

Love Zombies
of San Diego

E. Z. Graves

Love Zombies of San Diego

A Young Adult Novella

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DEDICATION

To all the zombies in Congress who just don't "get it." Our kids are real, and you just keep shuffling and groaning about "big government." Protect our kids with decent health care, education and food stamps.

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5:15 PM, SAN DIEGO, CA

My name is Josh. I don't know my last name, and I don't really know how I became a zombie, but I do know I have to tell you this story. We're "love zombies," and we have joined forces with some breather teens who fight out of the La Jolla Caves. We're going on a dangerous mission, and we want you to come with us.

Zombie teens in this book can talk, and they can fight, and they join forces with breather teens who want to make their own mark in this battle to the death with the Zombie Apocalypse. Since we are dead, we can infiltrate the old school zombies and find out the source of the plague. With the help of world renowned geneticist, Dr. Mike Barkin, we're going to kick these creepers in the ass, and we're going to grease our swords with their brains. My name is Josh, no last name, and I'm a zombie hunter. I'm also in love with another zombie named Tasha. We'll take you with us as we crush these hordes where they live--deep inside their hive--and what happens to us will happen to you because you'll be dead too, one day, and that day might be coming sooner than you think! If the zeros don't get you, then we will. But, hey, seriously? We're the good guys. Or, are we? Check out this book to find out the truth--if you can handle the truth, that is. Not many adults can. I suppose we're their last hope. Nice to have you with us. We'll watch your back if you watch ours.

PROLOGUE: LOS DIAS DE LOS MUERTOS

I was wandering down Main Street in the Hispanic section of El Cajon, which means “the box.” It was November 2, the second day in the celebration of the dead, and I could see all the little poor kids running around wearing their skeleton and ghoulish costumes. They were really cute, but I also noted that they were being protected by several adults who were armed with AK-47s. I, too, was wearing a skeleton mask and costume because I didn’t want to get shot.

They should have been celebrating me because I was one of the dead. In fact, as I looked around, I could see the signs of my predecessors. The stores were broken into and looted, and the cars were smashed along the street. There were bloody stains on the sidewalk where still-live bodies had been dragged by the real living dead. Me? Yes, I am dead, but I’ve discovered that I am also alive. When I was around ten years old, about the age of the kid who is running past me right now, I ate my first human brain.

At that time, I thought I was still a zero, a z, a zombie 1.0. The change must have happened in an instant because one moment I was a drooling, mindless, brain-eating ghoul, and then the next moment I began to talk. What did I say, you might ask? I said, “Man does not live by bread alone.”

Why did I say that? I could have said a billion different things, but that’s what erupted out of my lungless diaphragm. I don’t know where I get these thoughts. I haven’t read any books. All I know is what I find on the Internet. I do know we’re in the middle of a Zombie Apocalypse. I also know that I don’t want to be associated with these monsters.

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That's why I'm now carrying a sword with me. It's a big one, and I call it "Rockstar." I use it to slice the heads off these unloving zombies. Unloving? Yes, you might say, that would make me the opposite. Indeed, I did discover I was one of these "love" zombies when I walked past a vacant lot near Euclid and El Cajon Boulevard. I had just cleaned up the street of some walkers, one of my prime duties, when I spotted another one standing alone in the middle of this vacant lot.

It was a lot between a pawn shop and a tavern called *Los Hermanos*. She was wearing a ripped-up cheerleader's outfit of some kind, and her face, legs and arms had the hallmark greyness of the living dead. I expected her to groan and stagger toward me at any moment.

I was about ready to charge her and remove her head when I noticed something strange. She suddenly began walking around in a circle talking to herself! Up to that moment I believed I was the only one of my kind in existence. How could there be another talking dead? Was she just a crazy human who was painted up for *La Dia de los Muertos*? No, she was certainly a zombie, but she was talking. I moved closer to listen.

"Who am I? Where am I? Is this for real?" she was saying.

"I think you're a love zombie," I said, and I watched as her head snapped around to stare at me.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Get away from me!"

