

The Waffle House Index

by

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FADE IN:

DAY - INT.

Garage, backyard shed, kitchen, restaurant; residential, commercial, industrial. No one cares any more. The setting isn't important. High-dollar zip code or ragged tenement. If a corner promises warmth, if a structure offers protection, if a pantry can be looted - only then do houses and buildings have value in this gray world.

Their CONVERSATION grows louder as SAM and JOE approach. They are alert to every shadow, defensively gripping garden implements and sporting goods repurposed as weapons.

SAM

That is no ordinary waffle. A tread like that? Those are tactical pancakes. I'm just saying: Don't mess with Waffle House. You know FEMA rates disasters using the Waffle House Index. You know it's bad when a Waffle House goes red.

Sam and Joe warily disarm themselves to scour cabinets, shelves, and furniture. Their search is orderly, methodical, conducted without the aid of artificial lighting.

JOE

Goes red?

SAM

Red. As in green, yellow, red.  
Green: all menu items available.  
Minimal damage, full power.  
Yellow: partial menu.  
Restaurant's powered by a generator. Some stocks of food running low. Red: Waffle House is closed. Flooding. Structural damage. Just general catastrophe. And if Waffle House is closed, you're own your own, Jack.

Sam and Joe ignore distant BURSTS OF AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE as surely as they've long ignored matters of fashion and personal grooming.

JOE

And you're telling me that FEMA -

SAM

- the Federal Emergency Management Agency -

JOE

- FEMA uses a Waffle House rating -

SAM

- the Waffle House *Index* -

JOE

Okay, an index as a scale for disaster response -

SAM

It's an informal yardstick, but yeah. It's a way to classify assistance and recovery resources.

JOE

But... why?

SAM

You ever seen a closed Waffle House?

JOE

You mean... before?

SAM

C'mon, don't be dumb. Obviously.

Food is the most prized of discoveries, but it's rare to find a supply that hasn't already been picked over. Occasionally one of the scavengers tucks a can of tuna or box of raisins into a knapsack or messenger bag. Even half-eaten or stale snacks are cause for minor celebration.

JOE (CONT'D)

Look! Snack Pack! Pudding!

SAM  
Not the Juicy Gels?

JOE  
(Slowly, as if to  
an imbecile)  
Pud.Ding.

SAM  
(reverently)  
That is one righteous find, my  
friend. My compliments to the  
chef. Wait, what's the  
expiration?

JOE  
Do we care?

SAM  
Probably not. What is it?

More gunfire. Maybe closer. Some is single-shot, manual  
action.

JOE  
September of '26. You gonna be  
picky?

SAM  
I don't guess so.

The search resumes.

SAM (CONT'D)  
But seriously, you ever seen a  
closed Waffle House?

Joe strains toward something in a hard-to-reach corner.

SAM (CONT'D)  
No you absolutely have not. At  
Waffle House, 24/7 means 24/7, my  
friend.

JOE  
Nah, c'mon. They gotta close for  
at least a few hours on Christmas  
or Thanksgiving or -

SAM

Three hundred and sixty-five days  
a year! It's not, like, a slogan.  
It's a statement of fact, a  
promise to the American people.

JOE

Huh.

A moment of quiet as they search.

JOE (CONT'D)

(quietly nostalgic)

Man, I could go for some hash  
browns.

SAM

How?

JOE

How, what?

SAM

How do you like 'em? How do you  
like your hash browns?

JOE

What do you mean? I like 'em  
cooked. Crispy. With eggs. Over  
medium. I like 'em crispy, is  
that what you're asking?

SAM

(disgusted mocking)

No! That is not what I'm asking.  
Nobody goes to Waffle House for  
"crispy" hash browns.

JOE

But... what are telling me? You  
want them... soggy? Frozen? What  
are you saying?

SAM

(rapidly, ticking  
the words off on  
his fingers)

Smothered. Covered. Chunked.  
Diced. Peppered. Capped. Topped.  
Or Country. Those are your  
options.

JOE

Do whut in the when-where?

SAM

(A little slower)

Smothered, covered. Chunked,  
diced. Peppered, capped. Topped or  
Country.

Joe holds gun-shaped fingers to his temple.

JOE

Capped?

SAM

Mushrooms. Grilled mushrooms.  
C'mon, get with the program.

