



ZOMBIE

ZOMBIE

SPECIAL

SPECIAL

OVER 140 PAGES OF ZOMBIE

GOODNESS

Well. Here we are, our fourth issue already, wow! And doesn't time just fly? This month, we have a treat for you, our fantastic readers!

A ZOMBIE SPECIAL!!!

Yes, Far horizons has been invaded by Zombies!

We find out if a zombie apocalypse is even possible, and join our Writing staff in some of the goriest and most fantastical zombie stories I have ever seen!

We also have a report on the Smallville ComicCon by Author AD Trosper and Mike Bene continues Star Seers.

So get your bug out gear ready, get your pitchforks, shotguns, chainsaws and crude torches ready, and prepare for the ZOMBIE INVASION!



Far Horizons June issue cover art
by Rose A Campbell © 2014

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Far Horizons is a FREE online eMagazine that seeks to help new and unpublished authors and artists to get their work out into the world.

Why the zombie apocalypse isn't possible –

Ana Marija Meshkova

Yes, zombies are scary and gross, but they are not exactly equipped to start an apocalypse. At least the classical slow non-viral ones aren't. And here is a breakdown of why.

Humans may have gotten to the top of the food chain, but we got here for a reason. Because of our brains. We managed to change our own environment to suit our needs, to craft tools to replace our lack of claws, speed and strength. Zombies don't have our intelligence, and thumbs alone won't make the lack of any deadly tool obsolete. Humans aren't equipped to deal with the wild without our brains. A zombie is a human without intelligence, and whose flesh is falling apart from decay.

Ok, you say, maybe they are not smart but they have numbers on their side. Do

you know why every zombie movie is set after the actual apocalypse? When there are only a few people left, and everyone else is a zombie? Why don't they show how the apocalypse begins? Or what starts it for that matter? Because whatever it is, it can't spread through the world fast enough to infect the number of people needed for humans to be toast. You need to think what happens to take us from a few zombies, to thousands of them roaming the streets. Humans are better at protecting themselves than horror movies lead us to believe. The few zombies that rose in the city would find their brains blown up just as soon as they ran into the first decent shot in the neighbourhood. Or the first guy with an axe. Even if an entire town would turn, the rest would still be here.

I have another bone to pick with zombies. They reproduce by biting humans, but they eat humans. They are a species whose main reproduction method is the thing they need to eat to survive. If

every species on the planet used that method of reproduction, they would go extinct. The closest thing I can think of that resembles this is rabies, and that is almost extinct. How do they even differentiate between humans and other zombies, or any other animal for that matter, if they are dumb enough not to know what a glass door is?

While on the subject, how do zombies even eat? I mean how do they process food if they are corpses? If they process it, where does it go? How do they see, since most zombie movies give the actors that play the zombies white contacts, which would mean they wouldn't be able to see you. And since movies show that zombies continue to decay, that would mean the older they are the worse their senses would be, and the heat from the sun wouldn't help. The only weapon they would have in the end would be the hope that they would fall apart close enough to suffocate

you with their smell or give you an infection.

And finally, what would happen if they did manage, by some twisted trick of nature, to destroy humanity? They have exhausted their food, and they can't reproduce. Would they just shamle about until they turn into a smelly pile of grossness? I don't know about you guys but that is not a very horror ending to me, it's more depressing than anything else.

All that work so that, in the end, the monster can turn into fertiliser.

**So you think the zombie
apocalypse could never happen!**

By Jim King

Zombies, slow, ridiculous. Never happen. Nothing but Fiction. Hollywood movie plots and a whole slew of books and stories.

You tell your offspring there are no monsters under the bed or in the cupboard. Clowns are not the incarnation of evil; gargoyles on old buildings are just decorations.

But this is horror, you want cute and fluffy with happy bunnies and warm milk and cookies go read a romance novel.

This is terror, this is death and destruction, fear of the darkness, the end of the world and other such fun.

**Zombies could never happen you
say:**

Type: Fungus.

Source: Ophiocordyceps
unilateralis (Zombie Ants), X-Files
(Firewalker), The last of us (Computer
Games).

Defence: Gas masks, Medical Face
masks.

Fast growing, ever present,
airborne spores. Worst of all it already
exists. Go Google Ophiocordyceps, yes it
works on Ants but look at how it works
and consider that it can evolve. Mother
Nature will see to that or scientists will.

You start to cough as the airborne
spores settle into your lungs, the cough
becomes worse as the fungi builds up and
blocks your lungs. The shortness of breath
leaves you walking slowly. Antibiotics are
no use, a fungicide perhaps but how many
exist that would not destroy your lungs.
Surgery, but how many are infected.

Then the fungus reaches maturity
and forces its way through your lungs into

your bloodstream. Countless trillions of first stage spores in your blood and heading to your brain, your immune system hopelessly overwhelmed.

Your brain chemistry quickly changes, will this change cause you to simply shamle towards the largest group of new victims, to die and release a new cloud of airborne spores in their midst? Will it make you more aggressive and make you attack others, to be killed by them and release new spores that way?

This is just a single example of a single threat.

Zombies are not a threat you say:

A Zombie is a dead body, it will quickly begin to rot and bloat. A few days or a week and it will collapse on its own.

Yes into a mass of highly infections rotting meat that will contaminate the surrounding area for

weeks or months. Forget that whole biting people thing; the whole putrid mass will be infectious. It may be driven to attack you with the only weapons it has, its teeth, but that rotting liquefying mass will infect you just by touching you.

Animals will hunt and kill Zombies, they cannot defend themselves and are nothing but walking meat to be eaten by any passing animal.

Oh good, animals killing and eating infected humans then carrying that infection much further than the zombie could ever shamle. Carrion birds feasting on a zombie one day and dropping infected bird shit on you a hundred miles away the next day.

Insects will quickly infest and destroy them/

A billion people a year bitten by Mosquitoes, all those maggots turning into flies that carry the infection into your home by flying in through the window. Great, that will help.

Zombies will freeze in winter and in northern climates.

Indeed they will, so what happens when they thaw out. They may not be mobile but they are still infections. Or what about all those zombies in the warmer places where they will not freeze, the same warm places where people happen to live. All those northern cities with interconnected tower blocks and walkways, shopping centres and tunnel walkways. Insulated against the cold, enough to keep people above freezing for a few weeks, or to keep zombies above freezing for the same time.

Does the entire world's surviving population move to the arctic circle?

Humans have guns and clubs. Zombies are easy targets.

Indeed, but far more humans will be using crude weapons than guns. Grab that fire axe or length of pipe or 2-by-4. Beat that rotting putrid zombie hard enough and often enough to smash it. Are

you wearing Hazmat, are you completely protected against the infectious splatter that has gone everywhere including over you?

Yes you killed the zombie, but are you now part of the problem?

Think Zombies will destroy the world:

Nope, it's a Zombie Apocalypse. Part Zombie and part Apocalypse. The end of the world comes to visit with shambling dead in the streets and the collapse of society and civilisation.

The thing about an apocalypse is not the individual threat, it's the scale. Oh look it's a zombie, shoot it so we can go back to watching the DVD.

But Zombies are not the whole problem, they are part of the problem, a symptom if you will. The visible sign of the end of the world. Consider the following:

Airborne threats, just put on a face mask. But where do those masks come from, where do those latex gloves come from, how about the paper jump suits used to avoid contamination. Where do they come from?

A global pandemic of any sort would almost immediately trigger the shutdown of air travel in an effort to slow the spread of the infection. So you can't fly in more if you are running low. The country that makes them, well if they become vital all exports will stop at once as they are reserved for use by the critical personnel at home.

So suddenly those cheap paper medical masks that will completely protect you from the airborne threat are in short supply, only doctors and soldiers have them. So you improvise if you can or take the masks from others if not.

That simple airborne threat becomes a lot more dangerous when you

have nothing but a torn up shirt soaked in household cleaning fluid to keep you safe.

Worldwide infection. Here in the Western World we look at things from our own point of view. We think of Hollywood films where Americans have access to guns and ammo and can fight to defend themselves. We think of well organised militaries and police forces with access to technology and firepower.

We forget the rest of the world!

A zombie lurching through the streets of mid-town US will be shot and killed easily. That same zombie rising in the slums of China or India or Brazil or Mexico would be fought with the weapons to hand probably infecting those who were hitting it. They in turn infect their families and friends who infect neighbours.

As crowded as some US cities may seem to be, consider the likes of Hong Kong or Macau, to name but a few with population densities a thousand times higher. People packed in so tightly that

within hours the infection rate would be so high that wide scale bombing becomes the only option.

But many countries do not have access to the weapons that would destroy the infection, most bombs simply kill the Zombies and spread the infection across a larger area in the dust and debris. When you have a million people living in a tightly packed mass they all have to be considered infected, can your police and military react quickly enough to quarantine millions of people. Will your soldiers kill on sight; can you feed that many people when they cannot be allowed to leave the area?

The country areas of India or China would be almost unaffected. But the cities, those would fall rapidly. A billion zombies, half the world's population now leaderless and fighting for their lives or shambling in the streets.

Can your army handle that?

We live in a tightly interconnected world. The collapse of large nations under the zombie threat would crash the world markets. No more flights stops a lot of world trade. Ships at sea reluctant to dock in case you are infected. Manufacturing grinding to a halt in the infected nations. Massive inflation, the money in your pocket becoming worth less and less in real terms.

The loss of China alone would devastate the world, cheap manufactured goods, computer chips, those cheap disposable medical masks. All gone. Can you live without plastic bags?. How about can you live without tee-shirts, or underwear? Laugh if you will but when you no longer have access to the simple things you know the apocalypse has arrived, never seen a Zombie but wearing worn out rags. Welcome to the end of the world as you knew it.

How about this one. Rare Earth Minerals. China has locked the world market on these. Computer processors,

magnets, watches, cars, satellites, mobiles.

So many things that would suddenly become hard to find or make. It would take years to build up the infrastructure to mine and refine Rare Earths. Years you do not have. People with cars old enough to have no computers would be safe but when computers become scarce car production will stop fast.

Mobiles, tablets, X boxes, once they are gone there will be no more to be had.

Your light and heat, power stations, the grid. Computers. Water and sewage, computers. Stock in the supermarkets, computers. How many computer chips are manufactured in Britain, or in Europe?

Imagine special forces launching raids into zombie overrun areas to grab stockpiles of materials, or fighting a desperate action to hold a mine in China long enough for the miners to extract enough of the stuff to keep your nations critical infrastructure running. Men

fighting and dying to grab a few tons of dirt.

How about military convoys flying to Japan or south Korea to secure enough chips to keep your lights on for another few months.

Rare and costly or a thing of the past. Welcome to the early twentieth century, welcome to public transport and black and white TVs. Welcome to the end of the world.

Any stranger becomes a threat. Rumours run wild, gossip and fear in the streets. Increased state control, martial law. Changes to society. Your world turned upside down without a single Zombie walking your street.

Crowds are a huge risk, all those people in close proximity, easy infection spread. One infectious victim bumping into dozens more who in turn bump into hundreds.

Schools shut down, sporting events
a thing of the past. That football game
played in an empty stadium. Your children
trying to learn at home because no one
wants a thousand children together. The
daily commute, in a packed train carriage,
seriously, do you want to cram into a
tightly packed metal tube surrounded by
humans one of whom could be infected?

Wear a face mask, oh that's right,
China is gone so no more masks.

See than person, they just coughed.
Long term smoker, winter cold, flu,
elderly. Can you afford to risk your life on
the chance that they are infected? Flee or
shoot them, it's the only way to be sure.

Cities are the most at risk, all those
people side by side. Flee to the country,
but where will you find shelter? How
many supermarkets are there? What about
water and sewage? Can those small towns
handle countless thousands fleeing the
cities? Will they want to?

After all charity is one thing but
countless thousands of people fleeing the
Zombie plague in the city, coming to your
town, eating your food, bringing the
infection with them!

So then what. Quarantine the cities,
how will that work. Cities are huge,
hundreds of roads in and out. People can
just walk, that's a huge area to cover. How
big is your military? How many cities do
you have?

Stop travel between counties or
areas, good luck with that when zombies
are spotted in one area and a million
people run for it. All you will do is prevent
lorries and cars and trains, so no internal
trade, where is the food coming from then?

Food, that's a good one. Do you
live in a country that grows its own food?
If you are in the US or Canada you have
plenty of wheat. But what about the poor
old UK that imports half of its food. The
whole population on half rations,

removing waste and dropping rules on misshapen food would help but what impact does wartime levels of rationing have on your society?

What about countries that import almost all of their food, how will they cope as international trade falls away? How many nations will be stockpiling excess food rather than risking bandits and pirates and non-payment by exporting it to a nation that may collapse before the cargo even gets there by ship?

No planes, few ships. Imports are gone. Back to eating what is grown in your own country, not a big problem, just another little thing. Black markets, that bloke down the pub, car boots and farmers markets, plenty of places to find the special stuff. Of course the prices will have gone up again and again, can you still afford to buy it or are you dependant on your ration book tokens.

Here in the UK with a million people going to charity food banks, ration

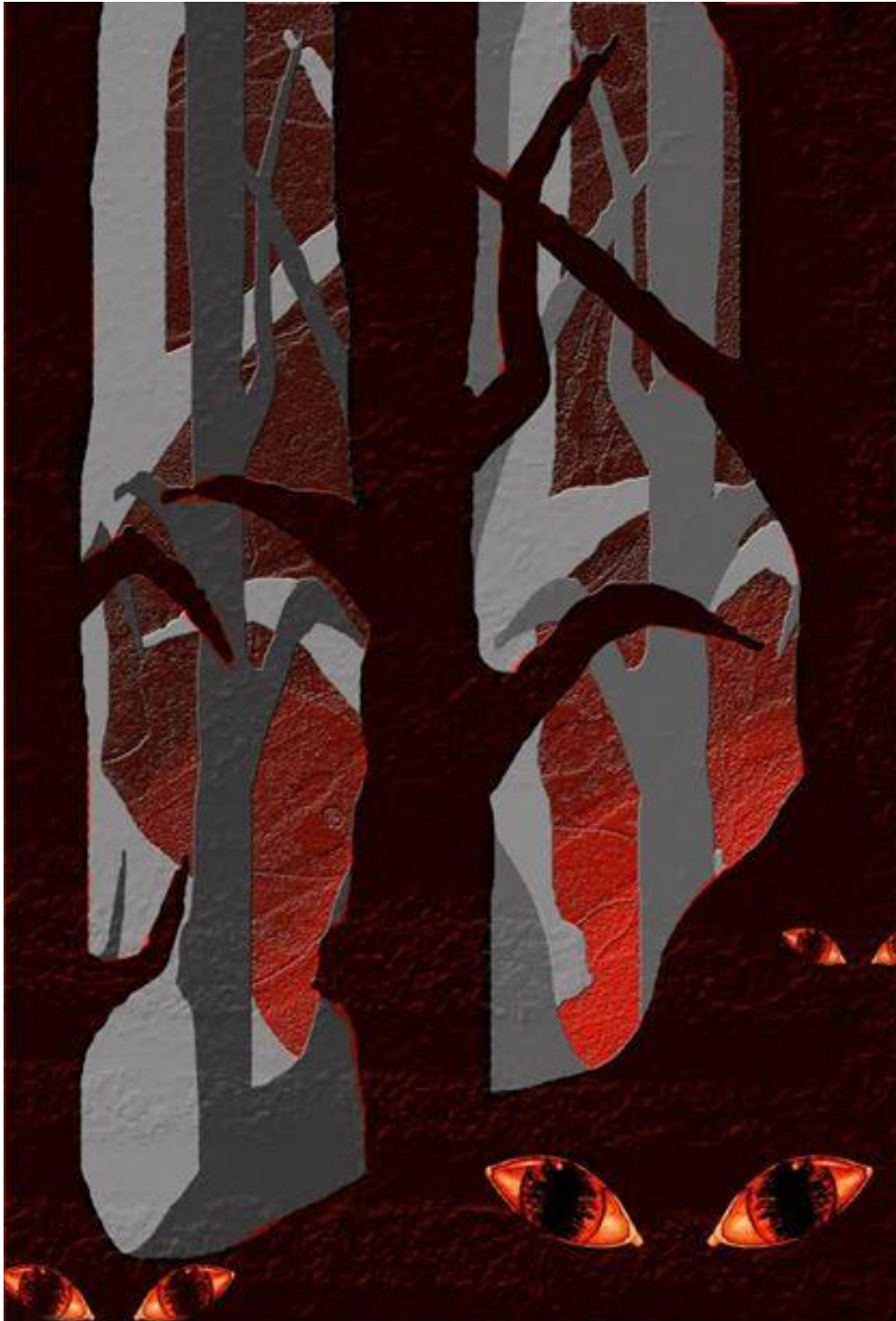
books would actually help them but follow that forward to when things start to get really bad. Ration books based on employment, are you critical to the country or unemployed? Nurses, doctors, engineers, full ration books, keeping the streets clean, sorry mate half ration book for you, not a vital job. Unemployed, here is just enough to keep you alive.

Malnutrition, rickets, scurvy.

Nineteenth century problems come back to haunt us in the twenty first. Britain is a vastly more populated nation that it was in the second world war, we could learn to manage again, after all there are still plenty of people around who managed during the war. But with nothing but home grown foods, no imported chemicals or fertilisers, nothing that cannot be made completely in country. I doubt we would be able to last.

Starving mobs rioting in the streets, gangs hitting the farms to grab the food that is now so expensive and valuable. Chaos and devastation.

Zombies could bring down your nation without you ever seeing one. That is the Zombie Apocalypse, that is the end of your world.



Artwork by Claire M Hutt

TRAPPED!

The Lorelei Walker story

By Thea Gilchrist

I don't remember much about the end of the world... Except dying. And coming back as this, thing, I guess you could call it. Not alive, not undead. What was I? Was there anyone left? And more importantly, could they help me?

#

I was stuck. My body felt the same, but my mind, my sense of *self*, was different. I could think, but speech was next to impossible. I hid it well, using what little intelligence that remained accessible to act like all the rest. It was hard to eat what they did but they no longer had the capacity to light a fire and cook the meat. And besides. Food was food. I knew they'd kill me (again) if I let on I wasn't normal, so acting became a

way of life. We met a few clusters of human survivors. Their voices were shrill and hurt my senses.

"Walkers!" Apparently this was what they called us.

"Where?"

"Kill 'em all!"

They made so much noise we had to kill them. Noise *hurt*. At least it did for me. It drew them with the promise of food, but me, I just wanted the noise to stop. I was hungry too... But that was secondary. One woman just kept screaming like a banshee so when I got to her I broke her neck. We're flexible. Walkers do what it takes to get food. They're very animalistic in their behaviour. She fell and I took a huge mouthful. Others helped themselves and soon all that remained was a pile of bones resting in a pile of rapidly congealing blood. One survived.

“Dear God, no.”

And she ran. Some went after her. I went too . And I fell. That wasn't normal. Walkers didn't fall. I couldn't rely on any help. So I got left behind. I managed to drag myself to a railing and hauled myself up. Then I stumbled off in search of other walkers or food, whichever I found first. What I found was a cluster of humans standing out front of an abandoned building... With other walkers just passing them by. Their silence was the answer. They weren't making any noise so they were being ignored. Maybe they could help me! My shuffling gait brought me closer to that silent group. They spoke in hushed whispers.

“It's coming over here!”

“Hold still.”

They were watching me. An old man spoke softly.

“Can you get a bead on it?”

Another lifted something and put it near their face, then lowered it.

“What are you doing? It's getting closer!”

“It's not behaving like the rest.”

I stopped at the bottom of the steps and watched. One of them came down the stairs and slowly reached out a hand. It was the one who'd noticed my behaviour. I lifted my arm and set my hand on his. He gently held my hand and led me up the stairs, facing me all the while. When he got to the top, he let go of my hand and I just stood there.

“You see?”

One of the women came closer and I knew. I had to tell her. When she got close enough I leaned in and forced one word out of my corrupted throat.

“Stuck.”

She blinked in confusion.

“Stuck?”

I had to try and say more.

“Not walker.”

Comprehension dawned in her eyes and she turned to the old man.

“She’s not a walker in the traditional sense! She’s trapped between worlds!”

Still hushed whispers. They knew how to handle walkers. The old man shook his head, then tilted it.

“We’d better move.”

They turned to leave. And the old man said something else.

“Jake, bring her along.”

Jake was the one who’d approached me. He smiled and offered me his hand again.

“Let’s go.”

I took it and walked away with them. They were so quiet it lulled me into complacency. I didn’t know what was going on until I heard a loud clang and turned around.

“Alex, what in tarnation are you doing!?”

The one called Alex pointed at the old man.

“It’s a walker. It needs to be in a damn cage!”

I shuffle-stepped to the door and forced myself to talk.

“I girl. No it.”

Alex blinked rapidly, then closed his mouth with a snap. Jake handed raw meat through the cage door and I set most on a clean surface. I wasn’t hungry until he gave me the last chunk. I turned away to eat it and something strange happened. I vomited blood. It REEKED! I could hear their reactions very clearly.

“Oh God!”

“Ewww!”

“That’s gross!”

Jake opened the cage and a small group of people cleaned it up. I just stood there out of the way as they did. When the door clanged shut I turned to look at them.

“I’m sorry.”

That didn’t hurt to say! Jake reached through to touch my hand.

“It’s okay.”

Alex and the old man were staring at me. I turned away and sat on the floor with my back to them. I was embarrassed. I heard the old man as they left.

“I wonder if we can reverse it.”

“Reverse it!? Are you *mad*?”

Jake chimed in.

“If we can reverse it, we can free her.”

Now Alex sounded thoughtful.

“And maybe prevent newly risen.”

I just sat there. There was nothing else to do. Hours passed. Someone came in and took the meat, I didn't eat it, then the gate closed quietly. I sat there for I don't know how long until I felt something put in my hand. Something that squirmed. I looked down and saw a squirrel.

"You need to eat."

It was Jake.

"Not hungry."

