

## **1-8 The Dragon Has Awakened**

It's early morning, 0200 hours, and quiet. You're sitting by the pool outside the studio apartment you now call home. Being July, it's still eighty degrees and typical for the summer months in Paradise Valley, Phoenix, Arizona.

There are no sounds except for the gentle swirl of the crystal clear water just beyond your lounge chair. But while chugging down the second glass of Chillable Red box wine, the silence is broken!

**Pivot on the right foot, whirl... Kill! Pivot on the left foot, whirl... Kill!**

**Kill! Kill! Kill! OORAH!**

Thoughts are racing through your brain.

Back from your fifth combat tour, three in Iraq and two in Afghanistan, you've managed to get a shitty job at the local smorgasbord, dishin' out food to fat civilians. You recall...

"I wanted to cut the throats of those fuckin' maggots!"

Thinking over tonight's shift, lighting up a cigarette and pouring another glass of red nectar, you're also remembering...

"Yelling 'kill!' wasn't real to me in boot camp, but after my first tour in Iraq, I now sure as hell know what my D.I. meant back there in San Diego."

He told us...

**"You are Marines! Your job is to KILL! You will not hesitate to kill the enemy! You will kill without fucking Tree Hugger compassion! Hesitation will kill you and your fellow Marines!**

You are killing machines! You are swift, silent, and deadly! And listen up, you shit birds! War is our business, and business is damn good!”

Your thoughts continue...

“I loved boot camp and I still love the Corps. But I never got a training film on how to deal with killin’ so many of those damn kids. Still can’t get that shit out of my head, not to mention those good lookin’ babes I wasted.”

Thoughts of the Brothers and Sisters who died next to you, who never made it back are pushing the guilt of killing children aside...

“Fuck it! They were all the enemy! Or were they?”

Alcohol and gut wrenching pain is clouding your thoughts...

“Maybe I didn’t have to kill so many?”

At 0300 hours, you grab your box of wine and stagger to the door of your apartment. Luckily for you, the door is next to the pool area.

“Another sleepless night,” you think as you open the door, set your wine on the table, and lay your body down for the day.

“I know this shit is ripping my life apart, but I don’t know what to do about it.”

As fatigue takes over and your eyes begin to close, a comforting thought comes to mind...

“There’s a group session at the Vet Center down on Weldon Avenue tomorrow. I’ll see my Brothers.”

As your eyes finally close, the phantoms return and the nightmare begins again.

## **You're back in the Valley of Death one more time.**

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Now, let's really talk about what's happenin' here in this true-life story. You may not like what you're about to hear, but I suspect if you got this far, you're a hankerin' to go a bit further? Don't worry, I'm just tellin' you the truth. Hell, how much more can that hurt? Well, I guess that depends on how responsible you feel, doesn't it? How much you care?

We've talked about bringing out the Beast, the Primal Self in the first topic, and what a kickass struggle it is to constantly control that thing. Then we talked about the real life, no bullshit, what-it's-like-to-kill feelings that Warriors deal with one second after the killing for the rest of their lives. Then rounding it out with topics three and four, we discussed what it's like to never know if we're gonna live one more day for the rest of our life, and how we're stuck between the Warrior World we love and the Civilian World we hate.

We've also discussed how Warriors feel comfortable with things that sure as hell make civilians and non-combatants uncomfortable. Then we went over how Warriors feel about friendship, Honor, and self-sacrifice in the topic of The Warrior Trust Bond.

So what happens in the Warrior Mind with the issues we've talked about so far? Well, I think the best thing here is to give you an example of what the thought process is like. (Damn! I'm soundin' like an egghead shrinker!)

I'm gonna put you in this story as a Warrior, so let's set the stage with a little background. First of all, you volunteered to give your life for this country. That's a fact that many people either seem to forget, don't think about,

or just don't give a shit about. We have an "All Volunteer" Military. Ain't but a few headin' for Canada or hangin' out in Juarez, Mexico, on this mission.

Let me throw in a bit of scuttlebutt here: Just for your information, that few I'm talkin' about was about four thousand five hundred desertions in 2009. According to my sources, most of these were Troops who had been down range once and were headin' back for the next deployment. You can check this out on the Internet for more details.

Doesn't matter if you took the Oath for the adventure of it, to fight terrorism, to get out of goin' to jail, or to get a GED. Don't really matter if you wanted to "Be all you can be," or to be one of the few and the brave. And it doesn't even matter if you signed up because you hated your parents and wanted payback. Fact is, you volunteered.