JOE

Wait. Say them again.

SAM

(slower, teaching a  
child)

Smothered: with sautéed onions.  
Covered: Melted Cheese. Chunked:  
with ham. Diced: with tomatoes.  
Peppered: jalapeños. Capped: with  
the 'shrooms, like I said. And  
Country's got the sausage gravy.

JOE

(trying to learn)

Smothered, covered. Chunked,  
diced. Peppered, capped. Topped or  
Country.

JOE (CONT'D)

(faster)

Smothered. Covered. Chunked.  
Diced. Peppered. Capped. Topped.  
Or Country. Wait. You didn't say  
what 'topped' was.

SAM

Right. 'Cause topped is nasty.

JOE

Topped is nasty.

SAM

Unnatural. It's just... gross, okay?

JOE

So... like... "sexy" nasty?

SAM

(winces with  
disgust)

No! Judas Priest! How are hash  
browns sexy?

JOE

Hell, I don't know. Lots of food  
is sexy.

SAM

No it's not.

JOE

Of course it is.

SAM

Food is not sexy.

JOE

Were you born on the moon?

SAM

Name one food that's sexy. You  
can't name one food that's sexy.

JOE

I dunno. Oysters, obviously.  
Asparagus. Uh, strawberries

dipped in chocolate. Honey.  
Pineapple. Caviar —

SAM

That's... disgusting. What kind of  
a...? I don't know what the heck  
you're doing with a pineapple, but  
you're... I ain't into your gay  
airfryer hypnotism, okay? No,  
that's just... you've got a filthy  
mind, my friend.

JOE

You said... Topped hash browns were  
nasty —

SAM

I know what I said and I stand by  
what I said. They are nasty.  
Just not that way.

JOE

You said topped hash browns were  
nasty and I thought maybe some  
hash browns were "topped" and  
other hash browns were "bottomed."  
I mean you've got to be more  
specific than —

SAM

William T, Shatner, bubba! Get  
your brain outta the gutter!  
They're served with chili, okay?  
Topped hash browns are topped with  
chili. There. Happy?

JOE

Chili?

SAM

Chili.

A thoughtful beat of silence. Joe processes information.

JOE

Chili with beans or chili without  
beans?



SAM

(a heavy admission)

With.

JOE

*Day-uhm.* Beans. On potatoes.  
That is some Soylent Green shit  
right there.

Only Joe sees the artless, lumbering SHAPE in a nearby window not far behind Sam.

SAM

I warned you. But you had to have  
it all spelled out, didn't you?

Joe flattens a forearm across Sam's collarbone, smashes Sam quickly against the wall, so neither can be seen from the outside. An urgent finger bisects Joe's lips. The two share an unblinking gaze of wide-eyed terror.

Who in this world of survival foraging can be bothered with washing windows or tying back sheer curtains? Yet even with the glass obscured, it is obvious that someone, something is looking in. A sluggish hand SLAPS the pane, sticking for a moment before SLIDING NOISILY downward and away. It leaves the calling card of a smeared and bloody handprint. The figure lurches on, FOOTSTEPS like dragging scrapes of leather.

Several anxious seconds pass before Joe relaxes. Sam peels from the wall. They both speak far more quietly than before.

SAM

Thanks.

Joe nods.

SAM (CONT'D)

What do we think?

JOE

Guess they're coming.

Sam nods.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm so tired of this, Sam. What's the endgame here?

SAM

Don't want to get trapped here if we can help it.

Sam reaches for a weapon.

SAM (CONT'D)

Lemme take a quick look. Ought to try for the tree line so we're not here when it gets dark.

Joe nods, secures the bag, tugs a bandanna up to cover nose and mouth. Reclaims a weapon. They walk stealthily toward a door. Sam checks a window near the exit, rubbernecking to scan the way ahead. Sam signals Joe with a nod. They muster courage, raise weapons.

JOE

You think there's a Waffle House still open? Somewhere?

SAM

Probably not, Joey. They've all gone red.

JOE

Okay.

DAY - EXT.

Sam opens the door. They walk through it. All clear for a few paces. Then the SNARLING zombies converge.

FADE TO WHITE.

The GRUESOME SOUNDS OF A FIGHT continue into the

CREDITS

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