"Now, now, I won't hurt you," I said, and I took off my mask and held it to my side. "You think you're one of them, don't you?" I asked, pointing to a dead head down the street who was standing still and gazing up at something that was making more noise than we were.

"I don't know who I am! Who are you?"

"My name is Joshua. I don't know my last name. I only know my first. I thought I was the only talker around here. Now I found you. We should talk."

I knew she was a teen like me, and I also knew if I didn't convince her soon that she should stay calm, I might lose her. "C'mon, let's go over to a place I know we can be protected."

"No! I can't remember anything, and I don't want to go with you. You're a monster! Look at you. You're death warmed over. You stink, and you have that stupid skeleton suit on," she said, moving away from me.

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“Hey. Seriously? Have you looked in the mirror lately? You’re not exactly Miss America, you know?”

“What? How do I look?” She suddenly broke into a trot and headed over to an office across the street. She stared at herself in the reflection of the broken shards of window. “Oh my god!” she yelled. “What’s happening to me?”

I ran up to her and put my hand over her mouth. “Hey, quiet down! Do you want the entire walking dead army down on us here?”

“Do something for me...please?” she pleaded, her beautiful green eyes sparkling.

“Anything,” I said.

“Kill me,” she said, her eyes looking down at the sword on my hip.

“Sorry, no can do, sweetheart. I’m a love zombie. So are you, by the way, or you wouldn’t be talking like this. You just haven’t realized your true nature yet, but it’ll come soon.”

“No! I hate you! I don’t remember anything about where I came from. I just want to die!” she screamed, breaking down completely into heaving sobs.

That’s when the mob of zeros came at us, and we had to exit, stage left. I did note, however, that there was a picture of a pretty young woman in an advertisement on the window where this young lady was looking at herself. It said “Tasha Likes Blue Boy Soap.”

“C’mon, Tasha. You’re coming with me,” I said, and I dragged her, kicking and screaming all the way, to my hideout uptown near the San Diego Zoo.

1 IT'S ALL HAPPENING AT THE ZOO

I suppose it was just the act of love between two people, during the middle of a war, but how was I supposed to know I would be born with that craving for love and life deep inside my zombie self? While my fellows were busily learning to stalk the streets and countryside with their groans and their slobbering screams, looking to eat the brains of humans, I was sitting at home, searching on Facebook for friends who could show me a little bit of affection.

What, after all, is a reanimated corpse? Why are we stereotyped as soulless, decrepit monsters that have no purpose in life but creating more of our own kind by waging indiscriminate war with our human enemies? Why, I've seen human Gothic and Heavy Metal groups on the Web who are more nihilistic and death-worshipping than any zombie I've ever met. Life and death, I have determined at the age of 17, is truly in the body of the beholder.

My parents met each other on the urban battlefield, fighting the humans, but when they found that spark of love deep inside their ragged, scrounged remnants of what passed for a body at the time, they came together for that one night and did the unspeakable for us undead: they copulated with their corpses. This sin means immediate banishment from our kin, and most certainly must have caused a chain-reaction in what was left of their human DNA because every human they bit into, from that moment forward, was also turned into our kind of "loving" zombie.

Talk about your minority groups! We were reanimated to walk the Earth and find love, while our zombie and human brethren were fighting it out to the bitter end. Of course, we have to survive, so we have found a way to meet in secret ways, and we have learned to live two lives (or undead lives). To other, killer zombies, we pretend to be one of them, creeping around dark and damp places,

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groaning and moaning; I've even got that death stare down pat. If you don't have the death stare, you don't last long amidst the bounteous reanimated killers and brain feasters. Of course, whenever the action gets serious, we have to find a way to escape without being noticed, so we can re-group and plot our next move.

When we do get together, we call ourselves "lover zombies," and we feast on stories about how we will find ways to mend our differences with humans and perhaps even exist in peaceful coexistence with them in the future. Hell, we all like good rock music, I am learning to drive a car, and I think my stare makes me look a little like Justin Beiber. I even wear my hair the way he does, and my girlfriend, Tasha, likes it a lot!

