamin BR, Vitamin BS, Vitamin BT, Vitamin BU, Vitamin BV, Vitamin BW, Vitamin BX, Vitamin BY, Vitamin BZ, Vitamin CA, Vitamin CB, Vitamin CC, Vitamin CD, Vitamin CE, Vitamin CF, Vitamin CG, Vitamin CH, Vitamin CI, Vitamin CJ, Vitamin CK, Vitamin CL, Vitamin CM, Vitamin CN, Vitamin CO, Vitamin CP, Vitamin CQ, Vitamin CR, Vitamin CS, Vitamin CT, Vitamin CU, Vitamin CV, Vitamin CW, Vitamin CX, Vitamin CY, Vitamin CZ, Vitamin DA, Vitamin DB, Vitamin DC, Vitamin DD, Vitamin DE, Vitamin DF, Vitamin DG, Vitamin DH, Vitamin DI, Vitamin DJ, Vitamin DK, Vitamin DL, Vitamin DM, Vitamin DN, Vitamin DO, Vitamin DP, Vitamin DQ, Vitamin DR, Vitamin DS, Vitamin DT, Vitamin DU, Vitamin DV, Vitamin DW, Vitamin DX, Vitamin DY, Vitamin DZ, Vitamin EA, Vitamin EB, Vitamin EC, Vitamin ED, Vitamin EE, Vitamin EF, Vitamin EG, Vitamin EH, Vitamin EI, Vitamin EJ, Vitamin EK, Vitamin EL, Vitamin EM, Vitamin EN, Vitamin EO, Vitamin EP, Vitamin EQ, Vitamin ER, Vitamin ES, Vitamin ET, Vitamin EU, Vitamin EV, Vitamin EW, Vitamin EX, Vitamin EY, Vitamin EZ, Vitamin FA, Vitamin FB, Vitamin FC, Vitamin FD, Vitamin FE, Vitamin FF, Vitamin FG, Vitamin FH, 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Every sound is a bad echo, incomplete and distant.  
But I hear one thing.

I hear Gomez yell out: "MREs!"

And there's a little thought in me that wants to laugh and say, yep, shit, we are Meals, Ready to Eat, aren't we? Morsels soon Regurgitated and damn sure Eviscerated.

Then, though, I realize: Gomez means something else entirely.

You can make a bomb out of an MRE, you know that? Not a big bomb. Not like the bombs you find strapped to lunatics or underneath the Humvees. But it's a bomb nevertheless.

The FRH, the heater, gives off hydrogen.

You can capture that. Blow it to hell. Make a bang. Make some shrapnel. Gomez was always good with the MRE, the Meals Ready to Explode.

Don't know how many he made.

Lots of white flashes and hot shrapnel stinging my cheek.

Lots of dead faces illuminated in flash-bangs.

My revolver is back in my hand, and the blood is coming back to my fingers, toes and lips.

The demons follow us home. The AR-15 barked fire.

The Redhawk in my hand spit bullets.

It was war, all over again. The dead, dying once more.

## Credits

**Written by:** Richard Clayton, Alex Greene, John Newman, Rob Vaux and Chuck Wendig

**Developer:** Stephen Lea Sheppard

**Creative Director:** Rich Thomas

**Production Manager:** matt milberger

**Editor:** Scribendi.com

**Art Direction & Design:** Mike Chaney

**Interior Art:** Erica Danell, Nik Stakal, Justin Norman, James Stowe, Brian Leblanc, Jeremy McHugh, Juan Antonio Serrano Garcia, Efreem Palacios

**Front Cover Art:** Efreem Palacios



Sample file



**WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING**  
2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD  
SUITE G  
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087

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PRINTED IN CHINA



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Sample file



The goal is to break you down and build you up. That's why some of them call Phase One of this whole process "forming." Because they take the shape right out of you and reform you into the shape they need. The shape of a soldier, the shape of a moral killer. The shape of someone who doesn't think too hard about what he's doing, but when he does think about it he's able to recognize that sometimes evil things are necessary to accomplish good things.