He left me with the squirrel anyway and locked the gate. I sat there watching it squirm then turned around and let it go. It stood there then ran out through the gate. I lost track of time until I heard Alex's voice.

"Is she starving herself?"

"Looks that way."

"Why?"

The answer came from the old man.

"She'd rather die forever than be a walker."

"Have we made any progress?"

"A little. But it's going to take some time."

Jake sounded grim.

"We may not have enough time. Shelley spotted dead wildlife on the southern perimeter."

I stood up and turned around to face them.

"They come."

Alex treated it like no big thing.

"How long?"

“Hours. Days at most.”

I had to stop because it hurt to talk again.

Jake picked up on it.

“Block the south gate. We need to pull back.”

Alex pushed something at me through the gate. A juice box with the straw in it.

“Drink that.”

I drank the juice as best I could. (I had a hard time thinking the way they did, so when I got a civilized thought it popped to the surface like bubbles in a coffeepot sitting over a campfire. That mental deficiency also left me with a very limited vocabulary so I sounded like a two year old.)

“The Herd.”

A pause.

“No. Not Herd. Co...”

Alex.

“Coalition?”

“Yes. Big group. Humans.”

I had a hard time thinking. The lack of food was getting to me. Jake swore and forced me to eat a piece of raw beef. He wouldn’t let go of my jaw until I swallowed it. I welcomed the rush.

“Humans herding walkers. Here.”

Jake shook his head.

“Get Ralph and Jane. We pull back on all sides.”

Alex bolted to do just that and the old man set down a bowl of raw beef.

“Eat, please. It seems to help your speech.”

He’d noticed! The bowl was emptied in no time at all.

“More please.”

The girl ran off to get more for me.

“Raw meat in a civilized serving method.”

I couldn’t smile very well but I tried. A thought trickled up from what was left of my “me brain”, if you will, and I said it before I lost it.

“I am Lorelei.”

Jake smiled and gently squeezed my hand.

“I’m Jake and this gentleman here is Dale.”

I could feel something in my corroded stomach and I knew. My arm came up and

Jake swore before grabbing a nearby trash can. It sat just in reach. I vomited blood. Again.

“Why in Sam Hill does she do that!?”

Dale’s voice was muffled because he had his hand over his mouth. Jake was breathing through his mouth.

“I think it’s the meat being raw!”

They took the can away and I dropped to my knees. Even in my current state I knew sorrow... I felt bad because the walkers were coming and it was all my fault. Or so I thought, anyway. The girl came back empty-handed.

“Pete cooked it all in a stew.”

Jake had an idea.

“Bring some of the stew, no gravy.”

Dale grinned a little.

“He’s trying to help her, Allison.”

Allison’s face cleared and she ran back to the kitchen to get some of Pete’s stew, no gravy. There wasn’t much to it, but it was food all the same. She came back with a bowl. And Pete was right behind her, muttering and swearing.

“That’ll do, Pete.”

Pete fell silent at Jake’s voice.

“Give her the bowl, Allison.”

She gave me the bowl without flinching.

“Thank you.”

As soon as the bowl hit my hands something came over me and I ate every bite. A loud belch that smelled of beef and garlic rang out and I looked startled.

“Pardon me!”

That made them laugh a little and Pete smiled.

“I’ll do my best to cook for you as well, but I can’t say for sure if I can.”

“Trying is good.”

Pete smiled again and took the empty bowl, then he and Allison left. Dale seemed thoughtful.

“What’s on your mind, old man?”

He smiled at Jake’s teasing then spoke quietly.

“Maybe we’re looking in the wrong place for answers.”

Jake was no dummy as I was coming to find out.

“You think it’s her own body fighting this.”

“Yes I do.”

This being the thing inside us all that made us come back as the living dead after we died. I heard people talking about it in the halls and one of the men called it a virus.

“Virus.”

Damn! I was losing the ability to speak again! Dale heard me though.

“Yes. Some of us think it’s a virus.”

Jake hummed as he looked at me.

“I’m thinking just meat for now, vegetables don’t seem to agree with you.”

Carrots and potatoes in particular. I could only nod.

“Dale, go find Shelley. Get her to bring in some of those deer before it’s too late.”

Dale nodded and went off to do exactly that. Jake sat in the cage with me and held my hand. Seeing me just sitting quietly made the others wonder if I really was a walker.

“Maybe she’s just really sick. Have you tried antibiotics?”

I shook my head and mimicked being stabbed.

“Jake! Jake, we got trouble!”

“What’s up?”

“Allison’s missing and Shelley’s room has been ransacked!”

Jake exploded out of the cage and locked it behind him. I managed two words.

“East gate.”

Then I fell silent once more. They fled, some going east as I had suggested. When they came back, they were silent and grim.

“She’s dead.”

“I’m sorry.”

Then my throat clogged up. They nodded to say they heard, then I was alone. I sat there in silence as angry people milled about. One of them slammed something against the gate to my cage.

“It’s your fault! If they hadn’t brought you here she’d still be alive!”

The noise made me cringe. I didn’t like it!

“Brad, that’s not fair! How was she supposed to know?”

“Things were fine before you brought that thing here, Caroline!”

He slammed something against the gate again and I tried to cover my ears. He kept doing it until I felt rage rising in my belly and I lunged at the bars to shut him up. I grabbed what he was using, tore it out of his hands and threw it behind me.

“No loud noise!”

I sounded like I was talking through mud... But he understood me. The fear in his eyes was replaced by comprehension and he nodded.

“And my name is Lorelei!”

Jake shoved Brad off to the side and silence fell. I was mad. Jake waved them

off and they quietly filed away. Jake stood there then asked

“What happened?”

I grabbed the noisemaker, Brad had been using a mechanic’s wrench, and made like I was hitting the gate. Jake took the wrench and quietly set it down.

“Who was it?”

I pointed at him and made a pushing motion. His eyes narrowed.

“Brad!”

I merely nodded and turned away.

“I’m sorry he did that.”

Then I felt his hand on my shoulder for a second. It felt nice. Then he was gone. I moved to the darkest part of my cell and there I sat. The silence comforted

me and my anger leached away. Time passed and people came by less and less. Of Jake, there was no sign. Didn’t bother me though. Caroline came up one day and opened my cage.

“We need your help.”

I rose and shuffled forward until I got to her.

“Half the group’s been kidnapped.”

I knew exactly what she wanted. I hadn’t eaten in days but I wasn’t about to let that stop me!

“Show me where.”

She led me to the north gate where the others had gathered.

“Caroline, what in blazes?”

I grabbed a light and started walking. My senses were like a wild animal's.

"Follow her! She can track them!"

They moved as quietly as they could, and that was pretty damn quiet! I led them right to where the others were being held and there we waited. I silently blessed my sense of smell for being so keen. They spoke in whispers.

"Jerry, you take five and go west. Shirley, take five and go south."

Caroline spoke softly.

"Eric and I will take Lorelei and 3 more to the east."

I smirked and pointed east. The least occupied wall, but the strongest point. That left Brad and the remaining five to go north. Caroline held my hand as we went east so I wouldn't get separated from the

group. It was good to belong. Even if I was only partly human.

"How do we scale the wall?"

"Watch."

I placed my hand on the wall and a rope ladder hung in front of us.

"Up. Fast. I go last."

They scrambled up the ladder like monkeys in a tree. When the last one went over I began to climb. I looked over the wall and they helped me over.

"Lead on, Lorelei."

I moved swiftly and silently along the top of the wall. They were right behind me and barely making any noise. I saw Shirley's group and they quietly joined us."

“Any sign of Jerry?”

“No. He’s fine though. He was a Marine.”

Eric turned his head and froze in place.

“They got Jerry’s team!”

I turned to confirm the grim news. But there was hope. They’d left Jerry his knife!

“They cocky.”

“How so?”

“Left knife.”

And that was how they knew I could talk. Brad’s group came in unseen and sprung Jerry’s using his knife. Brad had seen it in Jerry’s boot and the twelve of them bound and gagged the guards. No dying. That would bring walkers. Eric went to talk with them and I stood like a statue. Then I broke into a sprint and

braved the depths of the citadel. More proof I wasn’t a normal walker; they couldn’t go very fast. I knew someone was behind me but I didn’t know who. The place was empty.

Except for the frightened faces peering out the cell doors.

“Lorelei! Lorelei is that you?”

“Yes.”

“Oh thank God. Get us out of here!”

One by one the cells were opened and the first I knew of the person behind me being a spy was when I felt something slam into my back.

“Not again.”

Yup. I’d been stabbed in the back. Which was how I’d died the first time.

“Jerry! How could you?”

“Sorry Carla. Now get back in your cells.”

Unfortunately for Jerry, he'd done the one thing you were never supposed to do. He turned his back on a living walker. My fury blinded me and I grabbed him by the arm to spin him around. They hid their eyes as my teeth found his jugular vein. He fell like a stone. I wiped my mouth, grabbed his knife and jammed it into his eye, piercing his brain and leaving him dead.

“Out.”

Carla waved and they fled. I came out some time later and found the place deserted except the bound guards. Jake was waiting at the front entrance.

“No dying. That brings walkers.”

Then I untied one of them and walked out.

They saw Jerry's knife in my hand but didn't say a word.

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Four Seconds

By Joel C Rodriguez

"Quiet! Did you hear that?"

Michael shushed the group as they continued their trek through the forest. They were very close to the Killington sanctuary with only a mile left to go. The journey from New York had been hard on all of them. They had lost many people; their group of originally twenty now dwindled down to four.

"Sarah, put that camp fire out!" Jonathan whispered as he readied his shotgun. It was a simple double barrel from his farm outside of Albany, but it got the job done. The darkness of the woods left them no sight of the coming threat, only the shrieks and moans of the undead. After the fire was extinguished by Sarah, the group huddled up in the middle of the clearing with their backs to each other and their weapons ready. Jonathan was one of two

who still had a firearm, but since he was so low on ammunition, it would have to act as nothing more than an expensive club.

"How many do you think there are?" Sarah asked quietly as she rummaged through her purse and pulled up her Glock, only three rounds left in the magazine. It was either that or the grenade she picked off of a Marine's corpse a few days earlier, but that would be atrocious overkill.

"Put away that pistol," Michael demanded, "We've still got a while to go, and there can't be that many of them."

"Come here, buddy ..." Jonathan muttered as the first of the undead walked into the clearing. Jonathan placed his shotgun on the ground and unsheathed his knife, approaching the first 'snapper' as they called them. This particular snapper was slower than usual, due to the amount of decay it had suffered, opposed to the fresher bodies. Jonathan grabbed it by its hair and drove the blade into its skull, ending the creature's second life swiftly.

Jonathan then turned back to the group as he holstered his knife.

"We should keep moving. We don't know how many are out there." He said as he reached down to grab his shotgun.

"He's right. Who knows how many else are-"

Jessica was interrupted by a large crack behind her, turning around in time just to be face to face with a large snapper that tackled her to the ground, immediately tearing at the flesh of her face. Jonathan reached down to grab his shotgun and looked back at the others before dashing into the woods back towards the main road. With little hesitation, they followed.

"You could have at least ended it for her!" Sarah shouted as they bolted through the trees.

"Waste of ammunition!" Jonathan replied, "you have a gun too, you know!"

Sarah remained quiet as the three burst out through the brush and into the

main road. Without stopping, they ran in the direction of the sanctuary they had heard about all of those days ago through the radio waves of an old truck. They were so close, they were exhausted, they were so tired of the running and hiding.

As they rounded a corner in the long road, they saw it up ahead. A massive gate, spanning across the four lane road, with spot lights and guard towers at the top with a massive wall of twenty foot tall cement barriers surrounding the entire camp.

As soon as they were in range, the spotlights shined down upon them, blinding the three survivors.

"Halt!" they heard shouted from over a loudspeaker as they were stepping over the bullet riddled corpses of seemingly hundreds of snappers.

"We're not infected!" Jonathan shouted as he placed his shotgun on the ground and raised his hands above his head. Michael placed his machete on the

ground as well, and Sarah pulled the Glock from her purse and tossed it down.

The gates slowly screeched open as three soldiers rushed out with their assault rifles drawn. They lined up in the firing position and ordered the group to get on their hands and knees.

"It's just so they can check if we're sick ..." Jonathan said reassuringly to the group as a bullet pierced through his skull, then Michael's. Sarah quickly pulled up the only means of an end that she had left; the grenade from her purse. She swiftly pulled the pin and held it up in her right hand and the grenade up in the left as tears began to well up in her eyes. She remembered what Jonathan had told her before about the grenade when she had found it.

The fuse has four seconds. Count to two, then throw.

She had already counted to three.



Tales of Tribe House

The Den

Part-2

By Thijis Van Sise

Recap from part one:

Tribe house is a gigantic mansion that has become the home of thousands of miniature fairy folk called Fay after the fall of humanity. Flitt and Bugg are tunnel diggers from the town of Banister on the stairs who travel on field mouse wagons to work. They open new rooms by digging directly into them. On their current dig they have gone through the plaster and silk paper to open a hole into a new room.

Flit pulled his left dagger and began slashing downward in the remains of the paper and silk. At the base he cut left then right to make flaps that could be pulled aside. "Together then." Flit said. Pulling back the silk they both peered into a room which hadn't been lived in for a very long time. Dusty and musty were the first words to come to their minds, but not bad. Not like that side room from the kitchen where the water from the pipes had

leaked and created puddles where mould thrived. That room smelled terrible, this one however did not. Just old and disused.

Flitt went first, walking slowly in . They discovered they had tunnelled just under a half circular table pushed directly up to the wall. The color of the wood was a stain of light brown finish. Central in the room they could see a massive couch with a red and brown colour scheme. Tables stained the same as the wall one ended each side of the couch. Lamps with old white shades turned yellow from the years sat atop those end tables. Debris litters the rooms floor making a mash up of colours. Old pillows with matching colours from the couch, toppled lamp stands and a few throw blankets. Mixed with leaves and twigs that had been discarded by . the most prominent and most obvious feature of the room, a tree growing partially through the wall and ceiling. Its base beginning outside the branches had grown through the holes of broken panes of glass. The sheer strength of the growth has pulled apart

sections of the wall leaving holes. This made the light in the room brighter than it should have been. This was a makeshift exit, letting wind and seeds in through the gaps, allowing grass to grow from the moist carpet all across the expanse of the room. Green blades stick up thickly and stiffly from an apparently maroon coloured, earthen floor. It's somewhat beautiful, Bugg thinks. Nature having its way with something that was intended to keep it out. Up and down from the holes in the walls are vines, growing with abandon across its pale paint, with the highest ones reaching the ceiling giving the illusion of a canopy. It's obvious that the verdant lands from outside have begun to claim and move into this particular space.

Flit and Bugg knew from experience that wildlife was probably in this room with them. Indeed they could hear the chirps of infant birds atop a cabinet, with one half of its display glass cracked and filled with giant glassware. They listened more intently for the sounds

of something more insidious. Predators of all sizes had the ability to come and go for a long time judging the size of the holes in the wall. Time, and the elements, had allowed the plants to grow large.

Slowly, when they didn't hear anything alarming, the two workers made their way further into the room. Being as quiet and careful as their "noble steeds" allowed. The couch, they noticed, had its cushions torn apart and the fluff spread and moved about. Still no sign of anything dangerous. With relieved sighs they slowly let their guard down. Pointed ears would still be pricked and alert for any possible danger.

They began to do what they do best. Searching for interesting things and useful items that could be sold back at town. On the floor in the distance they could see a blue and gold tin container with "Butter Cookies" written on its side, followed by round golden discs. They weren't exactly sure what Butter Cookies

were but the size of the tin would make a good water tight house for a small family once a door was cut from the side. But that was a job for a metal smith back in town.

Bugg made his way over to the grass field growing from the carpet. It stood higher than his head, all of 5 inches. "This could be nice if it were tended and trimmed." said Bugg. "The mice would like it I'm sure." Flit considered this, thinking it may even be a practical room to use for travel to the outside. Food runs could be useful when stocks ran low. Again that was a job for someone else once they reported what findings they had. A bit of looting prior to anyone else having knowledge of this rooms contents wouldn't hurt anyone. Flit thought.

"Spread out and search for anything of use. Keep your eyes peeled for any needle and thread packs, I was asked specifically to find those if possible." Flit said.

"Oh yes, that pin cushion we found last month was a treasure trove of weapons!" Bugg said. "We made quite name for ourselves with that find. All the ladies were complementing on the colourful cushion as well. Shaped like a great red mato fruitit was." Bugg's eyes sparkled with the memory of that particular day. Flit was sure he had eyes for Marrit the daughter of a well to do couple living half way up Banisters slopes. She made a point that day of taking Bugg aside to tell him with large colourful eyes how much she would enjoy having the mato cushion for her home. He relented and gave it to her as a gift. He would ask for her hand any day now Flit was sure.

They listened while searching for materials of use.. Supplies for making clothes, and papers for fires, some water damaged. Using Bugg as a lifter Flit climbed up onto a ledge of a low shelf. Peering in he was able to just see into the darkness of the interior. "Treasure!" said Flit. Inside he could make out great

bundles of coloured ropes. All neatly rolled into balls with multiple giant spears of metal stabbed into them. Those would come in use for something he was sure and the coloured rope could be pulled apart for the loom ladies to create new and colourful clothes. He let himself down and looked around. Had the room grown a bit more silent? Yes, weren't the birds on the cabinet making chirping peeps just a moment ago?

"Did the mother return when I had my head in the shelf?" Flit asked Bugg raising his arm to point at the top of the cabinet.

"No nothing came in as far as I could tell."
.

It was then that the other sound picked up. The baby birds must have heard before the two searchers did. It was coming from the torn area of the couch. Small mewling voices cried out for food. Sounds that could only be the young of a large mammal, hungry for dinner. It was

then that the light from the holes in the wall broke.

She stood poised on the broken edge of the wall leading into the room. Light from the sun illuminating her red fur. The dead vole in her mouth sagged, appearing boneless. The vixen looked around and jumped down to the floor. Moving through the grass carpet she hopped lightly onto the remains of the couch. Flit and Bugg who were hiding low near the grass growing at the edge of the table, could hear the mewling sounds pick up to an excited dinner time pace. The clean, white tipped, tail of the fox could still be seen waving gently in the air.

Bugg still looking upward made a motion to begin across the floor but Flit held tightly onto his arm. Silently he asked what the problem was. In response Flit pointed across floor where dead dried leaves and grass scattered the landscape. Together they both realized that they would need to navigate the floors obstacles

slowly and carefully if they were to avoid making any sound in their escape. The distance, which would be a mere ten feet for a human, was a massively long run for the two of them. Looking up again, seeing the mother's tail still in the air they began to make their way across the treacherous field.

The going was slow. They had come straight through at first but now on the return silence was key. Stepping over, around and under some bits in order to avoid a single noise that would signal the doom caring for its young on top of the couch that more food was working its way out of its reach.

They had made good progress, looking back to see if anything had changed. Nothing however could alter the fact that a foot on a slick surface will inevitably lose its grip. That was when Flit, usually careful and sure footed fell hitting the ground sprawling. The noise was not great but with ears as large as the

vixen had, he was sure she must have heard. Bugg looked back again. The tail was gone but the fox was nowhere to be seen, . . Flit stood and looked around, they appeared to be in the clear. Both turned to head back to the hole in the wall to escape while they were still able to and that was when they saw her. Standing on top of the half table right above the hole.

"RUN!" Flit yelled. Bugg turned and pulling Flit's sleeve they ran left aiming to go beneath another small table that stood half way between the couch and wall. The beast must have jumped from one to the other in order to get from the nest of pups and in front of them so quickly and silently. She jumped down scrambling after them but the distance they had to travel wasn't as far as it appeared. They moved without stopping and ran under the couch faster than even they thought possible. The vixen's paw swept directly behind them nearly catching Bugg. They centred themselves under the couch to get as far from her reach as

possible. This didn't really help anything as they could see her stalking around the perimeter feet moving in quick steps her nose occasionally poking under to sniff and growl at the food that got away.

"This is hopeless." Bugg said. "She is too fast for us to get all the way from here to the hole. I'm surprised we even got as far as we did." His eyes were opened wide and fear coated his face.

Flit looking around thought the same. How can they get back if she could just pounce them from the moment they appeared from under their protection?. Moving towards the far side she moved with them sniffing and pawing. They returned and headed the other direction in which the empty tin can sat on the floor. Too far to run and closed anyway. But seeing the tin gave him an idea. Running back to the other side she followed them both.

"Ok, this is the plan." Flit whispered to Bugg. "We are going to make

as much noise over here as possible. Then I want you to walk slowly over to the other side and aim that pin sticker you have there", pointing to the half needle crossbow, "at the tin container on the other side. If this works how I hope it will she should run over there to catch us." Flit explained. "Please make the shot count." He said with a pleading urgency. Bugg's face took a second to change but when he understood he knew it was probably the only chance they would have.

"Get your running boots on. We are going to have to make a dash for our very lives to escape her. If we don't make it to the hole then I expect you to join in giving her digestion hob nailed holy hell with me" said Bugg before he began to jump up and down, starting to make as much noise as possible. Flit joined in at once, smiling.

It had the effect they were hoping for. She growled and clawed under the couch yipping and trying to get at them. Her reach was short, although still quite

able to sweep farther than Flit felt comfortable with. He continued to make yelling sounds and jump up and down as he waved to Bugg to stop and begin moving quietly to the other side. Bugg went, quickly and smoothly making not a sound. Flit, when he reached the other side, stopped. He stood still trying to breathe slowly and quietly to prevent giving away the plan.

Bugg raised his pin sticker taking aim at the blue colored tin across the room. Breathing in to steady his arms he readjusted aiming slightly up and shot. The sound when it struck was a deep bong which in the relative silence sounded much louder than it actually was. It was enough though. She scampered around the couch heading towards the sound.

Bugg looked back and signalled Flit to quickly move. They both hurried out from under the couch trying to run without making noise. The vixen had reached the tin and was inspecting around

it for her tasty morsels. Her ears perked hearing the crackle of dried leaves back the way she had come. Head turning back she saw them running and moved to intercept.

