

Better Dead Reds

[\[The Day After Ragnarok\]](#)

Lou Lindley didn't really mean to become a Nebraskan nomad warlord; it just sort of... happened.

More of Nebraska *should* have survived the Serpentfall. It was spared the tsunami and the first waves of venomous rain, and there were plentiful stocks of grain and meat to draw from. But the disastrous Evacuation of '46 rolled over the state like a plague of malevolent locusts, and the legitimate governor picked the worst possible time to die of a stress-induced heart attack. What the mobs didn't wreck, typhoid and cholera laid waste. Anything left after *that* mostly fell to monsters and blizzards.

But not *quite* everything. Sgt. Lindley was a radio operator for the army, and he grimly stuck to that job until the final collapse. But Lou had grown up a dairy farmer and cowboy, and he knew the value of cattle. As things got worse, he and his men managed to grab and keep alive a surprising number of cows, horses, and sheep, defending them from both monsters and whatever refugees couldn't take a hint. By the time the new national border was somewhere around the Rocky Mountains, 'Major' Lindley had enough livestock to keep about 700 people alive indefinitely.

His Outfit has only grown since then. Lindley doesn't ask many questions about what recruits did before they signed up, and as long as they behave themselves he'll keep on not asking questions. As a result, his forces include rustlers, former POWs, desperados, mugs, pugs, thugs, refugees, bushwhackers, bank robbers, and the remnants of the infamous Nebraska IMC Defense League (still headed by charismatic preacher Purlie Judson, who is also now Lindley's right hand man).

Unfortunately, after three years of cold, plague, war, and monsters, the pickings are slim in most of Nebraska. The Outfit has adopted a nomadic lifestyle in response, moving around a lot just as much to keep the cattle herds both fed, and as healthy as possible. Clean sources of water and grass are eagerly sought out, and just as eagerly fought over. Lindley's not a vicious man, but three years of apocalypse have made him a pretty hard one.

On the other hand, he'll make a deal. The USAAF fortified camp at Omaha survives at least partially because Lindley's Outfit helps protect it, although that's very much a mutually-beneficial arrangement. There are also a couple of farming communities that pay a high but bearable tribute, in exchange for protection and even some salvage. Lou reasons making sure places like

Sweetwater or Rock Ridge can grow grain safely will benefit his long-term plans.

And what are his long-term plans? Well. The major is extremely worried about what's going on in Iowa. Some of the news coming out of this Soviet of theirs worries him deeply, both as a good American *and* as an ambitious warlord (Lou doesn't really see the contradiction). It's just that the Outfit's not in a position to take a slap at the Reds, *yet*. They've got guns, and horses, but the Outfit uses black powder weapons whenever possible. The time just isn't right for a war, or even a major raid.

But when the Outfit *is* ready - or if they get a sudden boost of combat power, somehow - Lou'll be more than happy to go toe-to-toe with the Soviets. And once he gets started fighting Iowa, it'll be extremely difficult to get him to *stop*. Even if doing so ends up being the best long-term strategy.

- Moe Lane

- <http://www.moelane.com>