Next thing on the short list is this: You were conditioned in boot camp to bring out a side of human nature (which we all have) that scares the shit out of most people. That's right, the savage, unmerciful, bloodletting Beast that you ain't gonna control unless someone tells you about it... maybe even gives you some tools? And since you had NO de-briefing when you finally got out, the Beast is right up in your face, lookin' for the next victim.

Then, after five tours, which are more than any combatant in history, you've gotten to really like killing. You've also got a real hankerin' for the adrenaline rush of combat, and you're longing to get those feelings back... big time!

You not only killed human beings and liked it, you also lost the best friends you'll ever have in this world. And you hate it. You lost them on the battlefield, and you lost them when you were discharged. You are now alone. Fact is, you hate just about everything that's not military and

everyone who's not a Combat Warrior.

You can't adjust to a meaningless life in civilian society because you can't find any Honor in it. And if you mention you've got PTSD in any way, shape, or form, your best chance for a job is pumpin' shit out of a septic tank. Your family bailed on you after your first tour. You're hyper-vigilant (shrinker term for scared shitless to be without a weapon). And you've come to terms with death so completely; you're surprised to wake up in the morning.

Now, putting all this brain clogging, mouth drooling, bayonet sharpening emotion into one small egg-shaped skull, let's take a walk down Supermarket Lane.

It's a delightfully sunny day in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After loading your Glock 40 (with extra mags), placing your K-Bar (knife) in the small of your spine, and tenderly loading your AK-47 in the trunk (for back-up), you decide to make an emergency supply run (combat mission?) to the store for Warrior essentials... self-medicating liquid (beer and/or wine), anxiety-relief cartridges (cigs), and friendship-support aid (dog food).

You park in back of the store, lock your vehicle, check for snipers, and hug the walls of the building to safely approach the front entrance. Crossing an open field (the parking lot) is out of the question. You have no clue what day it is (that's normal for most of us brain-fried Veterans). And when turning the corner to the front doors of the store, the first thing that comes out of your mouth is,

“Oh Shit!”

It's Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving!

The ocean of vehicles looks just like the evacuation of New Orleans before Katrina. You're desperate for brewskies and food for Kujo. You lightly pat the side of your camo field jacket, making sure Von Glock is at the

ready; and a tug on your belt, lets you know your K-Bar is in place.

Taking a deep breath and checking again for snipers, you “move out!” on the extraction mission. The Beast is at full alert, evaluating the threat level as HIGH!

The only four shopping carts left are locked together. And the one you finally free up has only three good wheels... and you’re already pissed, muttering...

“Piece of shit! Probably made in fucking China.”

Since there are more than six people in the store, the adrenaline is really startin’ to kick in...

“It’s impossible to watch my back!”

Rushing to the beer cooler for medication and the tobacco counter for cigs, you’ve already got Kujo’s chow in the cart, but turning the last isle to check out.

“Oh Shit!” again.

There are at least a dozen people in each line and even more in the quick-check, “15 items or less” aisle. There’s no escaping the stampede of food mongers!

Small, nose-dripping children are running frantically around the store. Christmas music (In November?) is playing loudly overhead. Whining children are rifling through the candy at the checkout stands... their parents (?) have no control or flat out don’t give a rat’s ass about their sweet little nose miners bouncing balls and knocking food off the shelves. Carts are overflowing with civilian fat-food. People are standing motionless, their eyes glazed over with blank expressions...

”This has got to be another planet!”

And then it happens! Murphy dumps a load of shit right in your mess gear!

A small Arab-looking man with a turban-like headpiece, along with his wife and daughter, pull in behind you; they look just like the ones you've killed! A slack-jawed, longhaired hippie tries to weasel in up ahead. The moment of decision!

Now what is going on in your mind... in the mind of a Warrior?

"I hate these fucking civilians!" is most likely first. "While these fat maggots are loading up for a one day gorge, my Brothers and Sisters are lucky to get MREs today" might be second. "They don't give a shit about the Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan" might be next. And if the Beast is truly in control, "I'd like to kill every one of these worthless pieces of shit!" could easily follow.

What then keeps you, the Warrior, in check? It's most likely your dog. Why? Because, most likely in your mind, your dog is the only true friend you have at this moment.

What's next? Could be, "I can't dishonor my fellow Warriors by killing innocent, unarmed civilians." And for sure "I've got to get the hell out of here now!"

Killing civilians may not happen unless the Warrior snaps. And what do I mean by snap? What I mean is to go blank, black out into a flashback where he or she (that's right women too) don't know where they are, what they are now doing, or what they've just done. This is now happening at an alarming rate with our Combat Veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq.

