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Sergeant Augustus Hollie took cover behind the half-collapsed mud brick wall and wondered how he'd gotten himself into such a goddamn shit-awful mess. Joining the army seemed like such a good idea at the time—the time of his formless youth. Now? Shit. Hunkered down beside him was one of six newbies—Augustus thought his name was Travis—who'd joined the battalion in the last week. Augustus had laughed along with the rest of the boys when he came across the six newbies shaving their heads in the barracks bathroom, proclaiming that 'If we're ever gonna win this war, we gotta get meaner!' No laughing now though. They'd been under attack for half an hour, and each time Augustus made a tactical decision to try and alleviate their situation, he'd led them into a worse one.

'What do we do now, Sarge?'

In all honesty, right at that moment, shards of mud-brick showering them from constant gunfire, Augustus didn't have a clue. Two other soldiers were with him and the newbie-Travis behind the wall. Pinned down across the dusty street was another group of three soldiers and further back, two groups of four, waiting for orders while several others treated the injured.

Augustus hand-signalled to the group of three soldiers: Can you flank to the right? One of the newbies—Augustus thought his name was Pierce—signalled back with an unsnub slice of the hand across his throat then a series of hand signs: three bad guys dug in real good.

Augustus sighed heavily. Shit. Shit. Shit. Why? Shit.

'Sarge?' Newbie-Travis stared with such hope and trust at Augustus, even after his series of mistakes. Augustus felt sorry for him and the bad luck he'd acquired in joining this battalion. The 151st was becoming known as the unluckiest battalion for sergeants, to the rank of which Augustus had only just been promoted. That unlucky run now looked like extending to him and, as the present situation looked like ending in a none-too-happy manner, to the rest of the battalion too.

Augustus had given up calling on God and Jesus and the Almighty to protect him when they went on patrol. The last three times such invocation of faith had only got the soldiers next to him ripped to shreds, respectively, by a road-side bomb, sniper fire, and lastly, ironically, by friendly fire from a British strike fighter recon mission. The friendly fire victim was the previous sergeant. Changing his religious affiliation at a time like this, Augustus knew, certainly wasn't doing him any favours with his only-just-previous deity. All the same, calling on said deity wasn't providing his soldier buddies with any special treatment either.

Augustus closed his eyes for a moment and whispered a mantra to himself that if there was a universal being, then he wished for that all-supreme consciousness to cup him in a protective ethereal hand and forgive him for the

stupid actions he was about to take.

Augustus turned to newbie-Travis. 'I'm gonna create a diversion. When I do, everyone high-tail it. Got it? Tell everyone.'

'Yeah. What're you gonna do Sarge?'

'You'll see. Tell 'em.'

Newbie-Travis did just that.

Focused as they were on staying alive, Augustus and the rest of the men had failed to register the moisture laden storm clouds gathering over the jagged mountains to the east and rapidly heading towards the town which none of them could pronounce with any confidence. As the first huge and heavy drops of rain hit the earth, pushed hard onto the town by a prevailing gale, Augustus took a deep breath, nodded to newbie-Travis, stood up and strode deliberately into the middle of the road.

Accounts of the next few minutes vary widely from soldier to soldier. Most of the soldiers, it has to be mentioned, weren't looking in their sergeant's direction, and noticed little except for what was in their immediate path. Some soldiers say they heard repeated gunfire. Others proclaim that the subsequent noise was so loud that you were lucky if you could hear yourself think. Some thought they heard Augustus singing. This he denied.

One thing did happen for sure though. Only seconds after Augustus planted himself directly in plain view of the enemy, that part of the town was suddenly and unequivocally blanketed by a torrential downpour, the magnitude of which, no soldier who was there had ever seen or would ever see again. The downpour lasted long enough to enable the embattled battalion to regroup and retreat without further casualties. Streets turned into muddy torrents that knocked soldiers from their fleeing feet. And in a further strange twist, the path of the flow wound its way through the streets carrying many of the soldiers to the safest destination by which to exit the town. When the soldiers looked back they recalled that the downpour seemed only to be occurring directly over that part of the town.

Augustus himself was unable to shed much light on the subject. He was the last to return to the safe area, covered head to foot in a viscous mud, a golem of the twenty-first century. All he could say was, 'Maybe the enemy's guns jammed. I don't know. Maybe the water was too heavy for them to see. I don't know. I just stood there until I reckoned my men would have returned to a safe area.' Asked why he took the course of action he did, he replied, 'I'd made so many stupid decisions up to that point trying to do the right thing, I figured something had to give.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Murray.*