* * *

Teenagers, I suppose, were meant to be zombies. The others I feel sorry for. Really, I mean, little kids and even babies staggering and crawling around wanting to devour human flesh? How gross is that? On the other hand, we teens have been part of the walking dead from time immemorial. Have you recently entered a teen's bedroom? I am talking about a real-life teen, not the fabricated teens you see on television reality shows or sitcoms. There have been clothes found in a teen's room that a zombie would have loved to adorn. Filthy, moldy, torn and ripped, this is the casual attire of the teen who has entered into what my mother used to call the "adolescent cave of hell." Why, the conservative Supreme Court of these United States recently judged the teen brain as being so underdeveloped in the important "decision making" frontal areas, that they refused to condemn him or her to death—no matter what the heinous or bloody murder the teen may have committed.

Even though the zombie wars were happening all over the world, our little battle zone was in San Diego, California. The configuration of the virus that caused humans and their pets to become the walking dead had a most auspicious result. After our government failed to raise enough taxes to support services to the people, our economy hit the skids. There was open class warfare. The rich refused to share their wealth, and after the government's military services were disbanded because of the lack of funds, the elite took it upon themselves to hire most of these unemployed veterans for their own protection.

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As a result, the inner cities, universities, public hospitals, public schools and national parks all became pitiful and squalid areas wherein the masses of poor would congregate to plan their attacks on the rich, who were living inside their gated and fortified communities located in the suburbs and in the big hotels around America. The same thing was happening throughout the rest of the world. These poor communal areas became breeding grounds for disease, and the dead virus was the ultimate catastrophe to hit us in our dens of poverty.

Exactly when the first zombie attacked a poor human, nobody really knows, but the virus spread like wildfire. Soon, the majority of the inner cities were populated by the walking dead, and when my mother and father copulated, it had been almost ten years since the class warfare had begun.

The original zombie culture attacked the rich in primitive ways. Since the poor humans who lived among the zombies were soon devoured and turned into zombies themselves, the only food to be had was located inside the suburbs of the elite.

The rich, also, had their own logistical problem. In order to get food, they had to leave the security of their barbed wire fences and machine gunners on every rooftop and travel out into the rural areas to get their vegetables and to slaughter any animals they could find. The stores were long since ravaged, as were many of the agribusiness farms, so what was left was grown by the nests of what used to be called “the natural foods movement,” a collection of liberal farms that produced organic produce and free range beef, pigs and poultry. Ironically, the only ones who could afford this natural food were the rich elite, so they were the ones to arm these farms with cast-off government weaponry and military personnel.

Before the open class warfare began, San Diego County had over 300 organic farms, more than in any county in the nation. Therefore, the elite living in La Jolla, Rancho Santa Fe, Del Mar, Mission Hills, San Juan Capistrano and Coronado Island, all knew exactly where they had to go to get their food.

As you know, love zombies can communicate. This gives us more in common with humans than with our fellow zombies. Also, in their better moments, humans can also find time to love. Old school zombies, on the other hand, only have death on their programmed radar 24/7. We have hooked-up with the teenagers from the rich elite. Their parents do not want them to have anything to do with us because

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we are, after all, from the “poor side of town.” However, they are teens, and they enjoy rebelling, so we are now brothers and sisters when it comes to spreading the “love” to our ever-increasing zombie population.

Tasha, Gordon, Barbie, Neil and Rita are in my group. We have been together for six months. We got together while zombies were pillaging the San Diego Zoo. As our deadhead brethren were busy jumping the defenseless animals in their compounds and ripping out their flesh, we collected inside the Children’s Zoo.

Neil, who was a Jewish rabbi’s son in his human life, carries around two kosher slaughtering knives, or *chalaf*. The one for chickens and other fowl is six inches long, and the other one, for larger animals, is eighteen inches. We came upon him as he was putting the knife to a sheep inside the petting zoo. He was inspecting the knife by running his thumb nail down the blade to test for any nicks or gouges. If he finds any, then he must immediately re-sharpen the blade. The knife has no point at the end of it and is of equal width from top to bottom. These precautions are necessary in order to guarantee that the neck of the animal will not be torn. Neil must cut through the trachea and esophagus to the jugular vein very quickly and in a clean fashion. He must not kill the animal by stabbing it.

