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Katrina and the Waves

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Katrina and the Waves

Plan by Katrina and the Waves

R. Ryan Brandys

Imagine you have a summer home down in New Orleans. Wonderful beachfront property and you try to shoot down there once a year for Marti Gras.

But you haven't been there for six months or so. Your last visit was the worst vacation ever. You were watching some TV and melting into your black leather couch. You left some food out on the counter – pop tarts and whipped cream – when the swarm came. Thousands of black cockroaches poured from behind the refrigerator; the stove; the sink. The pop tart never had a chance.

A pesticide allergy means you can't call the Orkin man, so you've got to find another solution to this problem. You remember that you're paying out the ass for that extra flood insurance. You're not stupid; you know if the levees were to breach around Lake Pontchartrain, not even your cockroaches would survive.

On the other hand, flooding your infested summer home would solve all your problems. You never cared for the place all that much. You wanted granite floors, not marble. Why not take the insurance money now – and rebuild it next year after everything dries out?

Cockroach problem solved.

* * *

When you're not on your couch eating pop tarts, you work for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Your job is to prepare for natural disasters and respond to them as they occur. Or at least, that *was* your job – before FEMA was absorbed into the Department of Homeland Security. You and your *new* boss both honestly believe that suicide bombers – not floods – are the real threat to our nation.

You're back at your office in Washington, munching a pop tart and looking over your new budget figures. DHS cut your funding again. Crumbly fruit filling trickles down your shirt, onto your freshly waxed mahogany desk. Your secretary scrambles into the room. She's fiddling with the remote control. It's the Fox News Channel. Words scroll at the bottom of the screen.

CATEGORY FIVE HURRICANE FIFTY MILES FROM THE NEW ORLEANS COAST WILL MAKE LANDFALL IN 24 HOURS

Your secretary plops a big binder on your desk. Three-inches thick. 448 Pages.

“What is this?” you ask. More crumbs.

“Last year, we asked IEM to theorize about this situation and they drafted a response plan. Here, it says right here.” She flips the binder open and continues. “Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Plan. See, here's Pam – a slow-moving

category-three Hurricane, and she's hitting New Orleans – and the levees have failed.”

“I don’t remember voting on this...” You say.

“This isn’t finalized yet. The new budget cuts mean we can’t pay for IEM to finish the study. But it’s pretty comprehensive. See, here are the evacuation routes, and...” *(she flips some pages)* “...people to contact to get truckloads of ice, water, and food to the affected areas. There’s a section near the back on how to coordinate search-and-rescue operations. Should I start making some phone calls? We only have 24 hours...”

Your secretary’s name is Lindsay. You hired her because she was motivated. But you can hear a lilt of fear and urgency in her voice as she flips through the report. Your phone rings. Not the black phone on your desk. The red phone. *Underneath*. It’s your boss. Your *new* boss. From DHS. You give Lindsay a nod; she and the binder are quickly absent. You answer on the second ring.

“About that draft of that response plan...” your boss speaks in a gruff tone, slow and cautious, “ya’ll hold off on that, for a while, please. That there document was not designed to be the response bible for a major event like this. Seems we don’t have all the pieces of the puzzle yet. Cheney kept saying something about keeping all our ducks in a row, and I’m inclined to listen to him. He’s calling it **Operation Clean Slate**. We’re not to act until we hear back from the cabinet. They said they’re coordinating the matter personally.”

“We won’t have all those puzzle pieces until after nature takes its course. Mostly welfare nigger democrats anyway...they can wait two or three days...” you add.

“Glad to see we’re on the same page. We’ll be mobilizing all the trucks soon enough; they’ll be plenty a time for the media to paint us as heroes, but we wait until after the storm hits. 48 hours should be long enough.”

You chew on your pop tart.

Your boss is wheezing into a whisper. “Look at it this way. About this time next year, all those displaced folks that survived the storm will have found other places to live, and the ones that are washed away, well ... all we have to do is *lose* their deeds and social security numbers. Then the land becomes *county* property. We’re talking ten cents on the dollar. Half-acre.”

The prospect of cheap real estate has you envisioning a granite living room, your own private tennis court, and a swimming pool on the patio.

“Lindsay, um... hold the phone there. Go file your nails or something. This time next year, you can have your own piece of *New New Orleans*. Whaddya say?”

Music starts playing in the other room. Lindsay’s got on her favorite CD. An 80’s pop band. They called themselves **Katrina and the Waves**.

“*Now I m walking on sunshine, whoa oh, and don t it feel good, hey...*”