They run you. They work you. You climb over things, dead-hang from bars, sit-ups, push-ups, jump over this, and run some more. All the while, you got people yelling at you from all corners. Telling you you're weak. Stressing how worthless you are. You can feel your shape start to crumble, the bits of your old self start to tumble away, like thumbs breaking bits off the edge of a cookie.

They don't let you sleep much for about four days. See what happens to you.

Break you down more. Crumble, crumble.

If you're too weak, you go join the Pork Chop Platoon—where they decide that the hands-on approach is just too soft, and they start hammering you into the shape they need. Oh, and they'll hammer you. They'll get the job done.

Then comes the end of Phase One, which is about three weeks after you got there, after you got your head shorn, and a hard cot, and a bowl of chow in the morning.

When you're destroyed, that's when they come to you.

Three other soldiers and one drill sergeant. They show you a book, and in this book are military logs and Polaroids, and these logs and snapshots show how you're going to die. Me, I was going to die at a checkpoint in Najaf, some woman with a baby that wasn't a baby but was actually a bomb was going to blow the unmerciful hell out of us.

But the sergeant said I can change all of that. I just have to dip this fountain pen in blood drawn from my left index finger, and sign the back of the book. I ask what I am signing, but he tells me the Corps isn't about asking questions, it's about doing what you're told. And those pictures are mighty convincing.

I did what I was told. And I'm still alive long after I left Najaf. Others, though, they laughed it off. They didn't sign. Thought it was some kind of hazing prank.

They didn't make it out of Najaf.

# Introduction

War is a terrible thing, and human beings love to wage it. War shapes society more obviously than any other phenomenon; looking at certain accounts of history, one could be forgiven for thinking of human civilization's span as little more than a series of wars. No surprise that war stories are popular.

Yet, at the same time, Westerners' public perception isolates war. It's a special circumstance. War is something unique classes of individuals engage in, on battlefields far away from normal, peaceful life. And battlefields may have been other things before the fighting started—homes for civilians, urban sprawl, wilderness—but once a battlefield, it's a location for violence and little more.

As with all simple views of the world, this view of war and military conflict is, well, wrong. The truth is complex—just because fighting erupts in a civilian locale doesn't mean the civilians have time to evacuate. In places where conflict is common, innocents keep their heads down and live their lives, hoping to evade the notice of stray bullets while bombs fall or firefights erupt near their homes. Many can't evacuate, or will not abandon what's theirs. War isn't something that only happens to the other sort of people—the sort who live so far away from you they might as well not exist. And a war story need not only be about war.

## Theme and Mood

**Theme: War is Everywhere.** Or, more accurately, military activity is everywhere. In most of the world, it's not strictly cloistered away from civilian activity as many North Americans are trained to believe. The divide between civilian and military life is thin, and everywhere, the latter impinges upon the former.

**Mood: Just the Facts, Ma'am.** Military activity is sufficiently horrific as to need no enhancement. Dressing it up in gaudy horror tropes, at least in this book, would obscure the underlying information. This book doesn't try to play up the more terrible aspects of military conflict, nor does it play them down. It provides a foundation of information upon which Storytellers can create military chronicles and tools by which they can add military elements to chronicles otherwise unconcerned with such matters.

## How To Use This Book

This book serves two purposes.

First, it provides material with which Storytellers can run campaigns in the World of Darkness centered on military player characters. A military campaign provides structure and ease of play that the more open-ended conventional World of Darkness campaign style often lacks.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, it provides information for Storytellers who wish to incorporate military elements into ongoing non-military campaigns, either for a single session or in a lasting manner. Not all chronicles where police officers make an appearance need be police procedural games—why should soldiers and the military appear only in military-centered chronicles? Players and Storytellers who read this book will, hopefully, walk away with a greater understanding of how militaries work, and thereafter find less intimidating the prospect of bringing armed forces into games otherwise unconcerned with such things.

**Chapter 1: The Conventional Military** describes the United States Armed Forces in a format suited for near-immediate play. It contains a description of the training and operating practices of the US military, followed by a description of Fort Harmon and Zero Company, a military installation and unit well-suited to supernatural military characters, as well as ready-to-play scenarios. It then examines private military contractors

“War never changes.”  
— Fallout

in the same format and presents a set of new Merits and Storyteller characters.