They were perhaps a bit more than half way when Flit looked back and saw her head turning towards them. She moved and Flit yelled "RUN FASTER!!" Bugg having thought he couldn't go any faster found inside himself a burst of speed he didn't know he had. Even the craven Winderbell, who was legendary in his cowardly ways of running from all fights, had nothing on him now.

The fox moved and in a heartbeat she was up to speed. They were almost to the hole and she didn't want that, after all she was hungry. She jumped lightly intending to come down on her prey.

Flit looked back seeing the predator jumping into the air. High up in her bounce she was in a course to come down directly on top of them. Flit knew

they were too far still to make it. Not knowing what his body was doing, because he certainly didn't stop to have a chat about it, he had made up his mind in a single heartbeat. Spinning he drew his needle blade and pointed it up bracing for impact.

Bugg was running full tilt in front of Flit when the shadow moved over them. It came down in a blur of red fur and black tipped legs. Just as quickly he heard a yelping sound and it jumped away again. Flit running past Bugg at high speed said, "Go now! She won't hold for long!" and Bugg did as he was told.

They passed through the hole in the wall just as the fox's maw reached through trying to catch anything it could. Claws scraped through the walls hole searching for its meal. The paw left on the floor a tiny blood smear as it pulled away. Her nose shoved into the hole again sniffing loudly. Her hot breath smelling of blood from her previous kill wafted out at them.

After a minute she gave up and moved away, heading back to her pups with an empty mouth and empty stomach. She glanced back to the tunnel while retreating hoping to see a gullible little meal waiting for her to snatch it up.

Flit looked over to Bugg both of them a good distance from the opening and started to laugh. It was the kind that when begun was incredibly hard to stop. They did though and started working to gather their things back up and head home. They had a new room that needed to be left alone till the vixen's pups were old enough to leave but after that they could reclaim the den from her and with proper materials, shore up the holes to prevent her coming back.

Bugg's "noble steeds" had been startled by the fox paw that scraped the ground but managed to hold their place, just not their bladders. Bugg didn't care and was just glad to see his mice again.

Flit and Bugg returned to Banister that evening to spread their tale of discovery and near death. Others exclaimed over their victory and escape from the jaws of certain doom. Some pointed out that they were idiots for venturing into an unknown and opened room without backup and better tools. The story tellers were just glad not to be “In Business” with any large mammals. Some laughed at this crude joke. Others shook their heads and went about their tasks.

Just one of many tales that has taken place in the Fay lands of Tribe House.

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and scars. A tremor runs across his face.

He was the first. Subject zero.

Zero

By Pete Sutton

Snow. Pink snow? Why was he
barefoot in the snow? His feet bleed.
Bristol, bridges, leaping, falling, hadn't
worked. Clouds drift across the moon.

He looks down. Bare feet, like
tenderised steak, blood all round him,
soaked into the snow. He takes a massive
sniff, something hanging from his nose, an
icicle? Everything he can see is viewed
through the static of the snow. Strange
taste in his mouth like copper pennies.

He doesn't feel the cold, although
his skin feels like a plucked chicken,
straight from the fridge. The hunger
washes over him in a wave. Oh no. He
remembers. The experiments, the lab, the
virus, top secret, running, panic, blood, oh
so much blood. His hand, which feels like
it is a balloon full of water, lifts slowly to
his head and rubs across the stubble, scabs

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Trouble at the Docks

By Jim King

Chapter 3.

An hour after sunset and sergeant Peck stood by the main gate to the Bristol old docks. This late at night there would be no loading or unloading unless it was the odd smuggler trying to avoid the excise but tonight it was more empty than normal. There were a few ships tied up to the docks, each one festooned with lamps or torches and the closest two had armed guards standing on deck.

The three constables on night duty were supposed to be walking the dock and keeping an eye out but all three were standing by the dock masters office where one of the new electric lamps was burning brightly.

The sergeant knew he should get them out on the beat but for one of the rare times in his life decided to let them be.

One of the three, Constable Trapman, had been part of the team that had gone into the warehouse after the demon worshippers. Judging by the way the three stood with heads close together and with looks of disbelief on the two younger men Trapman was in the process of telling a story he had been very clearly told never to repeat.

Peck was a hard man, the sort of man that would walk to his death if he felt it was worth doing. But, though he would never reveal it, the deaths of the three constables that he had led into that warehouse bothered him.

He would rather not have to knock on anymore doors, standing there in his uniform waiting for someone's wife or mother to answer. Three times was enough. So rather than order them out to patrol the docks where God alone knew

what could be lurking he left them to talk in the imagined safety of the light.

Instead he walked the length of the dock himself, exchanging a few words with the guards on the ships as he went. Nothing was moving and no sound disturbed the steady rhythm of the water lapping against the dock and pier.

Having reached the end he spent a few minutes looking out over the water and listening for something, anything, that was out of the ordinary. But what did a monster sound like?

Finally he grew bored and turned to walk back along the dock, this time he walked along the town side wall beside the piles of crates and barrels ready to be loaded on the next ship.

Police issue boots are tough and cheap, designed to take constable walking the beat year after year. The uppers and bottom were hard leather and they tended to click when you walked on stone. But wear them long enough and they softened

to the point where they were all but silent. Peck's boots made no more than a whisper of leather brushing stone as he walked.

As he walked he listened. A gentle breeze flapping the flags and wrapped canvas of sails on the ships. The faint buzzing of those new electric lights. Two nervous French sailors standing on the deck of their ship talking loudly to ward off their fear. The creak of bending wood.

Peck froze. The sound had come from the stacks of crates ahead of him by the wall between the dock and the city.

Creak. Wood bending, slightly louder. Ten feet ahead, perhaps twelve.

The sergeant looked down the dock, his three constables were too far away. He would need to shout and that would alert whoever was making the noise.

Slowly he took a step, then another. He came to the edge of a tall stack and was able to peer round them. Deep

shadows, movement. The creak of wood bending and then the crack as wood broke. A shape, twisted, inhuman. No legs, but a broad base like a tree trunk. Human arms that stuck out to either side. No head, just a rounded top. The shape was moving around a crate, its form seemed to swirl and shift, the lower half grew larger and smaller.

Peck's hand slid into his jacket, to the inside pocket that had had sewed himself, strictly not regulation but then neither was the ironwood club hidden in that pocket. That club had saved his life in the warehouse and bought him luck, it was a comfort when things got weird and he had picked it up as soon as he got to the station for duty today.

Monsters made him nervous.

It was opening a crate, lifting the lid. Both arms reached into the crate and Peck heard the rustle of straw.

"That's my lovely. That'll do granny."

A human voice, a woman's voice!

Suddenly it was no monster but a woman in a floor length skirt that swirled around her legs and a hood pulled up over her head.

"Oi you. Police, Stand where you are."

The woman turned quickly, squealed and ran so quickly that by the time Peck's shout had finished she was several paces away and running fast. Her long skirts held up around her knees.

The sergeant's shout had carried across the dock. Sailors and constables looked toward the noise and saw the figure running.

The woman kept looking over her shoulder to see if Peck was chasing her, he was not. Instead he stood and watched as she ran, her head turned to look back at him. She ran straight into the grasp of constable Trapman.

With the woman safely caught
Peck turned his attention to the crate that
had been broken open.

It was packed with straw so he
pushed his arm down into the crate until he
felt something solid. He pulled it out and
carried it down the dock the three
constables, one old woman and the electric
light.

As he reached the light he looked
at what he had taken from the crate, it
looked like a soup bowl, a posh one at that.

The woman glared at him sullenly,
a constable standing either side holding her
arms. Trapman standing back a little to
keep an eye on things.

“Stealing plates old woman, you
willing to risk gaol for some bit of
crockery?”

The woman just glared.

“Beg pardon sergeant but that’s
posh stuff. Italian! My mum works as a
maid and she serves table. I grew up

seeing stuff like that. It’s real expensive
stuff. Sunday best for the upper class.”

Peck took another look at the soup
bowl then put it carefully down onto of a
nearby crate. “Anything to say for yourself
before we put you in the nick. Stealing
some lords tableware is going to get you
ten years I reckon.”

Peck leaned closer to the woman
who tried to flinch back but was held by
the two constables. “Nothing to say. Well
don’t say I never gave you a chance to
talk. Take her down the nick lads,
thieving.”

Both young constables started
walking, all but dragging the woman
between them. Peck turned face Trapman.
“I’ll stay with you for a bit; help keep an
eye on things here till they get back.”

“Wait.” The woman stuttered the
word. “Wait.” She spoke more loudly.

“You had your chance to speak.
Off to the nick with you thief.”

“I know where it is, I seen it last night.”

Peck turned to face her.

“The monster, I seen it.”

Three constables and one sergeant looked at her, their faces hard in the harsh electric light.

“Where?”

“You let me go and I’ll tell you.
Let me go and I’ll tell you where it went.”

Peck stepped closer, his legs brushing the woman’s skirt and his breath was on her face.

“Three dead and you know where it is. How many dead while you keep it secret. You tell us right now and you can walk. You keep it secret and I’ll turn you over to Inspector Thorn. He’ll have you shot or hanged most likely. An evil man is the inspector. Doesn’t like secrets.”

The woman had no idea who Inspector Thorn was but she was face to

face with Peck and she could look him in the eye. He had the look of a man who had done things, seen things, ungodly things. Killed men and worse.

She collapsed, all her courage and bravado gone.

“At the low end where the wooden pier starts, there’s a cave. I saw it dragging a body into the cave. It was just a shape. Big and black, but I saw it.”

#

Three constables, one sergeant and one woman stood at the end of the stone pier looking out at the mud and silt that marked the bank. A wooden pier extended out into the deeper water and some way further down the river but here there was just the bank and the walls of warehouses.

The riverside bank was some seventy or eighty feet long before it became a small wooden pier hidden behind

the main pier, a single ship was tied to this pier but there were no signs of life.

“Down there.” The woman pointed at a tangle of weeds that covered the bank no more than a few feet from the end of the stonework. “It went in there.”

Peck knelt down and leaned over the edge of the dock.

There was no moon but the bright stars cast a little light, enough to see a gap under the tangle of bushes, enough to see the marks where something had been dragged across the mud and into the bank.

He stood up and gestured the others to back up.

He looked at the woman. “Get yourself away woman, and don’t let me catch you here again.”

The woman fled.

Once the woman was out of earshot Peck addressed the others.

“Trapman get yourself back to the station. Rouse one of the drivers and get a wagon ready. Round up four of the night shift. No make it six. Pick good lads. Then go into the Inspectors office, there’s a rack of keys on the wall behind the door. Take the big one with the wooden handle.”

“Sarge, that’s the key to the lock room.”

“I know, which is why I’m sending you to do it. Nice and quiet. A couple of shotguns, some pistols, that pile of axe handles and a few oil lamps. Bring along a keg of oil as well. Remember, nice and quiet.”

Trapman looked nervous but nodded. “Right you are Sarge, it’s on your head.”

#

Nine constables, one sergeant, two shotguns, three police revolvers and a

plentiful supply of good oak handles stood watch till the first light of dawn appeared in the sky.

The crew on the nearby ships could not fail to see the men as they stood watch, the two oil lamps lit the end of the dock and the bank beyond and made the shotguns and axe handles plain to see.

By the time it was light enough to see both of the nearby ships had their entire crews on deck, one had steam up and the other had its sails half unfurled. Both cast off as soon as they could see to navigate. Neither captain wanted to stay with such a well-armed group of police clearly looking for something so close by.

Constable Trapman walked closer to Sergeant Peck so that he would not be overheard by the others.

“You reckon its safe now Sarge?”

“Maybe, suns up now so maybe.”

Trapman looked around to make sure none of the other constables could hear him.

“You reckon this is another one of them things, from the warehouse.”

“Buggered if I know but we killed that one and I reckon we can kill this one.”

Peck looked at the horizon. “Head back to the station in the wagon, leave everything here. Round up the day shift and get half of ‘em down here, send both wagons back with the men. I’ll wait here till the day shift gets here then I’ll go talk to the Inspector.”

“Right you are Sarge”.

Constable Trapman walked over to the wagon, woke the driver and climbed up onto the drivers bench. The noise of the wagon leaving alerted the other constables who watched it leave then turned to look at Peck.

“Stand easy lads, he’s off to get the day shift.”

A lot of faces looked happy to hear that. None of these constables had been at the warehouse but they had heard stories and every gossip in Bristol was talking about the monster on the docks. The sun was up, the day shift was on the way and no monster had come out. A good shift by every measure.

#

I woke normally, someone was standing over me. The sunlight was bright, the air smelt fresh. Not long after dawn.

“Inspector. I’m sorry but he insisted.” A nurse came into view pointing toward the door. I lifted my head to see sergeant Peck standing there, he looked both excited and worried.

“Reckon we found ‘em sir, under the docks.”

Excellent news. I sat up and swung my legs off the bed then stopped as my

knee exploded with fire and pain. I must have gasped because the nurse leaned over me looking concerned.

Damn this knee. I had to be there for this.

I picked up the leg brace up from the bedside table, “Nurse help me with this please.” She helped to fit it and pulled the straps tight.

Even with the brace I was barely able to walk, this would not work but I could not just sit here and do nothing. Then my gaze fell on the battered tin that had been sitting next to the brace. Carlyle’s powder.

“That will be all nurse.”

She hesitated then left, I had the feeling she was going to look for doctor Harper but hopefully he was not at work yet. The empty water glass was at hand; I opened the tin and took out the silver spoon. One spoonful, was that flat or heaped? I dipped the spoon in the power

and pulled it out heaped as high as possible, powder was trickling down the sides of the heap as I moved the spoon to the glass and tipped the powder in.

My flask was in my jacket; I took it out and hesitated. Seventeen year old Glenlivet, such a waste. I up ended the flask and poured about a double measure into the glass. The powder was slowly dissolving so I used the spoon to stir it.

Finally the powder was gone, nothing but an unpleasant looking film on top of the whiskey.

Oh well, nothing ventured. I drank the glass dry in a single gulp. Such a waste.

Nothing happened. I sat there on the bed and nothing happened.

I looked at the sergeant, he looked at me. Nothing happened.

My knee was still painful, the bright sunlight coming through the window sparkled and danced on the walls.

My fingers tingled. I could hear bells somewhere.

Still nothing happening.

“You alright sir, you look sort of peaky?”

Nothing happening, the powder had done nothing though the sergeant was oddly out of focus. Perhaps he was standing too far away for me to see clearly.

I felt sleepy, slow.

My pain had gone, my knee felt fine. Suddenly I was cheerful, happy. I stood, the brace supported my knee and with no more than a twinge I was able to cross the room to my clothes. I dressed quickly while the sergeant waited in the corridor.

Once dressed I went out to join him. “Do you have a wagon here sergeant?”

“Yes sir, waiting downstairs.”

“Good man, to the station first for my shotgun then down to the docks. Let’s go find this monster.”

Sergeant Peck was looking at me a

little strangely but that didn’t matter. There was no pain, everything was nice and clear again, I felt happy. We had monsters to hunt.



Artwork by Keith Whittington

The usual crowd

By Jim King

7:21 just left Caledonian Road,
next stop King's Cross St. Pancras, always
a long dark stretch this one, miles between
the stations. Just glimpses of faint lights,
bare brick walls and odd open areas as we
go.

The usual crowd. Brown suit man,
always wears that rumpled old suit. Derby
hat man, tall and elderly, never takes the
hat off. White haired woman, looks old but
always walks so quickly to leave the
carriage. The two students, late teens
maybe, wearing the uniform of jeans and t-
shirts. Chinese man, always nods as I
come on. Times reader, never see his face,
always in the same seat, always hiding
behind the Times. Just his legs and his
hands and his paper. Giggling girls,
twenties, heads together, talking quietly,

giggling loudly. Serious man always
sitting so straight and staring ahead.

Another Monday morning.

7:22. A minute late today. Past
Caledonian Road and into the long dark.
Lights keep flickering out, a few seconds
here and there. Wheels clanking beneath
us. Bare bricks and faint lights outside.

The usual crowd, Chinese man
nods as I look at him, others ignoring me.
7:20. Running early, just left Caledonian
Road. Into the long dark run beneath the
city. Lights bad today, just after we pulled
out of the station they went out for thirty
seconds, then again a minute later.

The usual crowd, got a nod from
the Chinese man as I boarded. I wonder if
he ever moves from that spot, he is always
there when I board. Darkness again for a
long time, right in the middle of the run.
Looking around, everyone in their usual
places, wait, where is Derby hat man? Not
on the train today.

7:26 Running late, someone
gargled a message over the tannoy, track
work I thought but who can ever
understand those messages anyway. Lights
even worse, flickering on and off every
few seconds.

The usual crowd, got my morning
nod. No Derby hat man again. Lights off
for a minute this time. Only one student
today, I thought I saw both but it's only
one, head back against the glass and fast
asleep just like always.

7:23 A bit late but nothing special.
Friday today, weekend in sight. Be nice to
have a weekend lie in, the kids want a trip
somewhere, the zoo is easiest. I'll decide
tomorrow.

Lights out almost as soon as I
board, moving now, lights more off than
on. Daily nod from the Chinese man, does
he ever move? Derby hat man still off on
holiday, just one sleeping student, Times
man still reading. Lights off again. Back

on. All the usual people, no wait, no white
haired lady today. The usual crowd is
getting smaller, no one else joining us
though. Carriage will soon be empty.

7:19 Running early. Another
Monday, another week. Zoo was good,
kept them busy for hours. Not sure
watching the lions be fed was the thing for
young children to watch though.

The usual crowd. Brown suit man,
always that rumpled old suit. The student,
asleep as always, in jeans and t-shirts.

Chinese man, nods like always as I come
on. Times reader, never see his face,
always in the same seat, always hiding
behind the Times. Serious man always
sitting so straight and staring ahead.

Giggling girls, no not today. That's odd I
thought I heard them giggling when I
boarded but the lights are off so often on
this run I didn't see them. They really need
to sort these lights out. I should complain.

7:21 Leaving Caledonian Road,
another long run into the darkness. Air
feels damp today, like rain, odd I never
noticed that before. Lights on and off, like
strokes. Chinese man nodded as always,
Times man never moves, Brown suit man
still wearing that old suit. Darkness, long
lasting. Faint lights flicker past outside,
inside all shadows and the clank of tracks.
Light. St Pancras at last, getting off as
usual. Did serious man get off already?

7:21. On time. Carriage dark, half
the lights are not working, everything is
shadows. Lights going on and off, second
week now. Useless underground.

Carriage all but empty, where is
my usual crowd. Daily greeting nod from
the Chinese man, Times man ignoring me
as usual. Darkness again. Almost used to
this now. Looking around, just the three of
us, Brown suit man not taking the train
today.

7:24 A bit late today. Carriage still
dark, is it too much to ask that they keep
these things working.

Morning nod from the Chinese
man, hard to see inside the carriage, so
dark as we pull out of the station. Long
dark run beneath the city. So far below the
light and air. Feels damp again, maybe rain
up top. Light back on, Times man still
reading, how does he do that with the light
so bad. Chinese man must have moved,
didn't see him but it's so dark when the
lights are out. I have never seen him move
from that spot.

7:20 Friday again. Been a long
week, be good to have two days off. The
kids want the beach this time, long drive,
not what I want.

Just Times reader today and the
sleeping student. Too early for many
people I suppose. Lights off again most of
the run. Two weeks now and they haven't
fixed them. Useless types, don't care we
are stuck down here. Lights outside, brakes

on. St. Pancras and work. One train ride home packed in with hundreds of others and two whole days off. Student must have woken up, didn't see him but he's left the train. He normally goes onward.

7:23. Another Monday, beach was a disaster, rained all day. An hour in the car and it rained all day, kids drove me mad.

Times man in his usual seat. No one else today, no greeting nod. Everyone off on holiday. Just the Times to look at. How does he read in this light, barely see my hand in front of my face. Odd, that picture on the front page, wasn't that the same as last week. Wasn't that the same as the week before?

Lights flickering. Darkness. Paper rustles. A lamp outside, rushing past, briefly illuminates the carriage. Times newspaper a flicker of white as it falls to the floor. Two hands, pale and pink as they fall to the floor. Darkness, teeth, cannot scream, silence, cold.

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Parts**

Cornered in a fort

By Ana Marija Meshkova

“This-has got-to be-the most-cliché-thing-I-have-ever-done!” Mackenna was firing a round from her shotgun every time she spoke. Even now you could hear her Scottish accent.

“Wow, you are a good shot!” Jeremy noticed that she hadn’t missed yet.

“Don’t sound so surprised.” She tossed him the empty shotgun and took the semi-automatic lying next to her. “And I’m not a good shot, I’m a great shot.”

Of course, there wasn’t much of a challenge in killing targets that were so huddled together and so slow. As she was standing at the top of the 40 foot high wall and mowing down everything in front of her, she still couldn’t believe her luck. Zombies, of all things to stumble on in a timeline. But if they weren’t in the middle of trying to keep the dead from eating

them, the second she landed her ship they would have tried to hang her. People could be scared of things they didn’t understand, and time travel was, sadly, one of those things:

“Tell me again why there are so many freaking bodies around this fort?”

Mackenna swept her violet hair backwards and changed rifles again.

“A whole lot of battles!”

“Let’s hope they run out before we do!”

There were three shooters on every side of the fort, firing constantly while others refilled weapons already used and handed them over. The view from above was not pretty. A huddle of decaying corpses climbing over each other, guided by whatever it was that told them where humans were. Most were blind and deaf, with no faces. The only sound apart of of the shooting was their low hum. The fluids

that came off them seeped into the ground, and infected more bodies. But as the amount of victims that had something apart from bones left was diminishing, their numbers were thinning out.

“Aaand, I am out!” Mackenna yelled.

“What now?” Jeremy peered through the fence. Mackenna looked around:

“Well, we have this whole valley filled with grass for miles. Why don’t we try and set them on fire? Wouldn’t that solve the problem?”