The animal’s neck is first washed thoroughly to remove any sand particles in the fur which could cause a nick in the knife during slaughter. Neil’s hand must be very steady, and he must employ one continuous movement, carefully avoiding the spine. This cut only takes a few seconds and is a much more humane method of killing an animal than are such common practices as smashing the head, shooting the animal or scalding it while it is still alive.

Following the slaughter, the carcass is hung upside down so that the blood can drain properly. Then Neil checks for adhesions on the lungs, which would indicate an abscess. If one is found, the animal is rejected as unkosher.

At this point the *traibering* process is begun. The major blood vessels, nerves and forbidden fats will be removed.

The carcass is then divided into primal cuts. The next step is soaking the meat in water for 30 minutes. It is then salted for one hour, and then washed another three times.

As we observed this, we were all very attracted to the ritual gentleness of the act. While our old school zombie brethren were busy attacking and ripping out the throats of the poor animals inside the main zoo, we were observing a most humane

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method of killing for food. We were meat eaters, of course, but this method became the only way we would eat our meat in the future, and we were proud of it. We weren't even Jewish, but we knew this was a practice that gave the animal dignity and caused the least amount of pain.

As Neil prayed before knifing the sheep, we could see the animal close its eyes and become lost in reverie, it seemed, and Neil carefully collected the blood flowing from the sheep's neck inside a large pan that had been used to feed the animals in the petting zoo.

That's when Peter Vanderhyde and his crew came upon us. Peter and his group of five rich teens, three guys and two girls, hunt from the La Jolla Cliffs. All but one of them attended the Episcopalian Bishop's School and were ready to transfer to their assortment of private universities around the country when the zombie wars changed all of that. Now they killed zombies for their rich friends.

Peter and his friends like to use Uzis when they kill zombies. But, being the smart ass rich kids that they are, they have attached silencers on their automatic weapons because they know zombies are attracted to loud noises.

As we all stood around munching on Neil's kosher mutton, we soon found ourselves surrounded by these five rich kids, who were smiling and pointing their Uzis at our heads. I guess we would have all been dead meat if it hadn't been for Peter and his big mouth. He always seems to have a smart-ass comment to make about everything, and this was no exception.

"Hey, check it out. Dead-boy remembers his table manners. Where are your napkins, creepers?"

"I don't suppose you'd know anything about proper manners," I said, and I could see my speaking caused quite a stir amongst the La Jolla gang. Peter lowered his gun and the others did the same.

"Hey, Pete, the dude can talk!" shouted Slim, a tall, blonde-haired surfer.

"How can you do that?" asked Peter. "I thought zombies were dead meat."

"No, it would be more correct to call us tenderized meat," I said, smiling. "I think our time could be more appropriately used if we were to pay a visit to that really dead meat over there in the big zoo. They're ripping it apart."

"How do we know they won't turn on us?" said Nicole, a hot redhead.

"Seriously. I say we waste them," said Slim, raising his Uzi's muzzle to point at us.

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“Yeah, I don’t trust zombies who can talk,” said Tim, raising his gun.

“Look at their dead-gray faces! And their clothes...they’re completely ruined,” said Susan, the brunette.

Peter raised his hand to stop them from shooting us. He then called his posse together around him for a short conference. After a few minutes, they turned around to face us. I was hoping we didn’t have to attack them to get out of this alive. Barbie was fingering the ZT spikes on her bandolier, and Gordon’s arm tendons were flexing nervously around his sword.

“We talked it over. We want to know a few things. First, what are you doing here?” said Peter.

“We’re here to kill zombies, just like you. We aren’t their kind at all. It’s just that we need to find out who we really are, and that’s why we got together,” I said.

“Yeah, that’s kind of why we got together,” said Peter. “How many of you are there?”