**Chapter 2: Irregular Units** departs from the format laid out in Chapter 1 for a somewhat more detailed analysis of unconventional military forces, examining the structure of third world militaries, guerilla forces, terrorists and freedom fighters, and arms dealers. It also re-examines private military contractors from a different perspective than Chapter 1, and closes with a set of sample military forces taken from real life, which serve to illustrate how theories of unconventional warfare are put into practice.

**Chapter 3: Sites of Conflict** examines ongoing military conflicts throughout the world, any one of which might serve as the focus of a military campaign—or background material in non-military campaigns. Though supernatural beings are the cause of none of the conflicts examined here, mortal disputes serve as excellent cover behind which vampires, werewolves, and other inhuman creatures might hide their activities.

**Chapter 4: Storytelling** presents an addition to the Morality system to make running military campaigns easier, mechanics for increasing the lethality of firearms in the

## The Disclaimer

Though many of the topics discussed in this book are real, the book itself is a work of fiction. The information presented herein is for use in role-playing games, on the assumption that adding verisimilitude and “realism” will enhance the play experience. As much as possible when discussing real world issues, it strives to be accurate and well-researched, but we, the book’s design team, do not and cannot provide any ultimate guarantees as to the veracity of the material herein. Much of the geopolitics discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, for example, are simplified, as analyzing them in proper depth would take whole encyclopedias of space. Readers who wish to use the information provided by this book in any context other than at the game table should research the issues themselves, as this book does not present itself as an authority on such matters.

This book doesn’t attempt to proselytize when discussing horrible, inhuman subjects, including terrible violent conflicts that have cost hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. Please, just because this book doesn’t condemn terrorist activity, illegal arms dealing, and military corruptions whenever it discusses them, don’t assume White Wolf endorses these activities.

Storytelling System, methods for resolving mass combat scenarios, and a look at some of the difficulties supernatural characters might face serving in the military.

## Recommended Media

War stories are popular. They’ve been popular for longer than the existence of written history. Uncountable movies and books about war, factual, fictional, and every degree in between, told from every perspective and written with any agenda flood libraries, book stores, and film rental outlets across the world. Here we list only the material that was particularly useful during the preparation of this book, or material especially appropriate to the subject matter of the World of Darkness.

### Books

*The World’s Most Dangerous Places*, Robert Young Pelton et al.

This series of books describes some of the most war-torn places on Earth from the perspective of those who travel there, and incidentally includes examination of terrorism, military tactics, and the complex politics underlying them, all in a conversational and easy to read tone. Not to be missed.

*Unkilling*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman.

Somewhat less impartial than *The World’s Most Dangerous Places*, backed by studies that have since been called into serious question, and harboring an agenda opposed to violent video games, this book nevertheless seems to accurately reflect the opinions many soldiers carry about violence and the act of committing it upon enemies.

### Film

*Full Metal Jacket* (1987)

This is one of the most well-known war movies of its era, and with good reason. Notable especially for the way it seemed to serve as a recruitment tool for the Marines, even though director Stanley Kubrick intended it as anything but. Examining one’s own reactions to this film can provide powerful insights into the potential allure of military service as it illustrates the horrors of war.

*Blackhawk Down* (2001)

Another obvious choice, with beautiful music and cinematography, but pay attention to the way it blurs the line between civilians and combatants.

*Dog Soldiers* (2002)

Almost as soon as it was released, horror fans acknowledged this movie as a classic of the werewolf genre. A group of British Army soldiers on a training exercise run afoul of a pack of werewolves, and carnage results.