It was a risky solution but it was accepted right away. They would have time to worry about the side effects when they weren’t in danger. Large torches were thrown, arrows with fiery tips were sent at the zombie’s heads, even Mackenna’s handy flame shooter, that looked like a vacuum cleaner with a very big nozzle,

found use. Others were pouring gasoline to keep the fire going.

“They are making this easy!” Jeremy was looking at the way the zombies were walking into the flames that now surrounded the fort.

“I guess they don’t find us using their sense of smell or sight.” Mackenna chuckled when Jeremy showed his confusion. “The smoke paired with their fast decay.”

“Well I frankly don’t care how they find us. That is for the scientist to figure out. I simply need them dead. Again.”

After a couple of hours the flames subsided. The threat was dealt with. Mackenna bid them farewell as she climbed into her ship.

“I guess you Violets aren’t as bad as we thought.”

“See, you learn something new every day.”

She blasted off and quickly located her portal back. Whenever one of them changed a timeline, a portal seemed to open near their place of action. The ones she left behind were already radioing to their home base to tell them they were alright. She soared through the sky and suddenly her ship vanished in thin air. No one else could see the electric blue swirl that she dived into. Mackenna allowed the waves to carry her, but kept her hand on the wheel, gently making sure the ship was pointing in one direction. She didn't need to drift off and end up in another time. After a couple of minutes, she could see a small opening filled with purple light. The path was clear, so Mackenna sped up, rocketing out the portal and settling in the current of ships that filled the lower half of the Vortex. The Vortex was a world between dimensions, filled with portals to everywhere. An endless tunnel in empty

space disguised as a nebula. Its walls consisted of fading purple smoke. She set her ship on autopilot. Her destination was the port, which was not that far. A shower and a drink were in order. Mackenna got back just in time to see her ship nestle gently in its appointed spot. Her console let out a soft beep.

“Oh he is coming.”

A large ship shaped like a frisbee settle next to her. A few minutes after, Mackenna was opening the door for Lunt. He was tall and thin, with a narrow smooth face, pointed jaw and an almost invisible nose. His skin had a scale-like pattern that was more evident on the lower part of his arms and legs. He had very short thick hair that seemed black, but had a very strong purple hue, and small similarly coloured eyes. All his other features were mostly humanoid. He was wearing jeans and a white shirt. He hugged her just as he entered:

“So where did you end up?”

She sat down and poured him a drink:

“Well, I ended up trapped in a fort filled with cowboys in the 23rd century.”

“Did they try and attack you? I know that timeline doesn’t really like us.”

“They tried, but they had to let me go. They needed help. You are not gonna believe this, I ran into zombies.”

Lunt chuckled “Why wouldn't I?

The number of timelines is infinite, and we make more every day. With so many options, there is no wonder a 23rd century cowboy Earth timeline infested with zombies exists. I’m just glad that the best person for the job got there.”

“Yeah I did get some shooting practice.”

She leaned back and put her feet up. “But I think I’m gonna stay here for a while.”



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Promotion

By Ana Marija Meshkova

The ground leaps with artillery shots that scatter sand all around and echoes with the noises bodies make as they draw their last breath. The air around me feels like hot iron against my skin and in my lungs. If I didn't know any better I would think I was drowning in lava. The smell, a mix of corpses baking in the heat and the sweat streaming from me and others just makes the whole thing even worse. The sand underneath my feet is so hot, I could swear we were walking on hot coal, and that the entire desert was placed in an oven. Even with boots and protective gear on, the heat slowly inches it's way in but doesn't dare come out, basting my body in a marinade of sweat.

I slither slowly across the field on all fours, a centimetre at a time. Sand fills my short hair as I brush my bangs toward my eyes to add another layer of protection. Luckily my uniform is covered in sand as

well so I couldn't be seen from the opposing side. There is an officer left down in the trench behind me, he is looking at the opposing troops with binoculars and a stern look. He is propped up with the help of crates and doesn't seem to be mourning the loss of his leg. He is probably preoccupied with getting the rest of himself out of here to care:

"They are a few too. We are both waiting for help." He finally realised I was here. I don't know him, he must be in another regiment. He waits a moment, maybe thinking I'm either going to drop dead or pull a knife and slit his throat.

"What's your name?"

"Private Rin, Roxanne Rin, sir."

He waved away my attempt to follow rank. It seems he didn't care about it right now. To him it was probably just a waste of precious time.

“You just tell me that you know how to operate solar powered weapons.”

“I do.”

“Well take a look.” he had spotted a rifle that was not yet destroyed. “If you manage to get that thing working and take their weapon systems out, the choppers can arrive and get us out of here without getting blown up.”

And here I am. I manage to hide behind a rock. One good thing about this situation is that they can't see me that well from their high perch even if I'm walking, well, at least until I get to the rifle. Suddenly a wheezing sound comes from next to me and I realize another soldier is lying here, a tall young girl from the same regiment as me. The only thing I remember about her is that she had a great sense of humor. She is now bleeding from a hole in her chest and is beyond help.

‘There is no time for a breakdown, or pity.’ I tell myself. I take the gun from her hand and the ammo from her pocket. Only 10 minutes of firing time, but it's better than nothing. I have only a little ways to go, so I run for it. I don't have time to focus on the air of death all around me, or on the sounds of souls leaving bodies, or even the jumbled mess of different prayers clumped up together. I instead focus on how to get to the only way out - the closest still working gun. It is tank like, able to fire at a high speed. I am incredibly calm. I have seen a lot of soldiers in the three years I have been here buckle under the pressure. It wasn't a trip I want to take. When I came here I made a decision to keep my brain focused on the important thing, mainly how to get out of this war alive. I don't have time to pray or cry over my fallen friends, to mull over the dead or the doomed.

As I run I realise something - the gun is not one of ours, that is why it's still

standing. They wouldn't shoot their own even if it wasn't working. There is also an opposing soldier lying next to it. He had fallen off the gun and can't get up to stop me even if he tried. He would be dead in a matter of minutes. I took his equipment and climbed aboard without a second thought.

"Full ammo! Lucky me." I wonder how I managed to find the strength to continue the habit of talking to myself out loud at that point. I fire it up, and the large mechanical contraption raises and turns around to face their owners. The goggles and the headphones allow me to rip through the troops without going deaf and blind. The implied shouts full of panic and the loud screeching of the machine are the only things that I can remember.

I run out of ammo just as I see a helicopter coming towards me. Of course they would notice I was here, you don't miss the soldier that blew up several tanks

to free the way for you. I jump off the tank and grab the rope dangling from the helicopter. The co-pilot's expression was one of astonishment.

"I have never seen someone climb up a rope that fast!" He yells across the wind as soon as I remove the headphones. I smile, relieved, then drop to the floor and the sudden cold air knocks me out.

#

"And that is all." Roxanne stopped the story and returned back from memory lane. It was tedious, this process. She never had any need of it, but orders are orders. She had to be approved before she could take her place as Captain. Most people loved recollecting their success as it filled them with pride and made them feel important, but she wasn't one of them. She wouldn't even call that a success, just a close call. That was why she was considered in need of this.

The woman on the screen smiled. Every psychiatrist thought it was necessary to smile. It only annoyed Roxanne. She knew why the doctor wasn't letting her go yet. No one seemed to understand why she worked so hard, why the only things she didn't withhold from herself were her basic necessities. She didn't understand Roxanne's way of thought. But Roxanne also knew there was nothing wrong with her, nothing that could stop her from doing her job anyway. She didn't go into danger without a second thought and she didn't miss a chance to save a crew member if it could be done. She left the Academy with top marks. No one could stop her.

"You are free to go miss Rin. You are approved." There it was. Roxanne nodded curtly and got up, not looking back. As soon as she was out of the room she smiled. She was a Captain. Time to go and have a drink to celebrate.

WANTED:

Companion for Zombie Apocalypse, I know its coming, I can feel it coming, can't you feel it too? They are everywhere, just waiting underground or in our brains, wanting... our brains! I mean come on, why else would they want to eat our brains? They know we are to smart... Don't contact me I'll contact you, can't be too careful... or they'll know we are planning to ... shut up ... shut up ... they'll hear my thoughts!

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All Rhythm, No Pulse

By Stephen Blake

I don't know where to begin really. Let's get the 'elephant' in the room out of the way. I'm dead, undead, living dead, walking dead, other variations on dead but generally, I'm a zombie.

My 'life' ended abruptly. I was dancing, when a disco ball dropped on me. The ball also smashed the dance floor, which back then used to light up. So, I got hit from above and electrocuted from below. Upside is that I still look good and that the electric current has held my hair in place better than any spray ever has.

I don't know why I didn't just head off to heaven or hell. All I know is that I woke up buried six feet down, with an intense hunger for human flesh. I wasn't entirely me back then but I'll get to that.

Anyhow, I worked my way out of my grave and munched on the brains of

some college girls. I was heading for this dude when he stopped me with an offer to head to Hollywood and work in the movies. It snapped me back, a little. Seems I inspired him and he let me do my thing, filmed it and got others to pretend to move, act and sound like me. I tended to just groan a lot back then. I remember the joke. He would call these people extras. I'd call them snacks. We laughed. What was that dude's name? John or George? Romeo? Camaro? Something along those lines.

Well the film did great for him. And it did great for me. I worked mostly as myself but they gave me the title of choreographer on the movies.

Those were good times. They're still a little hazy for me since I wasn't entirely myself. I did my thing and before I knew it I had groupies. They're a strange crowd in L.A. You'd be amazed how many closet necrophiliacs there are. This one girl in particular was nuts about me. She always wore this long black dress.

Plunging neck line does not cover it.
Thinking of it, that dress didn't cover
much. What was her name? Alva? Vera?
Elvera? Something like that.

We had fun but it was tricky for me
not to just feed on her and, well, she met a
fella with pointy teeth and suddenly I was
old news.

I think it was the eighties that I met
another director. He was thinking of doing
a zombie film but in the end decided
werewolves was going to be his thing.
John Londis? Something like that.

Still that meeting changed my
afterlife for the better. I'd kept in touch
and he invited me down on set and
introduced me to this young guy called
Michael. Yeah, his name I can remember.

We talked and talked. We had a
shared love; music. He played me some of
his music and it reconnected something in
my brain. I was the disco loving, dancing
diva I'd always been. Sure I still needed to
feed but the music seemed to feed another

part of me. Maybe it was my soul. I don't
know but it worked for me.

All Michael wanted in return was
some dancing lessons and this time I was a
proper choreographer. It was thrilling.

So that sort of brings me up to
now. I've done some other 'acting' jobs
but when they wanted their zombies to
start running at speed, I realised that it was
getting unrealistic and got out. They'll
come back to the way real zombies move
and let's face it; time is on my side.

These days I'm a jobbing roadie,
feeding my soul with good music and
feeding my stomach with those attempting
bad. I feel like I do the world a small
service that way. Mind you, some of them
are tricky to get hold of. That Beaver kid
drives so fast I can't even get a nibble.

My favourite track? 'Staying
Alive' is an all-time favourite. 'Voodoo
Child' speaks to me, even though it's not
disco. Right now though, I do like to head
out to, 'Everyday I'm Shuffling'. Speaking

of which, I need to put on some chill out
tunes and rest, in peace.



Artwork by Keith Allan York

The Infection

By Pete Sutton

I found these scraps of paper today.
Means I can leave a record, a chronicle of
sorts. From my prison. I can see them
watching me all the time, with their blank
faces and doll-like eyes. They pace up and
down outside the window. Their
expressions impossible to interpret through
the glass, but probably frighteningly blank.
I am trapped in these two rooms. In the
research centre, two secure rooms, one
outer door, one inner door, one large
reinforced glass window. There is a bed, a
desk, where I found these scraps, a harsh
overhead light I cannot control. The inner
room has a drain, water. The outer door is
locked tight. No-one is coming in. I am not
going out. I am not sure how long it has
been, but long enough for everything to go
to shit. If you're reading this then you
know the score. Let's call this **Day 1**. It's
arbitrary but who cares, it's my memoir.

Day 2 - They are Implacable,
unforgiving, relentless, omnipresent. It
feels good to get words on paper again.
However ephemeral they will prove to be.
I know what they want from me and it
chills me to my very marrow. I will be
helpless before them. Like a lamb to the
slaughter. If they come in I will fight them,
to the best of my ability but I have seen
how that's gone for the others. I realise I
am doomed. I have food, and drink, and
these few scraps of paper but when they
grow tired of waiting it will avail me
naught. The screams of the others haunt
my nightmares. I imagine them coming in,
crowding round me, lifting me up,
slamming me down, like I've seen them do
to the others. I have to stop watching at
that point. I don't like to see how it ends.
How I'll end.

Day 3 – I had the dream again last
night. Teeth ripping flesh, blood spurting,
hungry dead eyes, high pitched squealing
like discordant music. All very disturbing.

They watch and they pace and they stare. I am never getting out am I? This is my last will and testament, my legacy and my story. I wish I had longer.

I am trapped, like a rat in a maze, subjected to their malevolent scrutiny.

Where are my family? My friends? I think I know how this will end. I am afraid.

Stunned with fear, but they say you can get used to anything. However the bright overhead lights hide nothing. I watch and fear. They watch and wait.

My wife and daughter will have to remain anonymous to you gentle reader. I cannot bring myself to visit the past. It is too painful. Suffice to say I am, I was, a family man. I had a job. I did the usual things. I had a mother, father, sisters, colleagues, friends, acquaintances, they have all been taken from me. Ah fuck it, my life is over, everything is over.

What do I want to say here? What do I need to say here? I sleep, I get up, I eat, I

stare into space, I watch them watching me, I pace up and down in time with them. I await my death. The infection will rule. I find that this ritual of writing keeps me sane. I will write to the end or until I run out of writing material. Even if I don't wish to explore the past in too much detail here. I hope that you will forgive me.

Day 4 – I sleep when I'm tired, eat when I'm hungry, use the smaller room as little as possible, the smell is becoming too much. I am stiff this morning, sluggish, cold, I am worried about the food, if there is enough, I am always hungry, not getting enough of something in my diet I guess. Having no access to outside I cannot see when it is dark or light.

I have no idea if what I am marking as days are actually days. I feel time running down, my clothes becoming looser, life slowly escaping like air from balloon. It is an infection, virus probably, weaponised most likely, like Rabies

crossed with Influenza. There needs to be much study. Why do all the bad diseases start with “flu-like symptoms”?

Day 5 – Not sleeping well, mostly awake, last night. Hands hurt, cramps, writing hard. Spent lots of time banging on window. Shouting. Trying to make them stop. Make them go away. All they do is stare. Exhausted, feel like I’ve run a marathon. Lack of food? Need more protein. Maybe some vitamin C, I do so hope I’m not coming down with something. I hope the headache is due to dehydration, maybe I’ll feel better after a little sleep?

Day 6 – Can’t shake bad sound in head, thirsty, eyes sore, hungry, can’t focus, words swim, smell much worse. Need food. Feed. Hungry. Meat.

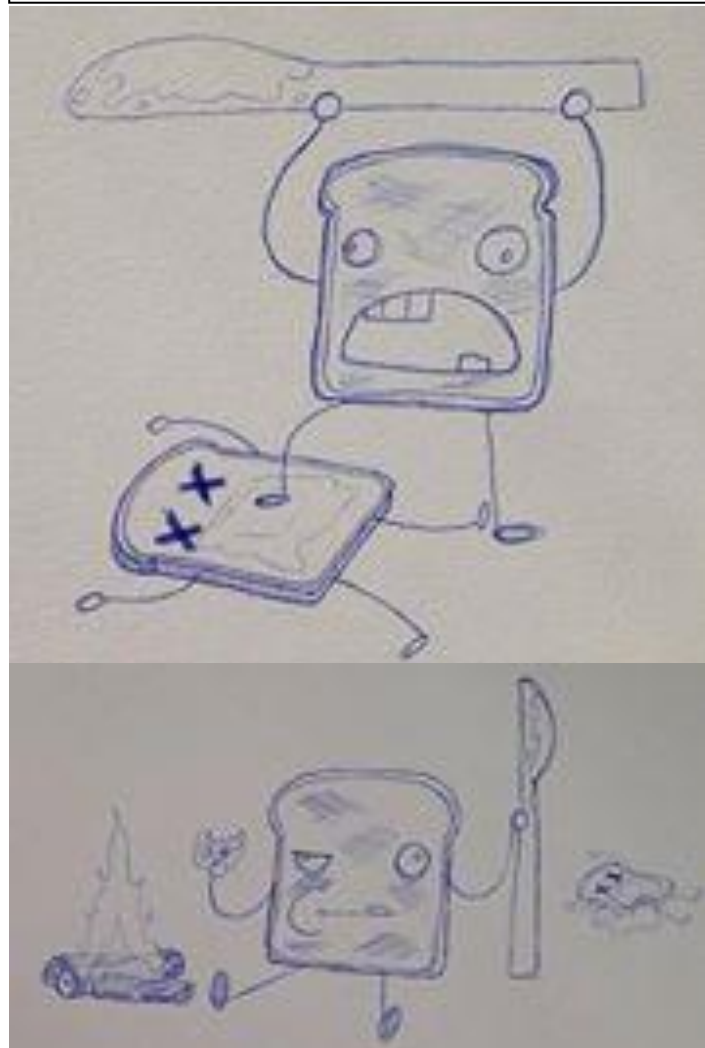
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Addendum: Subject’s own words included in this report are not redacted. Once the infection took hold it progressed fairly rapidly with an overall degeneration in both physical and mental function. As described in the main report and autopsies of the subjects so far, the disease appears to work in three stages. In the first the subject appears normal and fully functioning but is infectious through bodily secretions. The second stage retards function with, as the subject himself puts it, flu-like symptoms. The third stage is the one that holds the most interest to the program. After a quiet period, where bodily functions almost cease, the subject was vigorous, apparently ravenous and full of rage. Subjects two and three were provided after direct infection after bites from this, our subject zero. It is this author’s opinion, in concurrence with the conclusion of the report, that this strain should be studied further to assess if stages one and two can be accelerated. Only then

will it prove to be a very effective weapon
against an enemy population.

Cannibal Toast of the Loaven Plains

By Thijis Van Sise



I am zombie

By Jeff Durkin

Deirdre shot the homeless man in the chest with her black Walther PPQ. I am surprised there are any homeless people left. I thought most of them would have become zombie-chow on day one of *The Rising*. I guess some people have great survival skills.

Well, not great, since he now had a 10 millimetre slug in his heart. He let out a wet grunt and then was still and silent.

Jenny is on my shoulder, wet mouth next to my ear.

“I need some Zed, baby,” she says, her voice a hot wind worming into my brain. She is a typical California party-girl; plastic body and a brain that calculates life in Gucci purses and the drug of the hour.

In another life, she would have been the fuck buddy of the week. Now, with the living population on a glide path to zero, I couldn't be so picky.

“Fuck, we'll get some Zed next. Let's do this thing first.”

This thing. What is this thing?
There's not enough death around, so we make our own?

“Come on, asshole,” Deirdre says. She kicks the man's leg with the steel-toed tip of her Doc Martens. Nothing. “Man, this better not be some fucker who takes half a day to rise.”

God or Satan or whoever is in charge of this whole zombie apocalypse thing must be listening, because the homeless guy's eyes flick open. They have that unfocused, meth pupil look, nothing but black and white. His limbs jerk spastically as he comes back.

“About time,” Deirdre says.

She gives him another kick.

He looks up at her, his mouth falling open, letting out a dry air groan. Jenny grips my shoulder tightly, excited by something other than the drug urge. For the moment, her brain has switched to violence mode. At least she’d lay off me for a minute.

The new born zombie struggles to his feet, eyes glued to Deirdre. She is grinning ear-to-ear. Her bright green eyes are alive and shiny. The adrenaline is pumping through her, giving her that all natural, God-made, no-dealer-needed killing rush.

“Aw, look, he’s taking his first steps. They grow up so fast,” That’s me, because I think I’m funny.

Deirdre sympathy laughs and kicks the zombie in the crotch. It stumbles backwards a bit, but otherwise doesn’t seem affected. “Zombie equals ball-less,” she says. “Okay, Seth, give your bro here a whack.”

Seth is the last member of our little quartet. Body of an underwear model, brain of a gnat. His weapon of choice is a baseball bat, which he swings at the zombie, hitting it across the back and sending it sprawling. There is the snap of bones as its face impacts on the concrete.

“Home run, Seth,” Deirdre says. She looks at me, face glowing with excitement. “You’re up. Take any piece you like.”

“I’ve always been partial to the leg.” I pull out my machete. Its polished steel glitters like diamonds in the yellow street lights. I bring it down in a smooth swing, hitting the zombie’s left leg just

above the knee. The sharp steel slides most of the way through, getting hung up in a knot of muscle and cartilage. The zombie is squirming. I flashback to a summer a long time ago, with my granddad at his mountain lodge. He was showing me how to bait a hook with a worm and it wouldn't stop moving, even with the sharp length of steel through its slimy body. It twisted in wet loops as I shoved the barbed steel into its flesh. I feel a wave of nostalgic nausea. This is not the place to lose it. I swallow hard and wave at Seth.

He steps on the zombie's back, holding it steady for me.

"Thanks." The blade comes free and Seth steps back. We watch as the zombie tries to stand, blood pouring from the leg. The few strands of flesh and muscle holding it on give way and the leg tears off. The zombie flops over, face down.

"You want any more?" Deirdre asks. We all shake our heads. "Sure you don't wanna suck him off, Jen. Jen? Maybe he has some blow?"

"Fuck you, Deirdre!"

Deirdre looks suddenly pissed. Her whole face scrunches up. Her eyes get narrow, like a feral dog about to go for the throat. Her thin lips part just a little, showing the tips of white teeth. I get scared when she looks like that. I know she could kill any of us when she wears that face.

But, she doesn't. She just aims her Walther at the zombie's head and fires.

"Let's go get some Zed."

"Finally," Jenny says, not understanding just how close she came to dying.

Later, we are driving through LA.