One soldier I know of went to Wal-Mart to return a defective item. (Imagine that? From China?) Anyway, the store manager got in his face, and the soldier blanked out. He jumped over the counter, grabbed the stunned manager by the throat, and was in the process of killing him as the



guards pulled him off.

The soldier woke up from the flashback totally unaware of what he had just done. He was a two-tour Iraq Combat Veteran. Imagine what six combat tours will do? I've talked with a lot of Troops who are terrified about this reaction to combat trauma.

The first thing they say when they wake up is, "Oh my God! What did I do?" And unless there's a Veteran's Court System in place in that state, guess what happens? That's right, off to jail for a long, long time.

Blanking out is one of the effects of repetitive, sustained, and intense combat; that is, seeing and doing more killing than is humanly possible to process. And how much is too much? It could be a single kill, an innocent civilian, especially a child.

If we use the term atrocity, meaning extreme cruelty, this applies as well. In War there is certainly extreme cruelty; I can assure you of that from firsthand experience. Think about it. As I've asked before, is it humanly possible to kindly, lovingly kill someone in War? Don't think so.

And here's the clincher: Do you think you as the Warrior in the supermarket are a nut case? Do you think you were acting unusual? Nope! Not at all. You were acting perfectly normal for what you have been through, for what you've experienced. You are a highly trained, professional Warrior. And Warriors are trained to win battles. That means to win those battles, you kill human beings.

Just for a little reinforcement here, I want you to understand the intensity of what our Troops are going through right this second. And no matter what year it is when you read this book, the fact remains that the "events" of any Warrior's today in a war zone are locked into every Warrior's mind for his or her entire life.



I've been emailing back and forth to Troops in Afghanistan. And on one occasion, an Army Medic wrote me back... he was a little scattered. I understood why as he went on to explain...

“It's been a damn rough week, Sarge. I've been in five firefights, two mortar attacks, and one rocket attack in six days. I've lost some of my Brothers. And I don't know what to do.”

This Medic is on his third deployment; that's three years in combat. He writes that morale is very low, and his fellow Soldiers are so burned out, they can barely function on patrol. He doesn't know what to do, because there is nothing he can do.

He has to just continue going out every single day on patrol, losing his friends, and perhaps dying in the process. He IS a Medic. He WILL continue caring for his fellow Warriors to the Death! That's what Medics and Corpsmen do.

Now is it any wonder why some of our Troops are blacking out?

For those Warriors reading this book and thinkin' “Holy Shit!”... Don't freak out just yet. 'Cause it was explained to me by a real street-smart shrinker (a Boots-on-the-Ground, Battle Shrink) that in the cases of blacking out, the brain-housing-group is just acting normal. In other words, it's doin' what it was designed to do... to save your ass!

Ya see, there's a part of your brain that's hard-wired into the shut-down survival mode, just like the Beast is hard-wired into being your Battle Buddy. And even though your Beasty likes it, when you've seen too much horror, killing, mutilation, loss, etc., the brain just shuts down and puts you somewhere else.

Where are you? Well, it's sorta like sittin' in your car in the Wal-Mart parking lot: Something triggers a memory, you blink your eyes, and you wake up at the Burger King two hours later. Or think of it like being "beamed up" to another planet: You don't know where that place is, and you can't remember anything about it when you get beamed back to Momma Earth. In Grunt Speak, this is called the CRS Syndrome. That is, Can't Remember Shit!

The thing about blacking/blanking out is that your body is in full throttle, the Beast (Primal Side) is doin' jumping jacks for joy, but you ain't at the steering wheel. And you don't remember shit about your time on the other planet. As I'm told, this is one of the results from too much combat.

I personally know two troops right this minute who black out and don't know what they've done when their brains are shut down... from four to nine hours at a time. Now multiply the few I talk with by a hundred thousand or more. Think about it.

"So what do you mean by a trigger?" you ask with twitchy curiosity.

Very simple: A trigger is something that makes you react. When you are supersensitive to your surroundings, are walking on molecular ice (Marines... not a small furry animal in cold water), balancing between what is present-moment-real and what is the nightmare-distortion of past-horrors consuming your life, you are at your emotional breaking point.

In other words: Your brain can't take one single more input of any kind of a threat. If that happens, you react like a snail to a saltshaker. You know... draw inside your shell and feel the pain.

And what are the triggers? Again, this depends on

your own personal set of horrible experiences. But to give you an example: It could be a single spoken word from some dipshit you meet, or the smell of urine (people release urine when they die); it could be the smell of a steak on the grill (human flesh smells like a hog roast to me); it could be the smell from a certain kind of pine tree; or the sound that a particular bird makes. It could even be the temperature of the wind hitting your face. It doesn't have to be a loud bang like fireworks on the 4th of July, or the backfire of a car. A trigger can be very subtle or very obvious.