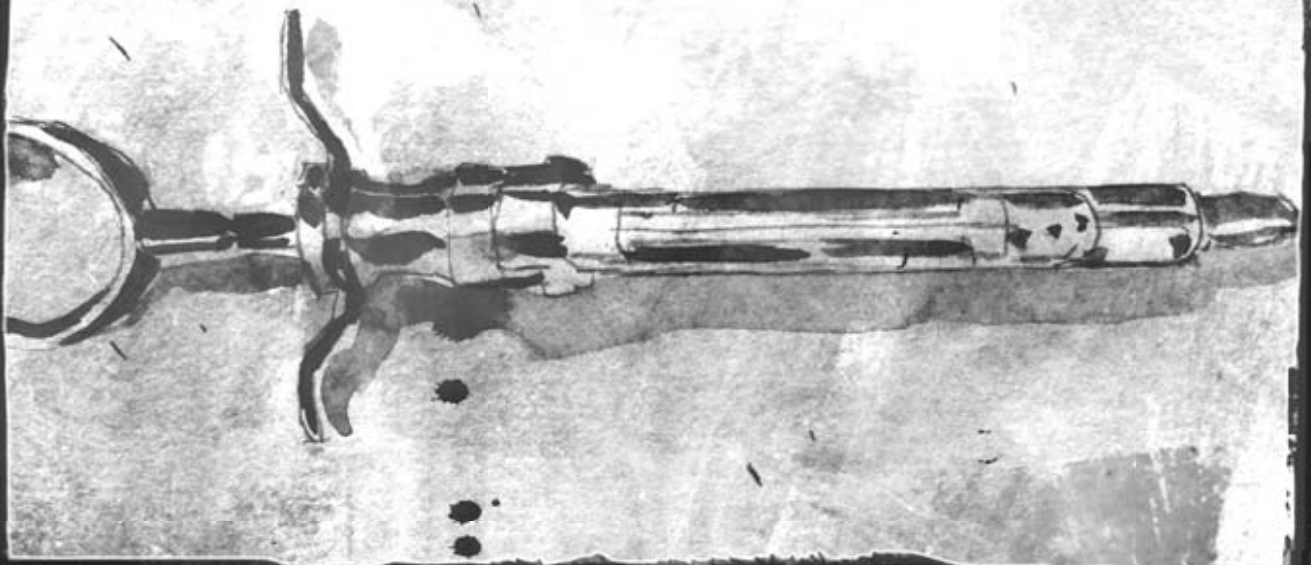
### Websites

[www.military.com](http://www.military.com)

A fine resource for all things US Army.



Sample file



Outside, the goats bleated.

It was colder up here than Abrams had expected.

Inside, the herder sat trembling on a rickety thatch-back chair, talking to Charlie Troxel while Charlie's twin sister, Charlene, translated. All of it got written down and put on digital recorder. All of it emblazoned with the Valkyrie logo.

When the two soldiers were finished, Charlene slid the paper across to Abrams while Charlie vigorously shook the hand of the goat herder, which was probably a gross contravention of custom around these parts, but who could keep track?

"Thank you for your help," Abrams said to the goat herder. "The Task Force appreciates your efforts. The United States Government owes you a great debt."

Charlene translated as Abrams looked at the paper.

"This is where the Beast is holed up?" he asked the twins.

"Another damn cave," Charlie muttered through teeth clenched in a dangerous smile.

Abrams gave the faintest nod to the twin soldiers. The two Troxels moved fast. Charlie had the goat herder's head in his hands, and he pulled the man's terrified face back, exposing the neck.

Charlene clambered atop the herder, syringe in hand. Bam. She plunged the needle deep into the herder's neck, between two corded tendons. Damn needle looked as big as a drinking straw.

It didn't take long. The man's eyes spun wildly in his head, and an expectorated froth swiftly formed, cascading down into his black beard. Charlie gently set him down on the ground, where the herder vomited and, blessedly, fell asleep.

"Done and done," Charlie barked, wiping hands on his fatigues. "Nicely handled."

"Not done yet," Abrams said. He gestured toward the only other room in this ramshackle house: the bedroom. "The herder has a son. Or a boyish daughter. Maybe six, seven years old. Hiding under the bed in there. You've got another dose in that needle, yes?"

Charlene paled, and nodded. "But, we're not supposed to use it on—"

"Just do the work and earn your paycheck. Estimate a lesser dose. The child needs to forget, same as the father. The alternative is less appealing, I assure you."

The two soldiers disappeared into the bedroom. Abrams turned away, and as he heard a child squall, he wondered just how long he could handle this way-off-the-books stuff.