“We don’t really know. All we hear about our kind we hear on the Internet. We’ve set-up a group on Facebook, and we’ve received IMs from hundreds around the world who say they’re like us. Maybe we can get together sometime in the future. If we can beat these groaners, that is.” I was hoping my words would convince them because I knew our looks weren’t.

Peter finally nodded to the others, and they nodded back to him in agreement. “All right. I suppose you freaks are legitimate. Let’s go! Bring whatever weapons you have, and show us what you’re made of. If we catch you doing anything weird, you’ll get a bullet in the forehead,” Peter said, waving his set into action. “You are now part of our gang. We’re called the Dead Head Posse. Let’s ride!”

I suppose it’s appropriate at this point to explain the “weaponry” we use when we attack our relatives. What better person to kill a zombie than a fellow zombie? We know all their weaknesses. Old school zombies are loners, unless they hear loud noises or they smell living flesh. So, we can sneak up on them pretty easily and make mush out of their skulls.

Also, our three women, Tasha, Barbie and Rita, have these great wild voices. They know how to put out the right zombie vibes that can bring these suckers right into our sights so we pick them off, one by one. Finally,

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our assortment of special zombie-killing tools gives us an advantage. We use blades because we can usually get up close and personal in ways that Peter and his pack of breathers cannot.

I use my personal favorite blade, the ZT Vakra, which is modeled after the Nepali kukri, an ancient, time-tested design that, in the hands of the legendary Gurkha soldiers, has raised kingdoms and maintained empires, and is still in use today as a ceremonial decapitator of water buffalo. It's a 19-inch, slightly curved blade that weighs almost two pounds. I like to say that I can "Rock the Vakra at the 5th chakra" (said by the Hindus to reside at the throat) and a zombie's skull will be separated from the spinal column, and his reeking corpse from its desperate attachment to the world. I have a drop-sheath that loops over my belt and straps around my leg, so I can easily draw my Vakra to decapitate the enemy. We all have nick-names for our weapons, and I call my Vakra "Rockstar."

Neil, of course, uses his kosher *chalaf* blades, the same ones he cleans and uses to fix our meals. We don't find it gross because he cleans the blades very carefully with alcohol and a chamois. He calls his blades his "golems."

My girlfriend, Tasha, prefers the "Harvester," a four-pound, 31-inch razor-sharp sword that can clear a field of zombies in record time. Made with 5160 spring steel, and an all-steel cutout handle, she is the perfect blade for the professional zombie killer. Like a giant razor blade being scraped across the face of the Zombie Apocalypse, Tasha can cut a bloody furrow through any horde of dead heads standing out in a farmer's field. She says, however, that she doesn't recommend zombie flesh as fertilizer. The nickname for her sword is "Babe."

Gordon is a big dude, his papa was a pro wrestler named "Cargo" in the old world, so he prefers his d'Capitan, that's modeled after the ancient falcata used by Iberian mercenaries and warriors to hold back the Roman legions. With this baby, Gordon can deliver a ferocious, flesh-rending over-hand hack, while still maintaining some of the speed and versatility of a swordsman. He calls his weapon "Admiral."

We call Barbie and Rita our "sneaky sisters" because they use specialized weapons to attack their zombie prey. Barbie uses ZT Spikes that she wears wrapped around her chest in a bandolier. These spikes can penetrate

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zombie skulls, and she can throw them with power and uncanny accuracy. Her father was a professional knife thrower, and he taught her all he knew before a zombie got him. She calls her spikes her “Sneaky Step-sisters.”

Rita, on the other hand, prefers wreaking havoc with her Squid Ax, which is a deadly steel blade that wraps around her fist knuckles and is wielded in close quarters like a monkey-wrench. She can do this, of course, because zombie blood and bites have no effect on us the way they do on the breathers. Rita also performs more prosaic tasks like skinning an animal, cutting rope, or divvying up five-pound blocks of scavenged government cheese. She calls her ax “Calamari.”

“Hey, Joshua!” Tasha was calling to me from the Children’s Zoo exit. “Are you coming, or not?”