Whatever the trigger is, it makes you recall one or more of the traumatic events in your past. And depending on whether or not you've worked through these events will determine not only how you react, but how intensely you react... as in lightin' up a cigarette or lightin' up a city block.

So my fellow Warriors, the way you prevent recalling a traumatic event that may be too painful to deal with and endin' up goin' "Bye-Bye" is to get some professional help. Talking with your Battle Buddies is good for a starter, but you've really gotta get to the root of the problem and develop some tools to keep you from takin' ears at the supermarket.

And while we're at it, let's discuss one more thing here: Line Officers, Senior NCOs (Sergeants who are E-6 and above), and Sergeants who are Squad Leaders (in charge of twelve or so other Warriors). I've talked to many of them, and their stories are all the same.

When you're responsible for the lives of others, you must be a leader. That means you must never show weakness; but instead, you must continually set the example of strength to those following you. And herein lies

the problem. Because the burden of responsibility is even greater for you than for those you lead into battle.

These Warriors take in all the pain, all the suffering and loss, as do the other Troops. But they, like Medics and Corpsmen, feel the guilt over those they lose in battle; the men and women they are tasked with keeping alive.

One Staff Sergeant on the brink of suicide said to me, “Sarge, I feel like I’m gonna explode inside! I’ve gotta end this pain now. I can’t show weakness to my men. They count on me to be strong. Please help me!”

This happened on a base where I was talking with thousands of Troops. This soldier actually ran out into the street in front of my vehicle with his arms outstretched. He put his hand on the car, running it along the hood until he got to the window. I quickly rolled the window down.

He grabbed my hand and wouldn’t let go! He was angry at himself, desperate and violent. After about twenty minutes, the Squash Doc and I got him to understand that after four, fifteen-month deployments in Iraq; he had the right to feel as he did.

He wasn’t weak. He was just damn burned out over the killing and the loss of his squad members.

We did get this Sergeant help. And he’s now dealing with his demons in counseling. But how many more did not come forward that day? How many more have gone beyond their limit of human endurance?

The same goes for Officer Pilots. Again, I’ve talked with a number of Officers, both fixed-wing (Like an F-16) and Chopper Pilots (Like Cobra Gun Ships). The stories and feelings are so close; they could be a tape recording.

The Fighter Pilots all say the same thing. “I know I’ve got Combat Stress (PTSD) but if I say anything, I’m grounded for good. I’d rather run my plane into a

mountain with full ordnance, and go out in a ball of flames than never fly again.”

With eighteen suicides a day right now, and the number climbing, don't you think it's time to pay attention to the needs of our Troops? To listen to their pleas for help, and bring them home in their minds and hearts.

For those of you who are not battle hardened Warriors, do you now see what's happened? We have truly Awakened the Dragon!

It's been said, and bein' a Marine, I won't quote it exact; “Beware the sleeping dragon, for when it awakes the world will tremble.” Now I know, some folks who study this sort of thing will say that quote applies to China and the like. But let's change that a bit to blend into our surroundings here. How about,

**“The Dragon has Awakened in our Youth, and now we must tremble from fear over what we have unleashed.”**

“Should I be afraid?” you ask. Damn right! You'd better be!

“Why?” How about the one million (Plus) two and three tour Iraq and Afghan Veterans now walkin' the streets for a starter? And how about the millions of four, five, and six-tour Combat Veterans who will one day be discharged and dress in civilian clothes? That means, you can't tell 'em apart from the so-called civilian normies... you know, those who are not trained killers.

We all look like civilians, and we blend in like civilians... until we explode! Doesn't give you a warm and tingly feeling, does it? These new Warriors are not easy to spot, like so many from my generation are now. They don't have long hair and a beard, sunglasses, ball cap, and camo

trousers.

Except for the many thousands of young homeless from these wars, this young generation of Warriors appears clean cut like any good ol' American jock. They act calmly up to the time they go into a complete combat adrenaline meltdown, which in some cases takes only one small trigger. Again, think about it.

We'll be blending all this into other topics a bit later on, but for now get used to the notion that we've got hundreds of thousands of time bombs waiting to go off in our society right this minute.

Now draw some ammo, and put your chest plates in your body armor. We're headin' into a free-fire zone. There are no friendlies on the next patrol.

**Gun Ships are Revved! We've got Air Support!  
We're headin' into a HOT LZ!**