

When the Shiraz Hit the Fan

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Introduction

In the sprawling, leafy suburbs of Melbourne, where the Yarra River winds like a lazy, brown snake through parks dotted with the silver chrome of coffee carts, a peculiar breed of folk prepared for the end. The distant, electric thrum of the trams echoed like a perpetual reminder of civilization's fragile hum, a low-frequency groan against the piercing, maniacal screech of cockatoos at sunset, their white and yellow forms flashing against the deepening purple sky.

These weren't the flashy, camo-clad doomsday preppers of American reality TV, mind you—these were everyday Aussies, hardened by the acrid, smoky scent of bushfires that turned the sky a hellish, apocalyptic orange for weeks. They were accustomed to the dank, muddy smell of floods that turned streets into grey, sludgy canals, and the heart-stopping thwack of an occasional magpie swoop, a sound followed by the panicked ringing in one's ears. They were the sort who'd stockpile Vegemite—its sharp, yeasty tang a bizarre, dark-brown comfort—alongside their tinnies, convinced that when the world went pear-shaped, it'd be the little things that saved them. Or, in their case, one very big thing each.

Meet our motley crew of 16 survivalists, all hailing from the eclectic neighborhoods of Melbourne. From the hipster haunts of Fitzroy, smelling of roasting coffee beans and sweet, heavy patchouli, to the leafy, silent lanes of Kew, smelling of damp earth and old money.

There was TP Tony, the burly ex-plumber from Collingwood, his garage overflowing with toilet paper rolls, a fortress of blinding white and soft pastel fluff that smelled faintly of processed lavender and dry dust.

Wine Wendy, the sharp-tongued sommelier from South Yarra, guarded her cellar of Shiraz, its deep, ruby-red contents glinting in the dim, cool light of her basement, smelling of rich oak and dark berries.

Ciggy Carl, a chain-smoking tradie from Brunswick, hoarded cartons of smokes in his shed, the blue-grey haze around him a constant, chemical fug that stung the eyes.

Bidet Barry, the hygiene-obsessed engineer from Richmond, amassed portable bidets, their gleaming white plastic promising a future of high-pitched fssshhh sounds and ultimate cleanliness.

Then came Gun Gary, the licensed hunter from the Dandenong Ranges fringe, where the air smelled of damp ferns, sharp eucalyptus, and rich, black soil. His arsenal of bolt-action rifles, all dark-grey blued steel and rich, polished walnut wood, was tucked away, smelling of metallic gun oil and sharp brass.

Tank Tom, a mechanic from Sunshine, had somehow procured a rusty old armored relic, its olive-drab paint flaking to reveal bright orange rust, the heavy, choking scent of diesel and old grease clinging to it.

Drone Dave, the tech whiz from Docklands, commanded a fleet of quadcopters from his high-rise apartment, the high-pitched, mosquito-like whine of their rotors a familiar tune, their flashing red and green LEDs like angry fireflies against the deep blue twilight over the harbour.

Solar Sam, an electrician from St Kilda, paneled his rooftop, the blinding silver-blue glare of the solar gear harnessing the erratic Melbourne sun, the low, electric hum of his inverters a sound of pure power.

Water Wally, a hydrologist from Carlton, purified every drop in his tanks, the gentle, rhythmic drip... drip... drip... of his filters a constant lullaby in his quiet terrace house.

Food Frank, a chef from Prahran, canned feasts fit for a siege, his kitchen filled with the sharp, metallic tang of tin and the bright, acidic scent of pickling vinegar, his shelves a vibrant tapestry of colourful labels.

Med Mike, the paramedic from Essendon, stocked first-aid kits, the sterile, antiseptic smell of iodine and bandages filling his spare room, a sea of white boxes marked with stark red crosses.

Tool Ted, the handyman from Hawthorn, wielded multi-tools, the cold, metallic sheen of stainless steel his weapon of choice, the satisfying snick of a deploying blade his favourite sound.

Book Bob, the librarian from Northcote, buried himself in survival manuals, the musty, sweet, vanilla-like scent of old paper his only companion in his dimly lit, book-lined bungalow.

Battery Bill, an inventor from Williamstown, recharged endless supplies, the faint, ozone smell of charging lithium hanging in his workshop, which glowed with the tiny green and red lights of a hundred charging units.

Fuel Fred, the trucker from Altona, filled jerry cans, the pungent, dizzying fumes of petrol making his garage a no-go zone, the bright, chemical red of the plastic cans a warning sign.

And finally, Shelter Sheila, the camper from Elwood, pitched tents of vibrant blue and shocking orange nylon in her backyard, the sharp snap and whoosh of canvas flapping in the sea breeze.

These Melburnians, united by paranoia and divided by their singular obsessions, lived in uneasy proximity. They swapped tips at weekend barbecues, the rich, fatty smell of sizzling sausages and caramelized onion mixing with their low, conspiratorial whispers as they secretly eyed each other's hoards. They drilled for disasters, from zombie outbreaks to coffee shortages, all while sipping creamy, beige flat whites and debating AFL finals, the distant, surging roar of the crowd from the 'G a cherished echo.

But when the proverbial shit truly hit the fan—a cascade of supply chain collapses, buzzing, flickering power blackouts that plunged the streets into inky, oppressive blackness, and a freak storm that turned the city into a soggy, grey mess—their preparations

unraveled. Alliances crumbled. Raids erupted. What began as neighborly nods devolved into a hilarious outback odyssey of theft, chases, and comeuppance.

This is their story: a satirical romp through the absurdities of survivalism, where the real apocalypse isn't the end of the world, but the end of trust among mates. Buckle up, dear reader—it's about to get as wild as a possum in a wheelie bin, all claws, hisses, and the sudden, deafening crash of tumbling rubbish in the dead of night.

Chapter 1: TP Tony's Tower of Tissue

In the heart of Collingwood, where the past and future wrestled for dominance on every street corner, TP Tony's fortress stood ready. His street was a typical Melbourne clash: a row of heritage-listed workers' cottages, their filigreed ironwork rusting into orange-brown lace, directly opposite a new, brutalist apartment block of cold, grey concrete and stark, reflective glass. Here, the rich, dark, nutty scent of artisanal coffee roasters—a \$6 cup of single-origin pride—did daily battle with the stale-beer-and-piss aroma drifting from the corner pub, a place that still advertised "counter meals" on a faded, chalk-scrawled A-frame sign.

This was a suburb of sensory warfare. Electric-blue and hot-pink graffiti screamed from soot-stained brick laneways, vibrant and angry under the grey, overcast sky, while just a block away, organic grocers charged a fortune for kale that smelled of nothing but green water. And in this chaotic heartland, TP Tony, a burly ex-plumber with a beard that could genuinely hide a toolkit and at least two days' worth of brekkie crumbs, had transformed his modest, single-car garage into a monument to mundane necessity.