I suppose I irritate the rest of our merry band because I’m the journalist of the group. Can I help it if my father was an anchor man at local KNSD TV? I guess that’s why he became a love zombie. He was making out with my Mom in the green room at the station, getting it on right there, when a pack of old school zombies crashed their party. They never had a chance to consummate their love, so to speak, so I guess the only way they could do this was to radically evolve their DNA after they awoke from the dead as zombies. Whatever. I was born, and my Dad’s genes are there inside me to inspire me to write my experiences down for the record.

Speaking of genetics, I have this private theory about how these zombies came into existence. My conception began when I began noticing that the zombies I sliced up had skin that resembled a soft fur. I knew they weren’t hair follicles, so I stuck one under a microscope. I ran a computer check on what it was, and I discovered that it was more like the hair on bumblebees and honey bees. I also began watching the zombies very closely. They seemed to send out scouts who would begin groaning loudly when there was any living flesh around, and they would even do what I like to call a “zombie dance,” whereby they would wiggle their backsides in a really weird way. These two clues led me to the theory I called the “insect mutation hypothesis.” However, I didn’t want to tell my comrades about it until I had thought it out in more detail.

When I arrived at the Lost Forest Gorilla Compound in the heart of the zoo, it was chaos. The male gorillas were attacking the zombies from a perimeter around

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the females, who were also showing fangs and beating their chests, and in the center were the youngest members of the tribe, squealing and hooting in fear.

The zombies were coming at them in waves, through a large hole in the reinforced glass that had been smashed open by the sheer weight of the hundreds of walking dead, so if the first wave couldn't make it through the slashing fangs and pounding fists of the silverback males, then the next wave would. Peter and his posse of Dead Heads were picking off as many of the staggering monsters as they could. I watched, as one corpse, his head filled with maggots, was stopped by two bullets from Peter's Uzi. There was the barely audible "thump!" from his silencer, and then the spray of maggots from in back of the zombie's head as the projectiles exited, and the tall zombie slumped to the ground.

However, I also saw one poor gorilla being mauled by three zombies as he fought valiantly to fling them from his hairy, 400-pound body. His huge right bicep had been torn open by the mouth of a female zombie, who was clinging to it like a rag doll.

Tasha, however, was having none of this. She sprang at the three creepers with her Harvester swooping through the air like the Grim Reaper. First, the head of the female was popped off like the cork from a champagne bottle, and I watched it roll down the hill toward the observation pit, where zoo visitors can watch the gorillas at play. Then, she struck the second zombie, a squat, hairy guy that looked like he'd been a truck driver in his other life. His bearded head was severed from its plump torso in one swipe of my girlfriend's blade.

The third zombie, a gargantuan dude with a slice of glass in his big mitts, was coming at Tasha from behind. I had to act fast before he could slice her like lunch meat. I knew I couldn't get over to her from my location beside the Treehouse Restaurant at the top of the compound, but I saw that Barbie was down below me, about ten yards from Tasha and the zombie goon.

"Hey, Barbie! To your right, about six o'clock!" I yelled, and, just as the big dead boob was right next to Tasha, raising the glass blade above his head, Barbie let fly a spike from her bandolier. It came at the head of the zombie with a powerful "whooshing" sound and struck him right between the eyes! He fell backward in his tracks, the glass falling harmlessly on the grass alongside his inanimate body.

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“You go girl!” Tasha screamed at her, raising her fist.

That was the usual signal for us to begin what we call our “Duty Dance with Death.” We got this name from part of the title of a great old sci-fi novel by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. called Slaughterhouse-Five or, The Children’s Crusade, A Duty Dance with Death. It’s kind of our thematic routine, if you will. Whenever we need to slay a ton of zilch brains really fast, this is what we do. It’s kind of like when they play that old Queen song “We Will Rock You” at the team sports events all over the world. We get our dander up, our spirits are high and our berserkers get it on.

