

ROUTINE PATROL



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The tires explode like gunshots—rubber shrapnel whipping through the air.

The cruiser fishtails, slams into the dirt shoulder, and the stench of burning oil and scorched asphalt floods your nostrils.

Shit ain't right.

Shit ain't fucking right.

Deep in the Arizona interior, there ain't another patrol for 60 miles.

You step out.

Then—CRACK—sniper fire.

Your partner's head disintegrates. A wet thump as brain matter slaps the dashboard.

His body jerks, fingers spasming around the radio mic, his last breath gargling out in a froth of blood.

"Officer down—we have an—"

Dirt bikes roar out of the scrub, engines screaming.

They surround you.

The first boot catches you in the solar plexus.

Your diaphragm collapses. Air explodes from your lungs in a hot, wet burst. You hit the pavement, your cheek sears like a tenderloin on a grill, skin peeling back in bubbling strips. Blood pools, sizzles. The smell of cooked meat fills your nose.

All of them in the same uniform: blood-red ski masks, faces hidden behind that deep crimson shroud, like their skin's been flayed off. Black bandanas tied tight over their heads, soaked in sweat and gunpowder. Their

**boots—steel-toe, scarred from kicking in
teeth—stomp in unison.**

**Your diaphragm collapses. Air explodes from
your lungs in a hot, wet burst.**

"YEAH! GIVE EM THE FUCKIN' BOOTS!"

A chant can be heard.

**"Fuck fuck fuck—" Wrong day to not wear the
vest.**

THUD. A rib snaps.

**THUD. Your kidney ruptures, a hot flood of
piss and blood filling your guts.**

**THUD. A boot crushes your fingers, bones
grinding to paste.**

**You scream—half pain, half rage—as a
steel-toe boot slams into your gut, knocking
the wind out in a wet, guttural gasp.**

Your arms scrape against the asphalt, skin

peeling back in ragged strips, mixing with oil and blood. It sizzles. Smells like cooked meat and gasoline.

"Officer down—we have an officer down—" you try to scream.

"Hey, Brisket Boy."

The ski-masked figure—shades on, BDU camo jacket—kicks you again. Again. Again. "PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"PIG!" AGAIN.

"Grab his radio," he says to someone behind him, ever rib connected to your sternum broken into pieces, cutting into your organs with each breath.

Static crackles. A dispatcher's voice, tinny and distant: "[—units responding, ETA 30 m—]"

The masked man leans down, lips brushing your ear. "This land ain't welcome to you and your kind anymore."

The radio hisses. A new voice cuts through—cold, mechanical: "[WE WILL FIND YOU]"

The man grins. "Then come." He racks a short-barrel shotgun—shick-shack—and presses it under your chin. "Listen to your fate."

"Wait, fu—"

The world detonates.

Your skull splits, jaw unhinging like a broken puppet.

Teeth scatter.

Brain matter hits the pavement in a wet splat, steaming in the sun.

The vultures don't even wait for you to stop twitching.



[HOUDINI]