Jenny is in the passenger seat of my midnight blue BMW X6 SUV. Well, “mine” in the sense that I have the keys. Everything is Daddy’s. Lawyer turned movie producer, Daddy was in Europe when The Rising happened. All air travel came to an end, even for movie producers who are richer than Paraguay. So, now Daddy is stuck in Paris with whatever supermodel he’s fucking this month. We still Skype once a week, which is about as engaged as he has ever been. Mommy is still here. But her coping skills run to Seconal and Stoli Elit for breakfast. She’s dealing with the zombie apocalypse by staying wrapped tight in gauzy drug-alcohol bubble wrap, watching the world come to an end in our home theatre. 1080p is much better than the reality.

That left me to my own devices and vices. Like Jenny. She leans over as we drive through the empty streets of

dying LA and sticks her tongue in my ear. Her hand goes up my shirt and cups one of my La Perla covered breasts. Beside us, Deirdre and Seth are in her Porsche 550. She calls it her James Dean Death Car, because she is that type of obvious hipster.

These days, LA is more surreal than usual. Half the lights in the city are out. Military patrols on Rodeo Drive. Chanel and Vera Wang with boarded up windows. Random bodies on the street, some torn up, other with heads blasted apart. Still, there’s a party if you know where to look.

And we know where to look.

Deirdre knows a guy, who knows a guy, who knows a guy. And that guy is having a little rave for a few hundred of his closest surviving friends. I couldn’t give a shit about the mindless techno or the pretty people dancing the last days of their lives away, the popular party drugs

and free flowing booze. I'm going for the Zed.

The 'club' is in an abandoned strip mall in North Hollywood. A few months ago, it was up and running, an overflowing consumer Mecca. I'd go there for my ten dollar "hand-crafted, fair-trade, double-hot, double-sweet" lattes and to max out Daddy's credit card at Coach. Now, most people's tastes are more essential. Food, water, bullets. This year's model is sporting a shoulder holster by Dior, with combat boots from Miu Miu. Her bustier is made from lightweight, bite-proof Kevlar.

Tonight, however, the buy-and-sell rhythm is back and consumption is king. We're consuming X and coke and heroin, Tito's and red bull, spit and semen. And Zed, of course. Have to have the Zed.

Like a lot of drugs that I consume, I don't know the origin of Zed. Nobody does. There are rumours, of course. Users

and dealers love to talk shit. It's from an Army project to control the dead. It's what started the Rising, bad juice from some dusty country. It's a way to weed out the population, an NSA/CIA/DEA plot to wipe out junkies that got epically out of hand.

I don't know and I don't really care. All I know is that you take some heroin, mix it with the clear fluid that serves as blood for the living dead and shoot it up.

And. Then. You. See.

The first time I took it, I saw my Mother. Not Mommy. Mommy is mom number three ... or is it four? Daddy collects them like I collect vibrators. Mother is supposed to be dead, although Daddy is always vague about the 'whys' and 'wheres.' Like, maybe she's living in some South American compound with a

bunch of wild eyed Jesus freaks, harem
mistress for some jungle guru.

That first time though, she came
back to me. Floating down out of the
ceiling, hovering over me, where I lay on a
soiled mattress in an abandoned machine
shop in Inglewood. Among the grime and
grease and hard metal she floated gently
above me. Her hair, long and dark (like
mine), her lips full (like mine), her eyes
cobalt blue (like mine). I wanted to reach
up, but Zed paralyzes you. It gives you a
little taste of death.

She smiled at me, colour-foam
swirling out of her suddenly shark-broad
mouth. Red and gold and lime green.

She tried to speak, but more
colours just spilled out. And then she was
gone and I came out of it and sat there
crying in a building that smelled like old
oil and stale cigarette smoke.

After that, I was hooked.

The shooting gallery is in an Old
Navy. The store was left in an “as is”
shape, so people have made mounds of
baby tees and button downs into make-
shift beds. A few people are already
sprawled out, lost in their heads, in a drug-
induced nether world between life and
death.

I know the dealer. Cody. When I
was still a teen, I blew him for some X in a
parking lot behind an In-N-Out (I do not
fail to recognize the pun rich
environment). Then he bought me an
Animal Style burger. It was a nice gesture.
He became one of my main suppliers. We
fucked a few times, but it was nothing
memorable, nothing special. His use of my
pussy for my use of his drugs. Commerce.

He sits with his back against the
service counter, tools of the trade spread
out around him. Needles, a small butane

burner, sandwich baggies of heroin and a bright blue Coleman cooler. A sound is leaking out from the cooler. 'Clack, clack, clack.' Slow and rhythmic, a beat line for end-of-the-world dubstep. It's the sound of the head in the cooler snapping its teeth. It's easiest just to bring along a head. Whatever keeps the dead going depends on an intact brain. As long as the brain was functioning, the zombie juice flows. As long as the juice flows, we can get fucked up.

"Leesa," Cody says to me, smiling. His teeth are perfect, even, white. When he becomes a zombie, they'll last a long time. He'll eat well.

"Cody," I lean down and give him a friendly peck on the cheek. "Can you set us up?"

"Sure thing, girl." He stops looking at me and focuses on Jenny. "Who's this lovely lady?"

"Jenny, my girlfriend. Keep your dick out of her."

Jenny giggles. She gets a thrill when I play knight in shiny black leather.

Cody laughs as well. He knows the score. I don't mind throwing some of my pussy his way, but my girls are my girls. At least, until they're not.

"Okay, for the four of you, it'll be 1000 dollars or 100 rounds of nine mil. Either works for me."

I pull out a roll of money. "Drinks are on me," I say. Deirdre slaps my back.

"My bitch," she says, good naturally. "Let's get this shit going. I need to piss in God's eye."

Cody gives me a look that says "moving down in the world, I see." Fuck

him. His world is low-life, purse-mugger junkies and trust fund burnouts. Like me.

He checks the roll and then proceeds to cook the heroin. When that's done, he unwraps four disposable needles and sucks a little heroin into each one. That's one of the things I like about him. No chance of HIV or hepatitis with Cody. Just the chance that the stuff you're shooting into your veins will kill you and you'll come back as an undead eating machine. I'm a glass half-full kind of gal.

He opens up the cooler. I glance inside.

The head of a woman, probably my age, lying on its side. She is snapping her mouth and rolling her eyes. A clear fluid is leaking out of the neatly sliced neck, pooling in the cooler. Cody carefully adds a bit of the zombie juice to each needle. He then hands them to me.

"You want to shoot up here?"

"No, this a to-go order. I got a place. You take care of yourself."

Cody smiles, waves his hand at the junkies sprawled on the floor, the zombie head in the cooler, the ravers outside, burning an immense pile of books and manikins.

"What could go wrong?"

We leave and go back to our cars. I know where I want to go. We drive down the 101 to Santa Monica Boulevard. From there, it's a straight shot to the end of the continent. In the darkness is the Pacific Ocean. We stop at the edge of the beach and kill the engines. The non-stop white noise wave sound washes over me.

"Ready?"

Jenny nods. Of course she is. I have drugs in my pocket; she'd follow me anywhere.

We head out onto the beach. There's some light from the city, but it is diffuse. It takes my eyes a few moments to adjust, but soon I can make out the faint glow of the sand in moon light and the froth of white caps. I pick a spot at random and plop down.

I pull out my Glock and lay it in my lap. Zombies cluster where the food is and that's not out here. Still, you can't too careful. There could be some undead surfer lurking in the water, ready to catch a last red wave.

Seth looks nervous. I don't think he's had Zed before.

"What's the matter, baby?" I say.

Seth shrugs. "Is this shit safe? I mean, who knows what kind of germs those things have."

Deirdre lets out a laugh. "Germs? Baby, you've had your dick in me. If that don't kill you, nothing will."

Seth doesn't look satisfied, I take pity on him, like I would on a kicked puppy that's whining in an annoying fashion. You want to be nice to get it to shut the fuck up.

"Look, we've all done it before. And Cody knows what he's doing. You just relax, baby, and let it happen. It'll all be good."

It's not a lie. I've heard stories about people turning; but I've never seen it. Just stories.

Jenny wraps her arm around my shoulders. "Seth, if it helps, I'll go first,"

she purrs. I know her; she was going to go first no matter what. But, between the two of us, he seems to have calmed down.

Deirdre starts tapping out a muffled beat on the sand with the soles of her boots. She stops and lays down on the sand, her head in Seth's lap. He runs his hand over her spiked pink hair. "Seth baby, you're gonna love this. Once you come out, the sex is fucking amazing. We're gonna find a place and screw likes monkeys. Okay?"

He smiles. Deirdre might be an unbalanced thirty-years-too-late punk-rocker wannabe; but she is fun in bed. I can see the little wheels in Seth's brain turning. He'll shoot up now, no more questions asked.

"Okay, do me," Jenny says. She's getting impatient, drug brain in full control. The drug brain can't be argued with, only satiated. My drug brain is

starting to rise from the murky depths, dead red eyes looking for a fix. I'll need to shoot up soon. But Jenny is not going to wait.

"Sure thing. Where do you want it?"

"Between my toes," she says, closing her eyes. She slips off the Jimmy Choo wedge from her left foot. I insert the needle between her big toe and long toe. She lets out a sigh from the pinch, knowing that in a moment, the Zed will be coursing through her body, flooding her brain.

Deirdre is humming something, head still in Seth's lap, looking up at the dark, endless sky. Seth and I watch Jenny. Her eyes move rapidly beneath her closed lids. Her chest is rising and falling slowly. I get a sudden urge to hold her hand; but you never touch anyone using Zed. I don't know why; that's just what everyone says.

She suddenly lets out a moist moan. I lean towards her.

“Jenny?” I whisper. Deirdre is sitting up now. I can see her hand is on the butt of her gun.

“Jenny?”

Her mouth opens and a horrible wet sound emerges. Something is wrong. I’ve never seen anyone on Zed do this. I move away from her, gun dropping out of my lap. Deirdre is on her feet. Seth is scooting away on the sand, too scared to even stand, like a big, blonde crab. I laugh when I see it.

Jenny moves with the jerky, spastic limb flailing motion of the newly risen. It feels like a sledgehammer smacks me in the chest. I killed her.

“Aw, fuck me,” Deirdre says. She pulls out her Walther and fires two rounds into Jenny’s forehead. Her brain explodes out the back of her head, a dark spray that hits the sand wetly.

“Well, that’s the show for the night,” Deirdre says.

And so it is.

We all knew the score. Taking Zed is a trip, but like all good ones, it can kill you. Jenny, sweet Jenny, what was your last thought before Deirdre sent your brain into flight? Did you think of raw meat, of my guts in your mouth? Did you wonder where you were, like some sleep-walker waking up in the backyard of a stranger’s house, clothing on inside out?

It doesn’t matter. We are all going to be joining you soon. Walking the streets, red meat hookers, looking to turn a warm, wet trick.

Wetland Wardens

By Thijis Van Sise

When it happened and the world had fallen, only the strong and steadfast remained. In all the lands the contagion spread quickly. It burned through humanity like a wildfire through six month dry grass. Most turned into them; some fled and still survive in corners of the earth. They were just too numerous to control the spread of death. Like a wave it washed over the living, making them monsters.

The swamp was a haven. Defended by stout warriors who were unafraid to confront the abominations. With strength and quick reflexes they kept them from taking anyone when they would dare to enter. The undead, with brains on mind, sought for just that. The wardens of the wetlands however saw they never gained

their goal. Once one of the shambling rotting monsters stepped into their territory, they soon fell.

Day after day the earth became less civilized and more wild. It grew again where the green had been previously lost. In the swamp things never seemed to change in its unremarkable humdrum existence. While time passed the guardians procreated and thrived. It was a knack they had; surviving when and where others had failed.

Sometimes a slow moving dead one would come into their domain. Reeking of decay, mould and death. Flying in the face of their audacity; they were always hastily dispatched. Never would they be allowed to remain and soil the land.

#

The dead came calling on a particularly hot and humid day. One of the wardens was lying near the shore to soak in the little sun that permeated the canopy

of trees and overhanging moss. The warmth on his back was palpable, almost a weight. As he lay silent (if there was one thing nature taught you it was to be silent most of the time) he heard the first signs of one of the sluggish beasts making its way through a stand of cattails. It moved forward at a molasses pace, pushing at the tall brown tipped water plants. Splashing through the water. Clumsy arms, one hand one stump waved back and forth. It paused as though to stop and think; it's slack jawed broken mouth hung open in a silent scream. Raising its right leg he (or she, the decay was extensive) tried to move forward further but the mud had its left tightly bound below.. Clothes rotted badly with large areas of greenish white mould covering easily ninety percent of the outer wardrobe; skin the colour of smeared black and brown paper. Eyes gone, perhaps picked clean by carrion birds. What little hair remained stood out on islands of skin surrounded by yellowing bone seas.

The sun soaking guardian moved slowly to the water. He flanked the blind monstrosity. It smelled so strongly; standing out from the multifaceted aroma of the everyday swamp's decay. It was a wonder he didn't sense it coming sooner. Moving just below the surface of the water he approached its back. Sightless or not the undead seemed to be able to smell or perhaps hear when something living was close at hand.

He moved slowly, becoming slower and slower still. Weapons at the ready he pushed quietly through the reeds being careful not to make a sound. Breathing was nearly stopped; eyes opened wide. Watching for the first sign of realization of the danger the nasty dead thing was in. Right behind it now.

He pushed the final feet quickly. Jumping from the water he grabbed the monster in the midsection. Yanking hard and pulling back. It didn't give in complacently. Not caring or feeling the

terrible damage being wrought upon it, it turned in his grip. Trying to claw and bite with its mangled broken mouth. The hunter was used to this by now; he tore into the dead thing ripping and shredding its torso and legs. Down into the water they went, to the bottom where its body was pulled apart piece by piece. The warden had help by this point. Others had heard the ruckus and come to help in the destruction of the 'wrong' thing.

It was finished in minutes. Old black blood streamed from chunks of torn rotten flesh. Bits floated on the surface of the green tinged waters in the wetland river. Another had come and another had been defeated. Never stood a chance. Like the dawning of the great reptile age the guardian made his way out of the water and back to the bank of sand. Teeth shining white with a piece of dirty cloth stuck between two of them.

When you have an opponent that has been performing its life in a

mechanically efficient method for 83.5 million years; the outcome couldn't have been any different.

Interview with a zombie

By Jacqueline Driggers

Interviewer -- Now Mr Zombie, to get things rolling . .

Zombie -- MY NAME isn't ZOMBIE!

Jeeze, you normos. I have a name, just like you do!

Interviewer -- Well what is your name?

Zombie -- Would have been nice if you'd asked that to begin with.

Interviewer -- So are you going to tell us your name?

Zombie -- When you ask nicely, like you would for anyone else.

Interviewer -- Okaaaay, let's start again.
Can we do a take two please?

Interviewer -- And we have here with us today, a real, live zombie! Would you please introduce yourself?

Zombie -- Well, that's better. But actually, real and live aren't really applicable to a zombie.

Interviewer -- Just tell us your *bleeping* name!

Producer -- Take three please everyone.

Different Interviewer -- G'day mates!

Today we have with us . .

Zombie - Now wait a *bleeping* minute!

You didn't say anything about an Aussie interviewer! Where did the other guy go?

Producer -- He didn't want to interview you.

Zombie -- Bigot! I want a different one!

Producer -- Why? What's wrong with this one?

Zombie -- Aussie brains taste like crap! I hate Aussie brains.

Producer -- But you're not here to eat his brain.

Zombie -- I'm not? Then why am I here!

Producer -- To talk about what it's like to be a zombie.

Zombie -- Become a zombie and you can find out for yourself. That's an easy one.

Producer -- No thanks sir. We don't want to become zombies.

Zombie -- You're all bigots!

Producer -- No sir, we just prefer to be living. So shall we make that take four? And let's get a different interviewer in here too please, because 'Aussie brains taste like crap'.

Producer (to assistant) -- So who else have we got?

Assistant to producer -- Welllll, we've got that vampire dude . .

Producer -- A vampire! (He grins evilly.)

Yeah, let's set mister Uppity Trouble Zombie up with the vampire interviewer.

Zombie -- Well, since I'm back on the set, I assume you have a more appropriate interviewer for me now.

Producer -- Yes sir, we have the perfect interviewer for you.

Zombie -- I'll be the judge of that.

Vampire interviewer -- Welcome to our show Harvey! It's great to have you here.

Zombie -- What the *bleep*!

Vampire interviewer -- So tell us what it's like to be a zombie?

Zombie -- You! Why I . . (yelling at producer) What kind of set up is this!?

Producer -- What's wrong with this one? He too paranormal for you?

Zombie -- He *bleeping* turned my sister into a vampire! That's what's wrong with him! She was a perfectly fine zombie until he started hanging around her. Now she's . . (grimaces in disgust) a vampire. My baby sister!

Vampire interviewer -- Hey! Don't get so bent out of shape! We invited you to the ceremony. Your parents came. They're even thinking about converting to being vampires themselves.

Zombie -- (sputtering and shaking in anger) Why I should just . .

Producer, to crew -- So tell me you're getting all this!

Lead cameraman -- Yep boss, we're getting every lovely second of it, from several angles.

Producer -- Absolutely great. (leans back in his chair, a huge smile on his face) Just perfectly wonderful. Just keep the cameras rolling gang. As long as they're going, we're going.

Assistant to producer -- Sir, we might get several shows out of this footage.

Producer -- I know! (delighted smile on his face as he watches the melee going on onstage) I think we've found our show hosts.

(Later on, somewhere else in the city, late evening. The vampire is walking along the street, when the zombie steps out of a doorway.)

Vampire -- There you are! (he says, with a big smile on his face.)

Zombie -- So can you believe that actually worked! (Zombie's skin is green, but smooth, and he is well dressed.)

Vampire -- Yeah! (the two fist bump and do a short celebration dance.)

Zombie -- I thought he was going to blow a gasket before he got to you.

Vampire -- I know! Your sister, she's one smart cookie.

Zombie -- Yep! So let's head home and celebrate!

Vampire -- You know what they want to call the show?

Zombie -- No, what?

Vampire -- The Zompire Show

Zombie -- Hmmm, that works. You good with that?

Vampire -- Yeah, I am. I mean, what are they going to call it anyway? The Vambie Show? (he says with a grin.)

-- The zombie gives a big laugh and they stroll down the street together. --

The End.

Star Seers

Episode 3

Mike C Bene

"From where we left off from our last adventure, The crew of The Harbinger had split off from The Alliance of Worlds to help those planets the Alliance neglects. A few weeks after this The Dreadnought ship receives a distress call from an old Bio-Medical research that Eric interned at during his time in the academy. So in an attempt to help the Station; Eric, his lover Camille, George Greyson, Deveon Dale, and Jimmy Stonewall adventure to the station to save the research meant to benefit all planets on the station. However on the station they find the ship's crew turned into the cybernetic undead. Can the crew escape the CyberZombies from a little room? Or will the Cybernetic-Dead add them to their trapped horde."

"We're trapped here captain." Said Jimmy as he activated the Dead-Locks n the doors. The crew looked utterly drained

from their experience as they stayed working on a way to teleport back to their ship. The room they were in was a large group of monitors showing the Cyber-Zombies in each hallway either eating bones or fighting over the mutilated flesh of their once human counterparts. The crew watched this until a light tap on the monitor, and saw one group of the horde looking at the monitor. "Foolish children of flesh...you will never understand the gravity of the situation you are in now." Said a voice emanating from all of their mouths before they were quickly disintegrated, and an energy left their now ashend vessels. The stunned crew saw this happen to three other groups before the energy vanished from thin air. "What in the fourteen fucking planets was that bullshit?!?!" Eric asked as George's hair had turned white upon attempting to scan the energy after it had left. "Eric...I could only read the emotions of it.....It felt malevolent and violent." He said before collapsing to the ground. Camille went

through a scan, and noticed their room would be able to allow The Harbinger to teleport all but one of them out. After an unnerving silence however Jimmy finally spoke up to them grimly "Guys....leave me behind, I'll get you out of here." Jimmy said looking at them as he headed to the computerized teleportation system. His fingers began to quickly type across the keyboard, transmitting commands to the ship to get the rest of the crew out.

The Crew while unwilling to let Jimmy go were teleported involuntarily back to The Harbinger. After they were back on the ship, Jimmy looked at the empty space where the other members were and sat down in front of the monitors. His eyes watched fearlessly at the monitors showing the monstrous undead at the door of his final resting place. Jimmy sat back in a chair in front of the door with his energy pistol aimed at the door. His eyes showed tears in them for the first time since leaving Earth. He knew now that he would never see home again, but he felt at

peace with this. "I may not want to go to the other side of light yet, but if I at least take a few of you with me my death will not be in vain." He said to himself as he opened the door. However the only thing behind the door was the energy...now formed into a ball of orange light. The light advanced slowly toward him as Jimmy fired, and for Jimmy the room went dark.

On The Harbinger view screens as the station stood in a moment of silence for their fallen brother. "He saved our lives today, and his memory shall be carried on in our mission." Eric said as he cut the transmission to the ships ONCOM system. His eyes were heavy with guilt as he sat in the captain's seat on the bridge. "Take us to Furioniox 9...I heard they need help with some Dothrani invasion forces." As he said this however a ship resembling a large metallic bat cut them off. The ship's calling frequency activated the ship's Bridge screen showing the captain. It wasn't just any captain however...It was

Jarelex Florio, The Prince Legate of Vampirion. "Hello half sibling Lawson." Said The Prince as he stared at Camille while the rest of the crew (sans. Eric) look at the "young" engineer questioningly

The Crew has since been taken as prisoners aboard The 'Magra' Flagship, and the situation looks bleak as *The Harbinger* is towed behind on a journey to the Capital Planet of their civilizations. There is sadly some discontent among the crew... Head Engineer Camille's status as a Hybrid is causing some minor issues with those who once trusted what they thought was a full human, and in their captain who knew this secret. Will they escape? Will the entire crew be able to survive this trial?