This time, it was the old silverback gorilla that got us going. There he was, transplanted for survival into our zoo because human poachers in the African rainforests were killing his pals and serving them as bush meat burgers, and now these zombie poachers wanted his flesh. He was fighting with dignity and with courage, and we entered the fray using his example as our inspiration.

Rita and Barbie led our parade. They would pick-off the straggler dead heads, the ones who stay outside the pack and wander around with the typically glazed-over, goony stare of theirs. Barbie pitches her spikes at them with dexterity, each long metal blade finding its way through the thick zombie skull like a knife through butter. Rita works on the stragglers in-close, wreaking havoc with her Calamari. She bores into them and slices their throats in three deft thrusts of her fists, until the head is wobbly. Then, she lets out her banshee scream of victory, and pushes the head off the shoulders of the creeper, and it falls, rolling along the earth like a soccer ball. Rita then yells out “Goal!” and kicks the head with a mighty crush of her steel toe.

Next, we formed what we call “The Four Zombie Slayers of the Apocalypse.” We stand in one line, as if we are greeting guests at a funeral, with Gordon in front, then Tasha and I, and finally, Neil is in the last position. It’s kind of like an assembly line of doom for these fuckers, and we like to ham it up a little bit as we mow them down, enjoying the experience of slaughtering these flesh eaters because they give love zombies a bad name.

“Did you wash your hands?” Gordon asks the first zombie to approach us. “Oh no! That won’t do at all,” he says, and he swirls Admiral through the air and cuts off both of the zombie’s hands. “Now you’ve got a little Captain in you!” Gordon

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laughs, his big belly shaking as he pushes the zombie down the line with his muscular leg thrusting his big boot squarely up the creeper's dead ass.

Next, Tasha and I cut the zombie up into smaller pieces with our blades. I rock my Rockstar's 19-inch curved blade across the victim's throat, and the head is cleanly separated from the body. Then, Tasha cuts the goon in half with Babe, so that we now had ourselves a zombie cut into pieces. As we're doing this, we recreate a commercial from our childhoods about a knife sold on late-night TV. "The Shinsu knife can cut through frozen food, saw wood logs and cut tin cans. It can cut bread slices as thin as a slice of paper. Best of all, it can filet a zombie carcass for your next Grateful Dead concert!"

Finally, our group's rabbi, Neil, gives his usual blessing over the pieces. It consists of a joke, such as, "If a zombie is killed in battle, what does he get his medal for?" He then pauses for effect. "Dedication," Neil says, not the slightest hint of a smile on his face.

The worst thing we had to do that day at the Gorilla compound was to put down the big silverback who had been inflicted with the wound to his arm. Primates could become the undead just like humans, so we knew we had to put the old boy out of his misery.

As we stood in a circle around the great apes, which were hooting and crying over their dead leader, a feeling of collective sadness came over all of us. Even the piles of zombie parts littering the battlefield all around us did little to make us feel any better. We knew there were many more undead where they came from. However, we couldn't help but think about whom was the superior species in this picture. These noble beasts, so strong and without a vicious bone in their bodies, were being subjected to the most malicious acts the world had to offer. We had to continue our battle against the plague of undead, but, for this one brief moment, we watched, as this little troop of our better relatives, slowly began to groom each other, the infants were suckled at their mothers' breasts, and big silverbacks and younger males roamed outside the circle in an endless knuckle-walk of vigilance as the sun began its slow decent into the Pacific.

"Hey man, we done good," said Peter, gently passing his hand over his Uzi's barrel. "Why don't you guys come over to our caves and hang with us for a while? We can plan another party with these freaks."

I looked at my fellows. They were determined. I knew we still had a lot to do to earn the respect of these humans, and we needed time together to learn if we could evolve into a troop that was half as loving as these gorillas were. I had a

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secret hypothesis as to why these zombies were created and how we could eventually stop them, but I didn't want to share it with the others. I would keep it my secret until I could definitely be certain of its causes.

“Sure. We can do that,” I said, sheathing my Rockstar. “But first, help us pile these zombies into a funeral pyre. These gorillas deserve a clean cage, don't you think?”

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