Maryanchanka'Toranka having only found out about her father's treachery was still shaken as she was shackled with the rest of the bridge crew, and taken to one of the brigs. It wasn't even this, but she was chained up with Camille. She hated the woman since the academy, and her

status didn't change this feeling. As they got into the cell Mary had to put aside that hatred to help the crew. "Ok, Eric do you have any sort of plan?" She asked as her and the rest of the bridge crew sort of huddled together. She was determined while Camille's face showed depression in a mixture of determination, well illuminated by the Crimson and White light that illuminated the cells. Eric however was utterly befuddled but was able to reassure her that he did. It was a lie with purpose "Any good captain should give hope when there is none son." Was the only piece of advice his father gave him that he followed. "I have one of the books from The Arconik Sector of the ship in my boot Camille ... you mind?" He said while Camille bent over and reached into his boot, retrieving a small leather bound book. She looked at it and couldn't help but smile. This old book was fresh the last time she had seen it ... then again it was over 200 years ago.

Her expression had remained unchanged until she looked into Eric's eyes. "Why use it? We got some other options here ... hell you got three psychics so why rely on magic?" the crew murmured about her questioning him as Eric took the book. Chief and Bridge officers were required in the academy to learn magic from not only Earth but Mars, Phoneisia, and Vampirion. The magic and sorceries were as much a part of operations as technology was, and psychics were also a great substitute. However Eric's reliance on magic was almost an addiction since they split from the Alliance. One of the few negative things at least. His eyes were greying from withdrawal as he began to read the book. "Ehlan Kookokolo Ekay tolelo" He chants as the two guards outside unlock the energy barrier and fall unconscious. A few minutes later their shackles are unlocked, and they are moving quietly and quickly through the halls of cells in the brig of the *Magra*.

Eric fully liberated his crew in under an hour but had to use a lot of magic to do so. Camille let Eric sit and gather his strength while she addressed the crowded crew about her status. "I know most of you don't trust Hybrids, and I know y'all don't have any feelings for the Phonesian's temporal bombings of cities. I'm not like them ... at least not fully. My name is Camille Elvira Lawson and I'm five-hundred and twenty-eight. I may not be a full human but I am still the same woman who you know as your Engineer Chief, As soon as we get out of here y'all can decide what you feel then, but right now we need to get the fuck out of *The Magra* before my crazy ass fraternal half-brother and his crew find us." The crew took a moment before putting their fists over their heart in a solidarity salute. Camille helped Eric up as they continued to the teleport junction. However their journey was stopped when they came across a hallway filled with the Crimson Praetorian Guard with The Prince at the front of them "Well little sister were

you trying to escape?" Prince Jamek said
with a snide smile as Camille rolled her
eyes. "Says the younger one, the crazy
bat!" She yells as he draws The Vampirion
Steel Blade from his back sheath and his
skirmish mask goes onto his face. "I guess
if you die it won't matter anyhow sister!"
The Vampirions roar as they run down the
long hallway with their weapons drawn.
Their viciousness making others in the
crew feel fear as the two half-siblings from
The Vampirion Gambit of Power stood on
opposing sides ... neither aware of the
manipulations of an old evil that has
finally returned to the universe.



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State of Decay review

By Tobias Sorenson

Have you ever considered buying a zombie survival game without the clear supremacy from games like Left 4 Dead and Dead Rising? Where you actually need to be quick and silent, to not alarm the zombies? Well, then you should buy State of Decay. This game is about the fear of our retarded and dangerous friends, and even though it's not *actually* a horror game, it's pretty fucking scary.



(I'd like to point out now that some of these names may or may not be correct, it's been a few months since I played, but my computer isn't in the best of shape right now, so I can't find their names at the moment. My apologies.)

The game starts off with you fighting zombies. With a branch. It's easier than it sounds, trust me. Afterwards, you have to, well, kill more zombies, while helping unturned people. You play as Marcus, a black man (Yes, I had to point that out. He's awesome.) With the most amazing afro I've ever seen in a game, and you're with his friend Eddie. Together, you search the area you start in and eventually find Maja, a woman sharpshooter. You then scour the area for a vehicle, and eventually find a truck. You then drive towards the nearest city, where you find a survivor camp with a few inhabitants. Now this is where the game really begins.

From here on, it's all about scavenging and clearing out zombies. And as in all good zombie games, there's special kinds. We have the standard zombie, an infected person who needs a bullet to the face, or anything else really. Then there's the Screamer. And it, well,

screams. Loudly. Like, it attracts other zombies.



Then there's the Feral zombie, basically the most annoying bastard you'll ever meet in this game. It's faster, stronger, taller and scarier than the normal zombie, and it can rip you apart in seconds. There's also a big one, and I'd like to apologize because I can't remember its name, but thinks of it as a mix of a Tank and Boomer from Left 4 Dead, but without the explosion at the end.

Later in the game you'll be able to move your base. And *what a relief!* The first base you have is at a church, and even though it's a nice place, the starting city quickly gets dry of resources, thus meaning you're gonna have to drive longer

to get resources. So when you move your base to a more appropriate place, it's all about gathering again. And a friendly tip; Get as many building materials as you can, you're gonna need it, and survivors too, because you can actually get tired. I know, it's amazing that you actually can get tired, but it gives a penalty to your stamina, and trust me - you don't want a penalty to your stamina when a freakin' Feral is chasing you through houses.

Did I mention you can jump through windows?

So, when you get tired, you need to sleep. But for you to sleep, you need to change character, meaning you're actually playing as multiple characters. One of the greatest details in this game, in my opinion, is the way you can be remembered. Like, if you do something nice for someone, and you then die, you'll be remembered by that. If you're in a relation with someone, like brother and sister, or married, your death is going to sad them out. Believe me, as this is from my personal experience.

Other than that, this game is my favourite zombie survival game. I'd even go as far and say it's better than DayZ.

Of course, this game has cons as well as pros. A few things disappointed me, like the only single player experience.

I had hoped so much they would implement co-op, it would have been so awesome! And you can't shoot normal people. Only zombies. Not because I wanted to go on a full out killing spree, but there was a few people I wanted to kill.

So, with no further ado, let's get down to the rating.

Story: 5 out of 5



Combat: 4 out of 5



Graphics: 4 out of 5



Voice acting: 3 out of 5



All in all: 4 out of 5

Hands down, one of *THE BEST* indie games I've ever played. And it's a zombie killing/survival/horror game too, it only gets better. I will legitimately recommend this game to anyone who likes a good zombie game which, all in all, is just about surviving. Good luck out there, and remember to always bring snacks.

Snacks is love, snacks is life.

The first annual Smallville Comic Con

By A.D. Trosper



The Comic Con in Hutchinson, Kansas was a first on more than one level. First to be held in Hutchinson and also the first con I'd ever been too. I'd seen pictures of the big ones held around the country, but really had no idea what to expect from this one. Hutchinson is home to many things. The Cosmosphere, the salt mines, etc. But it isn't home to a large population.

After I originally planned to go and sent everything in it then looked like I wouldn't be able to make it. It wasn't until 11:30 the night before it opened that we

finally decided I would make it no matter what had to wait.

So, totally unprepared, I took off early the next morning with my mother to set up before the doors opened. I ended up running out of the house without my make-up on and slightly dishevelled. The con had eight foot tables. I only had a four foot, fitted table cloth. So I arrived, unloaded and then while I got everything inside, my mother drove to buy a table cloth.

When she returned, we got everything set up. All except my banner. I didn't have the right hooks to hang it. I wasn't too worried though. My mother (who was helping me run my table while my wonderful husband took care of the kids) planned on picking them up when she ran to get us lunch. As it happened, she never got the chance.

My worries of a low attendance were completely unfounded. The con

swarmed with people and there were great cosplayers everywhere. They ranged from beginner to master.





It was beyond fun and I was totally at home there. It felt like I had found my people. When I found the Predators, I totally geeked out.





They were one of my favourites matched
only by Master Chief and Kat.





My mother started saying, “Storm Troopers, Storm Troopers!” I turned around to see, practically squealed with

delight and said, “Those aren’t Storm Troopers, that’s Master Chief and Kat!” (My mother isn’t up on all of the gaming stuff)

Along with all the cosplayers, there were lots of buyers as well. I had quite a few books with me, but quite a few wasn’t enough. I ended up selling out two and half hours after the doors opened.

I didn’t leave yet though because I was on the author panel. I admit to being absolutely terrified of sitting up there on a stage in front of a bunch of people. I sat down and stared at the mike in front of me like it was snake.

Here is evidence of my terror.



However, I did manage to get past it enough to do a decent enough job of talking about indie publishing and answering questions...at least I hope I did.



(with me is author Jae Byrd Wells, author A.R. Crebs, and the Moderator, author Suzanne Dome)

The Comic Con turned out fabulous. There was even a DeLorean there with flashing lights and the song from Back To The Future playing. And of

course, The Doctor Who Box.



Guests included: Alaina Huffman, Michael Coleman, Phil Morris, and Aaron Smolinsky as well as many great artists, authors, and vendors. There were panels with the celebrities, authors, comic book creators, and a cosplay 101. Demos were held, a costume contest, and musical skits. There were people in from as far away as San Francisco. Pretty much everything

I've read about from bigger cons could be found there. Hutchinson may not be a large city and this may have been the first year for the con there, but the organizers outdid themselves. It was heaven.

Most people I talked to loved it and already couldn't wait for next year. I too am eagerly awaiting next year. I've often lamented the lack of geekery that seemed to be in Kansas, especially outside of Wichita. No more. Kansas is coming of age. Hutchinson has Starbucks, Sushi, and now a fabulous Comic Con. For a west coast girl like me, this is pretty dang close to perfection. Kudos to the Smallville Comic Con for giving us an amazing weekend.

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yourself a bargain!

Melissa

By Jeff Durkin

George stood at the edge of the Field and watched the Revenant walk towards him in a slow, deliberate manner. It was a woman, grey skin sagging from the rot of connective tissue. The left side of her head was destroyed, reduced to a jumbled mass of mangled flesh and jutting bone. She stopped in front of him. She was only a few meters away. If he were in the Field, she would attack and attempt to tear him limb from limb.

But, as long as he stayed out of the Field, he was safe. It was the Field that reanimated the dead; if there was anything people agreed upon regarding the Revenants, that was it.

Standing there, staring into her one intact eye, he thought back to when he was a boy and the Object had arrived. It had come from outside the Solar System. The

Space Agency had tracked it and the Air Force had tried to intercept it. George, along with billions of other people, had watched it all on TV. The missiles rising into the clear blue sky. Nuclear warheads detonating, creating a burning sky. The kilometre-wide glowing sphere that would later be called the Object descending unscathed through the nuclear fire.

The Object landed gently in the centre of the country. After twenty minutes, every dead body within 200 kilometres reanimated and began to attack the living. Those who died revived within minutes and joined in killing. Panic swept the world. Although George and his family lived far away, there were riots in his town. Everyone thought the reanimated dead would spread across the world.

They did not.

They were almost impossible to destroy. The one that George was looking

at was missing a chunk of her skull, one eye gone, her brain exposed and rotting. Whatever reanimated them had no weak spots, no vulnerabilities, with one exception; the Revenants couldn't leave the Field. George had seen experiments on TV, with heavily armoured troops dragging Revenants outside the Field. The undead would stiffen and collapse.

The world accepted the stalemate and adapted. The Revenants, as the reanimated dead were soon called, stayed in the Field. After a while, people grew bored with it. Millions had died and risen. They still wandered among the overgrown farms and ruined cities within the Field. But they didn't come out. And, after a time, no one went in.

A scientist that George knew had been part of the last expedition into the Field. She said that they weren't learning anything. The Object was still at the centre of the Field, glowing like a piece of the

Sun. The reanimated dead still lurked among the ruins. There was no practical way to stop them, short of physically removing each one of them from the Field. Or using nuclear weapons; but she had said that so many would have to be used that the world would be plunged into a Nuclear Winter. The cure would be worse than disease.

She left him with these words, "No one knows how the dead reanimate. No one knows what the Object is. No one knows what its purpose is."

"I know what this is for. It's to remind of us of our mortality. To fuel our regrets," George muttered.

He felt cold. Although he wore a heavy coat, he still felt cold. It wasn't the bite of the wind or a chill in the night air. It was something about the Field. It seemed to suck the warmth out of him.

He knew he had to hurry. The Army still ran patrols along the perimeter of the Field and he could not afford to be caught.

His pickup truck was parked on a pot-hole riddled road that ran parallel to the Field for a few kilometres. He returned to it. For a moment, he had to catch himself on the side of the truck. He stared down at the dark asphalt, wet with a recent rain storm. A part of his brain screamed at him, told him not to proceed with his plan.

He took a deep breath, smashed that voice down into a dark hole and opened up the tail of the pickup bed. Lying on the bed was a plastic wrapped bundle, a meter and a half long. George pulled the bundle out and slung it over his shoulder. He hesitated for a moment. Stay focused, he thought, this is what has to be done. He walked to the edge of the Field. The Revenant watched him with an unfocused curiosity. It made a chuffing noise as he

dropped the plastic bundle on the wet ground.

George took out a pair of garden sheers and cut the plastic away. Inside was the body of a young woman. She wore jeans and a pink t-shirt that had 'Sexy' written across the chest in sequins. Her attractive features were marred by a blotchy red wound on her forehead.

"Melissa, I'm sorry I hit you so hard. But, you'll be fine here. I'll come and see you."

He picked up the body and rolled into the Field. The Revenant pounced on it with a speed that startled George. He fell back onto the wet earth. After a moment of sniffing the body, the Revenant stood up. It regarded George with black eyes and then wandered off into the gathering night.

"Come on," George muttered.

Melissa sat up. Her eyes snapped open and she looked around slowly. One eye was flawless, emerald green and milk white. The other was dark red from a haemorrhage. Her gaze settled on George.

“I love you. Please forgive me.”

Melissa struggled to her feet. She continued to stare at George for a moment. In her new brain, she saw wondrous things, colours and sounds that the living had no words for. She regarded George briefly, seeing a blank space in her new world. She then turned and walked into the night.

Good Eats

By Jeff Durkin

Gaston tapped on the glass of the fish tank that dominated his living room. Inside, a long-dead angel fish swam sluggishly in the brackish water, an oddly appealing blue green fungus growing on its slowly decaying body. Gaston thought about changing the murky water; but the reanimated fish didn't mind and he always seemed too busy. Plus, the hand he had lost in the Breather War made it difficult to manoeuvre the tank around.

The cell phone rang. He reached for it with his stump. He did this at least twice a day, something that psychiatrists had dubbed Lost Limb Memory Syndrome. Gaston just cursed and picked up the phone..

"Hello?"

The voice on the other end was raspy, like that of someone suffering from a year-long cold who had just had a tracheotomy. "Gaston, it's Jenny."

Gaston smiled, causing a few scraps of rotting skin to flutter down from his cheeks into the fish tank. The zombie angel fish's brain dredged up a memory of TetraMin flakes and swam sluggishly after the sinking bits of skin. "Jenny, how are you?"

"Good. Are we still on for tonight?"

"Yes. I have reservations at Paul's for eight pm."

"Great," Jenny croaked. "I'm looking forward to seeing you again."

"Me too. See you at eight."

Gaston hung up and glanced at the wall clock. It was only five. Plenty of time to get ready.

He shuffled into his bedroom and looked in the mirror. *Not bad*, he thought. *Still the handsome devil*. His eyes were the same blue-green as they had been in life, although the whites had turned yellow. He noticed that the skin on his cheek was peeling away. *Can't be helped*, he thought. *Decay is inevitable*. His right ear was gone, shot off by a Breather during the War. *A few inches to the left and it would have been all over for you, my man*. The memory of the meal that had followed, as he and his pack had torn the shooter apart, brought a smile to his face. More dead skin flaked off.

"Damn, I really have to stop that."

Gaston dressed in the careful and deliberate fashion dictated by his slowly atrophying muscles and nervous system.

By the time he had combed his hair - losing a clump off the top of his head in the process - and gotten into his best suit, it was already seven.

Better get going.

"Bye fishes. Don't wait up for me."

He tried to give his fish a lascivious wink, but the motion set off an uncontrollable tic, a misfire of neurons and muscle spasms. When he left his building his right eye was twitching so badly that it seemed to be on the verge of popping out. He held his hand over the eye, hoping that it would stop before he got to the restaurant.

He waited on the sidewalk for a bus to pull up. When one did, Gaston entered through the front door. The driver was a Breather; most of the drivers were, as few of the reanimated had enough coordination to drive. He was locked in a cage, more to keep the passengers from eating him than to keep him from

escaping. In a world of zombies, there were few places left to run to. Gaston stared at him for a moment, saliva pooling in his mouth; some dribbled onto his suit.

The driver just stared ahead blankly.

Gaston sighed and took a seat. He wiped off his mouth with his stump. He really wanted to eat the driver. He hadn't had a good meal in days. His facial tic finally settled down and he relaxed.

This is going to be a great night, he thought. Jenny's a wonderful girl and you can't fail to get lucky.

The bus arrived at the stop nearest Paul's. Gaston got up, said "Boo!" as he passed the driver and laughed as the man started to shake uncontrollably.

That's for making me drool on my suit.

Jenny was waiting for him by the door. She was dressed in a short, black cocktail dress. Her long blonde hair was still mostly intact, although Gaston knew that there were a few patches in the back where it had fallen out. She wore a scarf over a wound in her throat, the bite that had turned her during the War and that gave her the "Janis Joplin after gargling bleach" voice. Her eyes were mottled red, dried blood from old haemorrhages. Still, as far as zombies went, she was intact. Gaston found her very attractive. In life, he would never have approached her; in undeath, it seemed as if his shyness had ended with his first life.

He kissed her cheek, felt the roughness of his dry lips pressing against her dry flesh. He came away with a smear of makeup and dead skin on his lips, which Jenny reached up and wiped away.

"Shall we?" He said.

“Yes, Gaston, party of two.”

She nodded. Jenny only talked when she had too. Gaston knew that it wasn't pain; the undead felt little. It was just the effort. He had seen her neck wound once, her frayed larynx, her damage vocal cords. She usually remained silent and let him do the talking.

The maitre'd leaned awkwardly against the front counter. As Gaston approached, he noted that the man's left leg was at an odd angle, as if had been almost wrenched off, remaining attached only by luck and shredded muscle.

It probably has been, Gaston thought.

“Hello,” The maitre'd said, his voice deep and rich. Whatever ravages his body had suffered, they hadn't affected his voice. “Welcome to Paul's. Do you have a reservation?”

The maitre'd perused a list of names on the counter.

“Ah, yes, Gaston, party of two, eight o'clock.”

He held up his hand and wobbled uneasily on his one good leg. He swayed drunkenly for a moment, then reached out and steadied himself on the counter.

He cleared his throat, an action that brought up a thick, wet gurgling sound, and said, “service!”

A waiter shuffled up. “Please follow me,” he said, his voice a hollow groan. Gaston could barely understand him. But it was obvious what he wanted and Gaston and Jenny walked behind him. From the concave look of the waiter's shirt and the odd voice, Gaston assumed he had suffered some horrible chest injury. Gaston

imagined shattered ribs and punctured lungs. The thought made him remember the last time he had shattered ribs, punctured lungs and then eaten them. He started to drool again.

Jenny pretended not to notice.

There table was near a front window, in a cosy corner. They sat and the waiter shuffled off.

“How was your day?” Gaston asked.

Jenny smiled, shrugged, made a writing motion with her left hand and shrugged again. She was an accountant with a local bank, so Gaston imagined any given day wouldn't be very exciting.

“I'm thinking of cleaning my fish tank.”

Jenny kept smiling. She clapped her hands softly. She had asked him about this a few weeks ago and was happy to see he was finally getting around to it.

The waiter returned. The air seeped out of him as he spoke. “Would madam and monsieur care to see tonight's offerings?”

“Yes, we would.”

“Very well, sir. If you would please follow me.”

The waiter led them to what had been a private banquet room before the dead had risen. It now served as the restaurant's larder.

“Here at Paul's we offer the finest in farm raised and free range Breathers,” the waiter wheezed.

Along one wall were plexiglass pens. In the centre of the room were a number of metal cages. In the pens, babies crawled over each other in innocent ignorance. In the cages, the free range humans shrank from the approaching undead, terror etching their faces.

Gaston shook his head. "Farm raised, please."

While catching a Breather in the wild was exhilarating, it was the chase that mattered. Most of the wild Breathers were so malnourished and stringy that eating them was more of a chore than a pleasure. Gaston glanced at Jenny, who smiled in approval.

The waiter nodded and led them to the pens. Jenny inspected the infants. One, a chubby boy of six months stopped rolling around playfully and pressed his face against the plastic panel. Jenny tapped the plexiglass. The baby cooed and smiled.

Jenny said, "This one. He's cute."

As Jenny walked back to the table, Gaston leaned down to the waiter and whispered into his ear. The waiter nodded and gasped, "Very good, sir. Well worth the expense."

Gaston re-joined Jenny.

A few minutes later, the waiter rolled out a cart. On it was a polished steel chafer. With a little flourish, as much as he could manage, the waiter removed the top.

"Bon appétit."

The infant writhed in the pan. He was crying, although the sound was muffled. Jenny squinted and saw something red was stuffed in the baby's mouth.

“It even has an apple in its mouth,”

Jenny rasped, delighted.

Gaston shook his head. He knew her vision wasn't the best, since her eyes clouded with dried blood. “Look closer.”

She leaned forward towards the writhing infant. She saw that what was stuffed in its mouth wasn't a shiny fruit, but something that glistened wetly. “A heart? For me?”

Gaston smiled, dead skin drifting down to the table. “Happy Valentine's Day, sweetheart.”

STILL ALIVE?

Want to kick some Zombie ass until it falls to the ground detached from the rotting zombie who you kicked it from?

We are a Resistance group who are looking for soldiers of all ages, races, creeds, all united against the Zombie threat! Come find us, or if you don't you'll become one of them, and we will find you, and you don't want us to find you!

The Heart of the Ice King

by

George W. Van Sise

From the archives of Xanearth:

Legends rise up from ancient tales told of long ago. Yet even legends find their basis in some shred of truth, some thread of fact told by those that were there, perhaps embellished and enhanced to make them shine all the more. However, even legends carry with them the fear and consequences of their tellers, as can be found in the tale called, **The heart of the ice king**.

Racing erratically across the great frozen wastes of long deserted Iozo, a single man, cold, exhausted, and breathing hard, struggled to keep a safe distance between himself, and the longhaired wild droogs that had picked up his scent just the evening before.

It was only two mornings ago, that, with sufficient supplies for the long trek back to the south, that the camp of treasure

seekers, of which he was a part, decided to give up in their search for the lost riches of Brim, the fabled Ice King. Instead, they decided to make their way southward to where their ship lay in its icy mooring.

After traveling all that day, they set up camp on one of the many wide blue ice plateaus that Iozo was well known for. They had ventured further inland than anyone in recorded memory before them, and had only seen more of the same, large rocky outcroppings and seemingly endless expanses of gleaming blue ice.

It had become very late when the group was awakened by strong tremors originating from deep beneath the blue skin of Xanearth's northernmost continent. Having just decided that the quakes were indigenous to the area they suddenly and mysteriously subsided. Rumors began to circulate among the men, which quickly rose to a pitch of superstitious panic. Fragments of half-remembered legends leapt into the minds of each as they hastily

gathered their belongings, and prepared to break camp.

The sky overhead cleared briefly as the full moons of Eiif and Auga one waxing and one waning broke through the snow laden clouds, casting their dull red glow across the shiny landscape.

They were only moments into their preparations when the ice around them erupted with a mighty blast. Bursting up through the frozen surface there came to life a terrifying reality. All of the legends in the entire world couldn't have prepared them for this. Looming as high as the main mast of their ship was Sath the giant snow serpent.

The monster's snow-white triangular head wavered in the moonlight. Its eyes burned like blood red endrils. Transfixed with shock, faces wide with horror, the snow serpent's prey stood watching as the long jaws opened wide. The men gazed helplessly as the sticky gray forked tongue, slipped out between rows of razor sharp

teeth to hang several feet beyond, twitching convulsively.

Then in an instant, as the massive jaws snapped up the closest victim, the spell was broken and the men scrambled for their weapons. As the blood of man after man spattered across the blue expanse, their efforts to combat the beast with their puny arms became evident. Amid the screams of the hopeless, several of them fled. The moons dipped behind the clouds, and mighty Sath pursued them, attacking with deadly swiftiness. In the near complete darkness, only one man managed to elude the cold-blooded white serpent.

Now with the wild droogs pacing his every step, waiting for him to drop from exhaustion, as was their habit, his chances of survival were growing very slim. He had plunged nearly into insanity from the ordeal and had not slowed in his flight for an entire day. When he regained his senses he found himself pushing forward relentlessly, armed with only a broken pike sheared off midway, the light of the

afternoon sun was quickly draining from the sky that was beginning to cloud over. His coat had been lost to him and his vest and shirt were torn and splattered with the blood of his fallen companions. Though it was summer in the frozen continent the bitter, wind still stung his face. The droogs, howling occasionally were less than a thousand paces behind. The man knew they would catch up to him eventually, but nonetheless he kept up his course until nightfall.

A crisp snow began to fall shortly before dark. His lungs ached from the endless pace. His weariness became so great that he feared that he would collapse at any moment, but he knew that if he paused for more than a breath, the hungry droogs would make a short meal of him indeed. They must have sensed his desperate condition, for they set up an infernal howling, high pitched and fluttering. The eerie quality drove a deep chill into his bones that rivaled even the great northern waste.

The snow had stopped for the moment, as the dense clouds began to scatter, giving him a glimpse of the wondrous northern glow that rippled across the upper reaches of the sky. Ancient stories throughout the Land of the Seven Kingdoms told of the shifting lights in the sky over Iozo, long believed to be the breath of the long dead Imlis; a magical race that lived, even before lost Tavagondo had been established, rising up into the starlit black void.

The reddish-silver light from the moons briefly rained down upon the gleaming blue landscape. He was beginning to enter terrain dominated by sharp black rock that stabbed its way up through the thick blue ice.

He looked back and could vaguely see the glittering yellow eyes of the droogs as they patiently stalked him. It was at that moment of inattention that he tripped, plunging headlong over some unseen object. The treasure hunter looked down, realizing in that same instant, that it was a

corpse laying face up. The winds having swept clean the snow from the body revealed strange garments covering the shrunken, frozen flesh. How long this poor fellow lay there, he could not tell, perhaps weeks, possibly centuries. He looked down into the rigid features, and found himself wondering if his fate would be the same. He found himself puzzled too, by the look of anguished fear forever engraved in the dead man's face. That is when he noticed that the dead man had only one arm, the garment that was still a pale green had been wrested at the shoulder. "Droogs!" he hissed under his breath, but strangely, they had not devoured the rest of the body.

He then heard a snarl from behind, and spun about, he had remained motionless too long. Two of the longhaired canines had moved in close to a distance of less than seventy paces. Suddenly in their eagerness, they turned upon each other, moments later only one remained. The man estimated that the other remaining

droogs had met a similar fate. The victor slowly approached.

With no other option, the man threw his arms high into the air and let out a piercing shriek. Jumping and screaming, with his arms thrashing wildly, caught the wild animal off guard, and making a quick dash toward the creature, it suddenly panicked and fled.

The clouds overtook the moons, and once again, the semi-darkness of the northland prevailed. He trudged onward for hours with Eiif and Auga winking at him occasionally from behind the edge of the clouds. It was at one of these times that he saw the ancient brooding tower thrust up from the landscape like some broken tooth in an otherwise toothless jaw. No doubt a former outpost he thought, from long, long ago when the world was younger and Iozo was green and alive. Getting closer he could see that the tower was snow-clad and cut from the same black rock as that which had been visible for the past several hours. It stood on a

massive cliff continuing the likeness of an enormous jawbone, jutting out and bare.

Apparently, the entire back portion of the structure had fallen away at some early distant time, into the gigantic crevasse that extended beyond. How large it had once been he could not imagine.

As quickly as his exhausted legs would carry him, he made his way toward the structure. New howls reached his ears once again. The hungry droogs had regrouped and were pursuing him with greater vigor than before. He glanced back and could see them, nearly forty, he guessed and they were moving in. It was only a matter of time before he might lose his footing on the slippery blue sheet, which extended all the way to the foot of the tower. They would have him for a certainty, unless he gained the entrance first.

The spent man increased his speed. The stone fortress was no more than two hundred paces away. The sound of his pursuers grew ever closer. Recklessly he

vaulted across the wind swept ice as a heavy snow began falling.

The adventurer had nearly reached the entrance when his feet shot out from under him. He landed hard and sprawled toward the tower across the remaining blue expanse. Dazed he lay there, imagining the largest of the droogs hovering just behind him, with jaws slavering and eyes smoldering, and long black fur standing on end down its back. He stood drunkenly and turned, his head still spinning from the fall. The droogs had not pursued him all the way to the tower, but had halted some distance back. Turning, he found the entrance just a dozen paces behind him, and made his way to it. Three broad steps led to two massive rusted metal doors that hung open wide as if to greet him. He gasped as he made his way up the icy steps and in through the arch of the door.

Entering in, he immediately noticed that the stone of the floor, and the very doors themselves, were also coated with a thick blue ice. A feeling swept over him and he

felt as if he had stepped straight into the gapping mouth of Sath the Snow serpent.

Not having time to rationalize his emotions he paid them no heed and turned back to check his pursuers.

The droogs had stopped several hundred paces from the tower. They paced back and forth, and as they did, he noticed a marked change in their behavior. Some began to cower back with teeth bared in fearsome snarls. Others snapped at the snow as if attacking some invisible foe, and still others attacked their fellows. Then suddenly as if they had all made a unanimous decision they let out a high haunting howl, turned abruptly about and ran until they were completely out of sight.

The adventurer wanted to let out a sigh of relief from his burning lungs, but somehow he could not. If not for the eerie howl, he would never have questioned the droogs turning tail and running, for no doubt they probably avoided human structures at all costs. He simply assumed

that is why they fled. Nevertheless, a certain deep perplexity remained.

Pulling his black fur vest close about him hoping to close out the cold, and the as-of-yet unexplored darkness behind him, he finally took a full breath. He turned about and tried to see through the all-absorbing blackness, as he carefully started to make his way into the heart of the mysterious tower.

He had gone many cautious paces with his broken pike extended before his feet, when the clouds must have parted again. Liquid moonlight poured into the tower from some unseen opening, illuminating a single immense chamber before him. His breath caught in his throat as he peered about. There before him lay the most awesome sight he had ever gazed upon. Strewn about, over the entire floor, lay the treasure of a hundred kings, no, of a thousand kings! Not since the days of legendary King Thimeric, had so much wealth, been in one place. There were gleaming yellow amazure helmets studded

with blazing red endrils. Swords of a black metal that was unknown to him, covered with an unintelligible script, inlaid with amazure and a multitude of precious stones. Shining goblets, belts with dangling sword scabbards, and large battle-axes all made of zilimar. Dazzling gems were loosely scattered about, clear and glittering dicrons, smoky amber irazen, and blood red endrils. Strangely antiquated decorations, all reflecting the same expert craftsmanship, hung upon the walls, and everything that could be seen was covered with the same thick blue ice. All of the riches of a forgotten age were here before him, and in an instant, he realized that this was it! He had stumbled upon the treasure that no man had seen for at least three millennia. He had found the lost treasure of Brim, the Ice King.

A chill gripped his spine as his sight crossed the chamber to the far wall. There seated in a huge throne of amazure and zilimar, was the Ice King himself, or so he thought he must be. Surely twice the size

of the largest man, finely garbed, with skin shriveled beneath the coating of ice that he wore. His eyes were open wide, staring out sightlessly, into all perpetuity. He appeared to be richly clothed in an unfamiliar material of purple and red, and as the treasure seeker looked upon him, he almost thought that the slightest curl of a smile was upon the frozen lips, and perhaps the tiniest glow lit out from the glazed eyes. Surely, the moonlight had played a trick upon him.

Then for a moment the scene dimmed, no doubt another cloud passing overhead. When the lighting was restored, his attention was drawn to the chest of the monarch, where, upon a fine chain of linked silver mwilmar, considered to be more precious than amazure by some and alive with the soft color of moonlight, in an elaborate setting, was a magnificent roolic. The roolic, perhaps the rarest of gems, which the man had only heard about in fanciful stories, possessed deep green facets which seemed to peer out in every

direction imaginable, and as it caught the moonlight, to the wanderer, it almost appeared a live creature upon the King's silent breast.

After so many tribulations he thought, to have accidentally stumbled upon that which he had sought after so desperately, seemed barely possible to him. Yet here he stood, before the treasure of a king long dead. The legend had said, that it was the King's very own greed, which was his undoing. Unwilling to pass his riches on to any successors, he secretly had it removed to some far distant place, murderously killing all who knew of its whereabouts. Then one night while an ice storm raged over Iozo, he walked off into the tempest never to be seen by the living again, hence he came to be called the Ice King. It was furthermore told, that one of the evil Necry had laid some extraordinary gift upon the King's royal pendant. Having imbued it with an eternal fire, enabling the avaricious king to never die, but such preposterous ideas were the very thread

from which legends were woven, and the subject of many a hearth tale, to pass the time in a smoky tavern.

The clouds passed overhead once more, and just as they did, he became fixed in his resolve. His journey's undertaking had been to find treasure, and treasure is what he had found. King or no king, dead or alive, it was his intent to relieve this silent edifice of its costly adornments. Slowly his eyes become accustomed to the dense darkness, as he stooped and tried unsuccessfully to pry free a fiery endril from the frozen floor. Again, the room was suddenly illuminated by moonlight. He temporarily abandoned the items littering the chamber floor and allowed his gaze to return to the tempting roolic pendant, which hung meticulously about the King's neck. He moved in for a closer inspection, noticing how the icy covering, which overlaid the gem seemed uneven, almost as if it had been the subject of an earlier assault, by pick or sword.

He quickly remembered the frozen corpse in the snow outside. No doubt, the man had been in this very place, then when he attempted to leave, must have been caught in one of the sudden vicious snowstorms Iozo was known for, subsequently freezing to death.

He gave the thought no further consideration and quickly set about relieving the petrified king of this, the greatest of all sparkling baubles. Hands trembling in anticipation, he raised the broken pike, and began to chip away at the slick blue ice that imprisoned the gem. He noticed, as the sharp, splintered, wooden shaft bit into the ice, how the sound reminded him of an axe striking an old hollow tree.

In that moment he caught himself idly observing the monarch's face, he chuckled to himself, for it seemed apparent that the curve of the lip he had earlier thought to be a smile, was simply the agonized last movements of a man who froze to death so many centuries before.

At last, he chipped away the remaining vestige of the ever present blue covering, releasing the wondrous crystal. The moonlight began to fade once more, as he was reaching out for the roolic. Finally clasping it in his tired fingers, he suddenly noticed how utterly cold it was. The gem itself seemed to draw the very warmth from his palm, almost as if it were hungry, hungry for his life. With a sharp jerk, he quickly snapped the mwilmar chain.

"The Heart of the Ice King is mine!" He whispered, in an almost giddy manner.

Lifting the priceless jewel high, he examined his prize more closely. His hand still tingled where the jeweled medallion touched, but he thought nothing of it, and in the twilight illumination, which soon would be gone, he could see the roolic's deep inner glow. Satisfied with the quality of his new treasure, which was then placed safely within his shirt he turned his attention to some of the other objects of value in the chamber, the golden amazure helmet he had seen earlier, along with the

black blade, would be his next conquest, perhaps they might be of some protection should the droogs return.

The remaining light vanished as he turned on his heel, whereupon he caught his foot on some unnoticed valuable, and lost his balance, the ice did the rest, as he went sprawling to the floor, sharply smacking his lip as he landed face first, splitting it nastily. Raising himself to his elbows, he spit out the blood that now began to trickle down his chin. He found himself, in the darkness, looking straight ahead, toward what he imagined to be the entrance, or so it must have been, for he could barely discern the slightly greater lightness of the snows without, compared to the intense darkness of his surroundings.

It was at that moment, when his ears caught the faintest of sounds. Was it a slight creak, such as might have been made by some ponderous weight, shifting in an old comfortable chair, or perhaps the wicked winds of this icy continent had

begun some choral rehearsal for an unknown deity.

No! It was not the wind. Then he heard it again, more distinctly this time, and he realized that it came from behind him, from the direction of the throne where the Ice King rested! Possibly another thief, like himself, had made his way into the dark, while he was hacking away at the King's necklace.

Suddenly, another thought occurred to him. Fearing to move, he imagined that a single droog, braver than all of the others had crept in and was preparing to attack him. Curse the clouds for darkening his situation at this crucial time. After several moments, he still could not see any more than dark shadows against still darker shadows. Again, he heard the sound, this time it sounded more like the slow, intent shuffle of feet not accustomed to movement. The hairs at the base of his neck began to rise, there was definitely something behind him! An unearthly dread swept over him, setting a deep chill in his

bones. Slowly, he began to turn over praying that the clean glow of moonlight would return and set to rest his growing terror. He was nearly to his back now, the broken shaft of the pike still clutched in his hand. He searched the darkness with his eyes, hoping for some clue as to the sound's origin. His heart paused as he saw, many paces in front of him two dim pinpoints of light; certainly no reflections, they were more like shiny little beads, or possibly eyes! "LORD OF LIGHT!" He screamed, as he realized they were the very eyes of Brim, the Ice King!

In an instant, with all of his might he hurled the broken pike into the consuming darkness. The eyes were moving closer. The roolic in his shirt began to burn his chest. All at once, the moonlight returned, flooding the room. To the thief's incredulous horror, there standing before him, only a few cold arm lengths away was the long dead King Brim, in all of his icy blue glory, and protruding from his frozen chest, the broken pike! A wide

sneer shaped the lips of the otherwise immobile face, and set above the icy grin, were two gleaming, unblinking, black eyes, equally glazed, possessing their own inner light. A frosty hand, skin shrunk from the bitter cold, extended toward the treasure hunter, opened wide in expectation!

A dreadful comprehension overtook the man, as he understood. The Ice King wanted the roolic, his glittering heart, back! Relentlessly Brim's feet shuffled slowly toward him.

Stricken with the absolute terror of the moment, the thief could not move. He found himself transfixed by Brim's eyes, and was positively helpless as the Ice King reached down to grasp his left arm. Searing bolts of painful cold riveted his shoulder, shocking him to his senses. He lurched back in agony, and with that the icy monarch snapped the man's arm free from its socket. A piercing scream erupted from the thief's throat, as it came away from his body. Now freed and nearly

overcome with the blinding pain, the one armed man lunged for the entrance. Behind him and still advancing was the Ice King, with a bloody, twitching arm locked in his grip.

The man fell once again just inside the opening as clouds blotted out the light, the slick ice still acting as the King's boreal companion. Wracked with pain he reached into his shirt with his remaining hand to grab the Heart of the Ice King. Instantly the moonlight returned and Brim was at his feet reaching for the thief's leg. In utter panic the man hurled the roolic, as Brim's frozen hand snapped up to catch it like a feeding serpent, and as he did the thief rolled through the arch of the entrance. Regaining his feet, he plunged down the three steps and out into the swirling snow that was by then raging. He ran for many reaches before taking a moment to turn around, and when he did, all that was visible to him were the endlessly flowing snows of forgotten Iozo. The Tower of Brim the Ice King was once again lost in

the ever-changing white wilderness. In silence, he turned in the direction he thought to be south and soon disappeared.

Many months later it was told, that in the far northern port town of Aspir, of the Vykorr, in a darkly lit tavern, in a corner filled with shadows, there sat, drinking many a pungent brew, a solitary man, with wide fear filled eyes, and one arm, telling an insane tale of the Heart of the Ice King.

The End

Welcome to hell

By Stacey Welsh

I watch from my place of safety, high in an old phone tower, they watch below, hungry for me to join them. But so far no luck.

Welcome to hell.

Population one.

It started out quietly enough, a cough here, a sneeze there. The new super flu they called it. It killed in half a day, but the dead didn't stay dead. Within another day they rose again, their families and friends confused, but joyful that their loved ones had survived this horrendous illness.

It was a joy that was short lived.

The next day after their miraculous recovery, the victims would become violent, fuelled by an unknown forceful

desire, they stripped the flesh from their healthy loved ones after the kill, while leaving the infected alone. It was as if they knew that soon the illness would spread.

For some reason, I have not contracted the disease. Yet I have watched my friends and family succumb and become victims of the damned soulless life sucking bastards who rose from their graves to feast on the living.

Yet for the most part, they have ignored me. Why... why me? I am a man of science but this makes no sense.

Is this the doing of some higher power? .Some 'God' or 'Devil'? Using us as playthings for their amusements? Or is this something else entirely? Some truly malevolent virus created by some crazed but brilliant scientist? No. It was Me. My doing.

I returned to my lab, where we had been researching new vaccines for the new flu

season. Barricaded myself inside and tried to find a cure until my workplace was no longer sterile enough to keep the fresh samples uncontaminated. While I frantically and unsuccessfully searched for the cure, it never dawned on me to think about the accident a few days before the first outbreak.

Janice and I, we had been working in splicing two strains of influenza together, it worked for a time and we left the sample to its own devices. It wasn't until about six hours later when Janice had gone home that I'd noticed her containment suit had a tear in it where her air supply connected to her belt. I called her back in but by then the infection had begun to spread

We both knew that she was in trouble. We had just finished looking over the new virus on the microscope, and we knew it was a mean son of a bitch that we had created. We were so proud, our thoughts were only

on the possibilities of helping people, we could not have foreseen the dangers of this new virus.

It's amazing how fast it spread. Janice, patient zero, was the first to fall and the first to rise. She ripped her husband's throat out with her teeth. He flopped like a sack of potatoes, blood pulsing from the gaping hole in his neck to splatter all over Janice who chewed the flesh and larynx of her husband of fifteen years.

She proceeded to attack any healthy person nearby, not including me. Security broke her legs with their night sticks but still she moved on them, hands clawed at faces and eyes, they struck her with their weapons until she was a mass of broken bones but she still tried to attack.

She lay there. A horrific bag of skin covering a shattered body that groaned and gasped without feeling, remorse or recognition.

I ran.

Like a coward I ran.

It wasn't long until the healthy people were all fine, the 'dead' shuffled around for a while, gathering in packs and stripping the bodies of the dead bare to the bones. No muscle, no sinew no organs, bare bones covered in blood, some scattered, others perfectly replaced with thought and care. A stranger disease none have encountered.

I sit above them all in my little Tower.

My gun ready. One bullet is all it will take.

I know I don't have enough for them all.

I'll take it the one who began all this and destroyed the world.

It's what he deserves. For his failure to help to fix that which he had wrought.

Welcome to hell...

Population 0.



Artwork by Rose a Campbell

The Bite

By Tyger St. Germaine

Subway tunnels once teeming with life were now filled with the shuffling dead, searching blindly for their next meal. A piercing scream echoed off the tunnel walls followed by hungry moans. Zoe was being chased, running blindly for her life in an attempt to lose the zombies; but all it managed to accomplish was attracting more. The echo made it impossible to tell how close they were, but close enough to drive her fatigued body onward. Zoe had no idea where she was going, she could be trapped down here forever. And if she fell to the zombies, this would be her tomb..

Her heart soared when she saw a faint light up ahead. She didn't care what it was or where it lead, anything had to be better than this, although the zombies would see her. They were already alerted

and following her solely by sound. Zoe burst from the tunnel into a subway terminal where sunlight was pouring in from the entrance. As she tried to climb up on to the platform she was pulled back down. A zombie had grabbed hold of her ankle and was pulling her to its open mouth. She struggled to get free from its grip and just before it bit down Zoe managed to kick the thing in the face hard. It staggered back, releasing its hold on her. She leaped up on the platform and headed for the entrance not daring to look back, scaling the stairs two at a time until she reached the top where she stumbled and fell. Zoe was surprised by what she saw,. a city rebuilt with a massive wall surrounding it and filled with people. Obviously surprised to see her, they rushed over, weapons at the ready. It wasn't to help her but to deal with the zombies now shambling up the stairs and almost upon her. Zoe quickly got to her feet and managed to kick one back down the stairs and tried to shove another. But it grabbed

her and leaned in for the bite. Panicking, Zoe tried to push it off. The teeth raked against the flesh of her hand doing no damage before a bullet pierced its brain causing it to crumble lifelessly back down the stairs. Zoe stood in shock checking over and over if she was bit. There were no marks other than the many scrapes and cuts she had gotten from running blindly in the tunnel and feeling her way along the walls, but no bite marks, no torn flesh. Before Zoe could recover, someone grabbed her from behind and moved her away to safety.

The zombies that had followed Zoe were quickly destroyed and the subway entrance was sealed.. Zoe was taken to a makeshift hospital where she received a check up and her minor scrapes were patched up. She was given food and allowed to take a shower. It was heaven compared to her situation before. Zoe learned the fortified city was named New Haven and is the last human stronghold

against the zombie threat. Once she was cleared by the medical personnel on staff, Zoe was taken to a building near the centre of the city where she was given her own room where she could stay. There Zoe sat alone on her bed watching the sun set. She felt numb, still in shock at everything. One moment her whole world shattered, watching her family being ripped apart and forced to run for her life to the next moment here back in a world like none of it ever happened. And through it all, all she could do was stare at her hand. It didn't bite her but her hand was covered in small cuts and scrapes where the teeth grazed her. Was it enough to change her? Or was she okay? Questions raced through her mind but despite it all she never told anyone what happened. She didn't know why. Fear they would throw her out of the city or even worse kill her on the spot. Still she wondered. Checking over her hand again and again. She felt fine and there was no visual infection. Zoe tried to put it out of her mind and get some sleep.

Sleep did not come easy, Zoe thrashed about in her bed forced to relive her horrors. She awoke sometime after dawn with a start. Her mind blurred and at first was unsure where she was. Once panic subsided things became clear once again. For now she tried to go about her day and not think about the fear of her hand that plagued her. Zoe needed something to keep her busy, some type of job. Anything to keep her mind occupied. The only job in the city she could get was helping in the kitchen of the grand feeding hall. All meals were consumed together, safety in numbers. She would mostly assist the cooks whether it be chopping fruits and vegetables, stocking the supplies, or keeping the kitchen clean.

Life went on for Zoe and the fear of her hand started to fade from mind, until one morning. At breakfast, food was not appealing at all to Zoe despite how hungry

she was. When she tried to eat the smell and taste was horrible, like rotted garbage that sat in the Sun. She didn't understand it but hope it was something that would pass. The rest of the day wasn't any better. Zoe struggled to do her work feeling weak and shaky. Her vision blurred and she started to have trouble with coordination. The only constant was her feeling of hunger. But whenever she tried to eat, she was repulsed by the smell and taste of any food. That night no matter what she tried, Zoe could not sleep. The hunger gnawed at her mind and stomach giving her no peace. To make matters worse she could not get warm despite it being a hot night. Her body felt cold and she shivered huddled under a blanket. Thoughts of her hand began to creep their way back into her mind. She tried to banish them telling herself this is only a cold.

By morning she felt exhausted, her mind struggled to function. But she knew she had to get up and help get everyone's

breakfast ready. Her body was on auto pilot the whole day, she did her best to hide the fact she was not feeling herself. The fear of what they might do to her still present. All she needed was some rest and she would feel better she assured herself. Zoe kept busy with work waiting for the day to end. While chopping some vegetables for the evening meal, Zoe didn't even notice she had cut herself until she saw the small pool of blood on the cutting board. She started at her hand in shock watching it bleed. There was no pain, she couldn't understand why. All she could do was stare. Zoe no longer felt in control of herself, like she was watching from outside. She didn't even notice that her blood had run off the cutting board and onto the raw meat sitting nearby. After a moment Zoe snapped herself out of it and quickly cleaned up everything. Food was important and instead of throwing it away she rinsed it off before putting it in the pan to be cooked for dinner. She quickly left to bandage her hand.

That night Zoe avoided everyone else, didn't even bother to try eating again. The smell was too much for her, if she stayed any longer she feared she might throw up. Hunger still gripped her, driving her nearly out of her mind. Trying to ignore it, Zoe desired to return to her room to try to sleep it off.

The following morning Zoe awoke feeling worse. Her body was stiff and almost unresponsive, her only thought was to get out of bed. Though still cold, she no longer felt hungry. Whatever relief that thought gave her was instantly dashed away when she pulled away the covers and saw herself covered in what was now dried blood. It was all down her front. Slowly Zoe forced herself from the bed and to the bathroom mirror. What she saw should have caused her to scream by no sound came from her throat except a soft gurgle. Dried blood was caked all around her

mouth and face, and her eyes had turned a pale yellow. Her worse fear had come true. She had caught whatever disease that had brought the dead to life and plagued humanity. Zoe had become a zombie. And soon there would be more. She felt the need to run and hide, but her body no longer responded to her commands. It would be only a matter of time before people found whoever it was she fed upon. They too would rise up and prey upon the first person they came in contact with.

Zoe wanted to scream or cry, but all she could do was stand there and stare at herself. She knew it was only a matter of time before the hunger would return forcing her from her room to find living flesh to feed upon. She would have to witness the first hand gory details of such an act before her mind faded from conscious thought. Condemned to the hellish fate of the undead. Her only hope was that someone would find her and

anyone else she plagued and end their suffering before it spread any further.

But what Zoe failed to realize was that the blood tainted food she prepared for the evening meal was served to almost everyone in the city. Slowly they would start to turn unaware as Zoe was. And those that were left uncontaminated would be feeding stock for the newly dead. The last of humanity would be devoured and New Haven would become the City of the Dead.

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Chasing Zane

Episode 1, Lost in Old York

by Jacqueline Driggers

Cindy shifted uncomfortably on the shuttle seat. The ship-to-surface shuttle was crowded, full of lifeforms that she hadn't even read about, little less seen before. She just hoped she didn't accidentally do anything to insult any of them. She had never been off Montanet before and Zane knew that. So why did he have to go running off to another planet!? Why couldn't he have just gone into the deep woods, to their hunting cabin and sulked? She could have given him a week, and then went up to fetch him; and everything would have been fine.

That's what they always did.

But nooooo! He had to go offplanet, and without word to anyone as to why. Blast him! She'd woken up from a great sleep, to a roomful of parents

demanding to know what she'd done; and at that point, she hadn't done anything.

Well, she'd done something now.

Jeeze. She hoped that she had gotten on the right shuttle. If it weren't for all those addresses that Zane had her hold onto for him, she wouldn't have had a clue as to where to head.

She heard the shift in the shuttle engines, and felt the restraint fields come on. They were landing. She breathed a sigh of both anticipation and relief. Relief that the destination had been reached, another step in her journey completed. Yet, anticipation, still worried that she might have gotten on the wrong shuttle. The debarking at the space station had been so confusing.

Getting out of the house un-noticed on Montanet had been her big challenge. She had woken up to find her mom and dad on each side of the bed, and Zane's

parents standing at the foot of her bed, all demanding to know what was going on with Zane. Problem was, she didn't know. When she had seen him last, the day before, everything had been fine.

Fortunately her and, Zane's oldest brothers had come in and shooed the parents away; then explained that Zane had hopped a starliner to NuYork early that morning, without a word to anyone. So she had gathered together some things and slipped out the back door of the house, then caught the Belgrade bus to the shuttle station in nearby Livingston. From there she caught the shuttle to the Montanet space station, and from there, a starliner to NuYork.

"Thank you for travelling with Empress Interstellar Cruiseliners. When you think of travel, think of Empress," came the voice over the shuttle intercom system. "We'll be landing in a second, so please keep your seats and don't struggle

against the restraint fields. They're for your protection during landing. Stay seated until restraint fields go off and the 'debark now' signs come on. Please debark in an orderly manner, starting with the front rows and going back."

She sucked in a deep, nervous breath, still wondering if she was on the right shuttle? She had wanted the shuttle to the central debarking station in Old York.

The sound of the engines changed, and she felt the soft bump of the landing beam taking hold, and then the thump of the shuttle touching down. Once again, a voice came over the intercom, "Thank you for travelling Empress Cruiseliners. We have arrived at the Old York south central landing pad. Baggage claim will be open and waiting to serve you. Doors are now open. Please debark in an orderly manner, stay on the green path through the gates, and enjoy your stay in Old York."

With that the voice quit, and people starting getting up and collecting their things from the overhead before leaving the shuttle. Cindy just sat there in a bit of a shock. She was so sure she had gotten on the right shuttle, so very sure! She tried to tamp down the panic that was rising within her. "Stay calm Cindy," she mumbled softly to herself, "don't panic. You're a smart girl and you can handle this." Yes, she thought to herself, I am and I can.

Step one was to collect her things from the overhead, and get off the shuttle. Hopefully her roll-ee bag would be at baggage claim at least.

The landing pad was surrounded by a tall fence, with city all around. She followed along behind the other departing passengers, to the baggage claim area. Not much thinking was involved.

She claimed her bag well enough, and was shuttled out the door with the

flow of people. Outside the door, were streams of people going up and down the sidewalks, various size buildings all around, and vehicles of various kinds zipping up and down the street.

She didn't just feel lost. She was lost! And then she began to feel a great panic well up inside her, so she began to look around for a corner to retreat to. She found a small space just on the other side of the constantly opening doors of the shuttle station. She huddled back against the wall, into a corner created by the building, and just stared at the city before her.

Now what to do for step two? Her mind was drawing a blank, as fear and panic tried to engulf her. This wasn't where she wanted to be. This wasn't what she had planned for on the cruise here. And she didn't know what to do now.

There was no ground transport station here. No way to arrange transport to Zane's friend's place here in Old York. If only Zane were here, she thought miserably. Then that sparked an idea. Zane was here in the city, she hoped. Maybe he was within reach of her datapad, and she could vid him? If she could do that, then everything would be okay.

She felt the tears start to fall as she fumbled through her carryall bag, searching for her datapad. A new fear started to engulf her, and the panic rose, as the thought swirled through her head - what if, in her haste to leave the house, she had left it at home? A new group of tears started to fall as panic set in while she frantically dug for her datapad, while keeping her roll-ee bag strap looped over her arm.

#

Zane lay back on Harrison's plush couch, stretched out, and sighed. This was the life. Kicking back in his buddy's plush apartment in Old York, far from his nagging parents. Yeah, this had definitely been the thing to do.

"You know Zane, I'm really glad you decided to come," Harrison called out from his desk in the adjoining room.

"You don't mind me using your place as a hideout?" Zane replied, a smile on his face.

"Are you kidding me! My parents love it. They've nagged and nagged me about taking time off to have some fun, a break between Uni and career." Harrison looked around his comp screen at his friend laying stretched out comfortably on his couch.

Zane was smiling and trying to think up some witty comeback, when he heard a dinging sound. "So what do you

have dinging over there?" he called out to Harrison.

"Me? Nothing. I don't have anything dinging over here. It's you! You're dinging," Harrison said with a smile. "I always knew you were dingee anyhow," and laughed.

Zane gave a slight scowl. "Well the only thing I could have dinging is my datapad, and the only one who makes it ding like that is when Cindy is vidphoning me. And she's back on . ." Zane went pale and gasped, then grabbed up his datapad with a sense of great urgency.

#

What happens next? Want to read more? Visit me on Wattpad where you can read this and more from me. Thanks for reading. --

<http://www.wattpad.com/JacquelineDrigge>

[rs](#)

Stories by Candlelight

By Valery Riddle

Gather round, friends, gather round. Time for a story now, I'd wager. And we want to make it scarier than usual. Alright then, here goes.

Once upon a time, when people were much closer to land and nature than we are now, there was a village with a bit of a forgettable stupid and simplistic name. It was situated on the vast reaches where the Slavic tribes had settled. The village was quite ordinary, really, but there was a khutor not far from it, a desolated farmstead, where a man lived with his lady-love. An ordinary couple, nothing to write home about, except that people in the village talked about them quite a bit. The rumour went, those two lived together out of wedlock. I mean, now you can do it, and nobody would spare you a second glance but then! Then it was quite the news. People were simpler then. But nothing happens without a reason. So here is the story about this couple. And don't judge

me, the story isn't mine, just what I've heard from the nice people, traveling the world.

The man was often away hunting, and his lady-love stayed home, waiting for him to return. She was making the most beautiful shawls on her loom, and selling them for the cheapest prices down at the village. And when the man came home, his sack full of furs, one of the most valuable things in the north where they lived, he would always give some away to the villagers, so generous he was. The villagers had come to think of this couple the kindest of people despite their sin and always returned their favours.

Sooner or later, the woman became heavy with the man's child, as is the natural order of things. She still worked at her loom but it was hard for her to come down to the village on foot, so the villagers visited her house quite often. They even asked an old grandma, who lived alone on the outskirts, to stay there

night and day when possible, and help around the house.

One day there was a terrible storm, and the villagers got all the cattle off the pastures and made sure they were safely in the barns, where the angry weather couldn't reach. The harvest fields were surely to suffer but there was nothing to be done about that.

The storm lasted well into the night and little children were scared in their tiny cradles, calling for their mothers. But when everybody got out of their houses in the morning, the grass and the trees were basking in sunshine, bright with rainwater drops on every leaf. But what they saw wasn't so joyful.

The grandma who was left to look after the woman was running down the hill much faster than her senile legs could manage were she not so obviously terrified. Her face was distorted with fear and her grey hair was breaking loose from under her headscarf. She kept repeating 'they took her' until she was helped to sit

down and given water. When she caught her breath, the grandma described the following.

It was late at night and the storm was getting worse by the minute; the woman was tired from the day's work, so she was already asleep. The grandma was by the stove, closing it for the night and making sure the smoke was going up the chimney as it should, when she heard some noises by the window. It sounded like somebody was singing outside and the grandma crossed herself three times, because who but the evil spirits could be out in such a storm. But the singing was getting louder and louder, until the cold fog slipped under the door and into the main chamber. The grandma hid behind the stove, crossing herself even faster and whispering a prayer, and she saw the fog turn into three creatures she could only call women just because there was no other word for their appearance. On crooked legs, but tall and skinny, their stomachs bloated out of proportion and their hair

loose and covered in mud, they looked like they had come straight from beyond the grave. The old woman recognised them with a gasp - they were the Boginkas, the child-killers, the unholy ones who committed suicide after they buried or drowned their babies. They loved to steal other women's babies, or exchange them with their own evil spawn.

The grandma could only watch in fright as they circled the bed of the pregnant woman who was sleeping peacefully until they smothered her with a pillow and ripped out her stomach. The Boginkas took the baby out, cackling and whispering something between themselves, until the baby cried out for the first time, which made the women burst into laughter. They soon left, carrying the baby and dragging the dead body of its mother after them, leaving the bloody trail on the floor. The grandma was sitting there petrified until the morning came and the first cry of the rooster made the veil of evil lift.

The father of the baby never showed up in the village and nobody could tell the truth of what may have happened to him. The tellers are unsure if the Boginkas found and enslaved him, or if they tickled him to death when he came across their secret lair where the river went by the marshland, or if they just drowned him. The only sign that the man was gone was that his horse returned to the village not two days after, steaming and its mane all tangled. Boginkas love it when they find a horse to ride and torment all night long.

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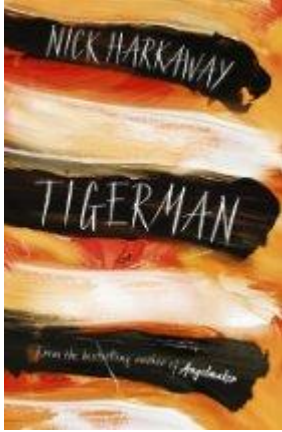
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Book reviews

By Pete Sutton



Tigerman

By Nick Harkaway

How does an author follow up an award winning book? By writing something completely different but equally compelling. This is the trick that Nick Harkaway has pulled off with this, his third book.

Lester Ferris is a sergeant in the infantry who winds up on the island of Mancreu after a tour in Afghanistan. This is a former British colony in the Arabian sea that has been given over to the NATO and Allied Protection Force of Mancreu (NatProMan). Technically Lester is the

senior officer of the United Kingdom's Mancreu command and senior consular member. But the whole island is imminently going to be demolished due to an extinction level threat from outgassing of toxicity and mutant bacteria from volcanic vents. Previous outgassings have had some unusual properties and are totally unpredictable.

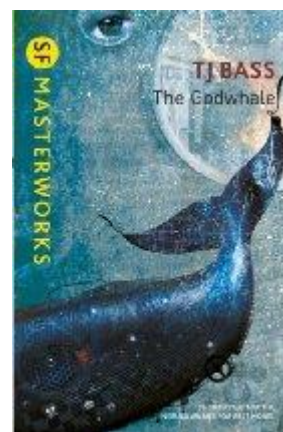
Lester has established several fair weather friendships but none so important to him than with 'the boy', a comics book obsessed, internet savvy local youth who calls himself 'Robin'. He is also friends with the NatProMan man in charge, the Japanese scientist studying the island and a local café owner. The island has become a bit of a backwater, due to people Leaving (yes with a capital L) and the UK government basically abandoning it. This has led to a fleet of illicit ships floating just off the island, listening stations, black-ops and all sorts of other shady dealings that governments can treat with plausible deniability.

Lester's job is basically to keep the consulate ticking over and "not get involved" apart from to do some basic policing and representing Britain in a nominal way. When violence starts to spread and Lester gets more involved with the boy it becomes ever more difficult for him to remain aloof and he feels the need to become involved, which the boy encourages. It isn't long before the legend of the Tigerman is born.

Tigerman, although ostensibly built like a superhero origin tale and drawing on comic book colour ("full of win", "We are made of awesome") is an endearing paternal tale and a complex character study. In fact Tigerman only just dips its toe into genre and if you're looking for full on SF&F then this may not be the place to look. However it is a great read and Mancreu and its colourful cast of characters is a great place to visit for the duration of this book. It has things to say about politics and the state of the world making it a more reflective book than the

previous two, but all the more powerful for it. It is also a book, like *Gone Away World* where, when you get to the end, you are tempted to start all over again. That, I feel, is the sign of a great book.

Overall - Harkaway just seems to be getting better, if you like his other books go and get a copy



Godwhale

By TJ Bass

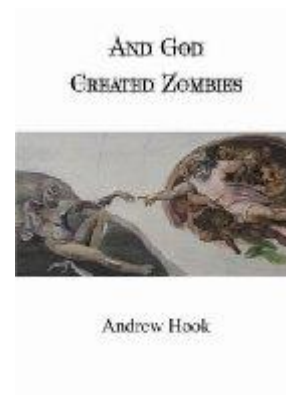
Apparently this guy only wrote two books and this is the sequel to his first one, which I haven't read. I bought this on the strength of it being an SF Masterworks and the blurb on the back, which made it sound right up my street, plus it was also

recommended by Jeff VanderMeer.

Covering several thousand years' worth of history this is a bit of a mess structurally; new characters are thrown into the mix (seemingly at random) throughout the book, even towards the end. There are many lurches in time and sometimes these are confusing plot wise, although to be honest there isn't much of a plot either. I've struggled to think how to summarise. In the future the seas are dead, most of humanity live underground in the hive, mechs farm the land, the Godwhale of the title comes back to life when the seas are re-seeded, the hive comes into conflict with the "Benthics", outsiders who live under the ocean.

And yet, it's never dull, it's full of crazy interesting ideas and I enjoyed it a lot. It shouldn't work, but somehow it does. I wish I'd read the first book, as potentially some of the mysteries wouldn't be so mysterious?

Overall – some structural problems but an interesting read nevertheless



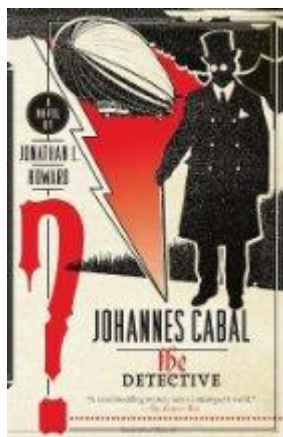
And God created Zombies

By Andrew Hook

John has just been dumped by his girlfriend because he's too self-obsessed. He has few friends. Worked in finance, until the meltdown and is now basically sat on his bum with nothing to do. When he does a favour for someone and they drive to his house they accidentally run over a man in an alleyway. When they discover that he is both already dead and also still moving John is drawn into the usual zombie apocalypse story development. However that is all well-trodden so Hook decides to go off-piste and treats us to something a little different, something a bit

more intelligent and interesting. This is a very brief book, novella length really, and effective because it doesn't feel the need to belabour the point.

Overall – Interestingly philosophical take on the zombie genre, something a little different



Johannes Cabal the detective

By Jonathan L Howard

Although this is the second in the series I think you could probably read it out of order without too much being spoiled, still it is worth reading the first one. We start the book in the company of Cabal as he is in prison awaiting execution for stealing a necromantic book in the small state of

Mirkavia. When the rulers of Mirkavia decide to use his necromantic skills this starts a series of events that sees Cabal on a kind of *murder on the Orient express* with airships. There is a bit of a tonal change between the first and second books but Howard's trademark wit and clever prose is here still, in spades. There's a whole host of new characters and Cabal, although feeling occasional twinges of a feeling he struggles to identify (his conscience), is his usual sarcastic master of understatement. I enjoyed the first book very much, this one cemented my love for the series and I'll be getting to the third book very soon. As a bonus there is an afterword that includes a 30 odd page short story set after the events of the book, this was also very enjoyable. Howard is a local author and I was lucky enough to be at a reading he gave in November in which he introduced the forthcoming 4th Johannes Cabal book which can be found here: <http://bristolcon.podbean.com/> along with other local writers doing readings.

Overall – Johannes Cabal is a marvellous protagonist and it is a pleasure to spend time in his company.

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