

How to Start a Zombie Apocalypse: Chapter 1

Draft 2

At first, it seemed like dying as the result of taking a bullet through his brain was the best thing that had ever happened to Blaze.

Success. When he was alive, Blaze had never been good at psychology compared to other CMU students. Now, thanks to the Overcompensation Effect, Blaze was getting straight A's in all of his classes and working on cutting-edge brain research. "A Neuroscience Prodigy? How one undergraduate student might have just discovered a surgical way to cure Brain Diminutive Disease," read the cover of the January 2022 issue of *Psychology Today*.

Love. His success spilled into other things. When Melissa recognized the person on the front cover of her favorite magazine, she was interested in learning more about him. Maybe it was his newfound success, or maybe it was just the confidence he gained from it, but she became more and more interested in Blaze. She found his short, brown hair, grey eyes, and muscular physique attractive. Blaze often wondered what she would think of him if she knew he was a zombie. Still, they became more than friends.

Friends. For the first time, Blaze finally felt like he had somewhere he belonged. Among people who die at a young enough age, there are only so many who die with their body in-tact enough to become zombies. And among these, there are only so many with a friend or family member who is able and willing to illegally obtain a sample of the pozarovirus within 24 hours of their death. And among these, there are only so many whose death never became publicly known and aren't too deformed by the pozarovirus's Overcompensation Effect to be

inconspicuous zombies--able to pass themselves off as humans. So when Blaze, John, and Samantha found out that they were all zombies, they instantly became friends.

They soon decided to stop hanging out in public.

"To be honest," John brought up one day, "I think we should unfriend each other on Facebook. If one of us is discovered, people might begin to suspect that our connections are also zombies."

"Dude, you're being paranoid again," said Samantha.

"Actually, to be honest," John said. "And it really pains me to say this, but, I'm beginning to think we should also stop hanging out all together."

"You can't be serious," said Samantha.

"To be honest, you guys are the best friends I've ever had. Things have been really terrible ever since..." John paused to look around. "...ever since becoming a zombie, and you guys are the only people I can talk to about it. But to be honest, it's just too risky for us to keep hanging out in the open like this. I don't want to be quarantined. Michael Jones had this article yesterday about what goes on in the quarantines, and..."

"DUDE," Samantha began. "Please don't bring up that stupid conspiracy website again. And also, stop talking about 'the government' as if its this one singular thing."

Blaze examined his friends. He knew John's legs were a bit off, but as always, he was wearing pants, so it wasn't possible to tell. Other than that, he was just a typical skinny, brown-haired, brown-eyed, glasses-wearing, nerdy-looking, polo-shirt-wearing recent college grad. And with her usual ill-form-fitting baggy t-shirt and pajama pants, tall, slender, and pale with blond hair, blue eyes, and a near perfect complexion--there was nothing out-of-the-ordinary or even remotely wrong wrong with Samantha's appearance. Blaze knew that his head was a bit taller than normal, but with his hair grown out, no one could tell. The last thing anyone could accuse them of being is conspicuous--they were textbook inconspicuous zombies.

Still, better safe than sorry. At least, Blaze weighed in on the disagreement, “Actually, I somewhat agree with John. We should be a bit more discreet when we hang out.”

“We shouldn’t have to do things differently because of the fucked up views people have of us,” Samantha said.

“We shouldn’t have to,” Blaze said, “But unfortunately, that’s the way things are.”

Samantha sighed. She had learned that, whenever John and Blaze came to the same conclusion, it was better if she just gave in. “This sucks, but okay. I actually know of a good place.”

And that’s how they started hanging out at the deserted warehouse. It never ceased to amaze Blaze that he knew a single other inconspicuous zombie, let alone as many as he eventually did. John met Serenity, and then Samantha brought Jim along one day. Finally, there were five of them meeting in the deserted warehouse each week. More friends than Blaze had had over the course of his life.

Things were finally looking up. Then, there was an outbreak of Brain-Diminutive-Disease-contaminated meat.

Brain Diminutive Disease usually means certain death. A couple weeks after eating tainted meat, you begin to ask yourself questions.

“Is school getting harder or am I just not getting as much sleep as I should?”

“How could I forget to bring my phone with me twice in the same week?”

“Woh, how did time slip by so quickly?”

Then, one day, you realize that you can’t remember your own name. In a panic, you head directly to the nearest Urgent Care center. The doctor takes a blood sample, makes you sit

anxiously in the waiting room for an hour, tells you the sad news when the results finally come back, gives you something to delay your eventual fate for a year or two, and then you die.

Still, despite the fact that Blaze's research on curing Brain Diminutive Disease had yet to even reach the stage of animal testing, Blaze was not even the slightest bit concerned when he got Melissa's text:

"Notified this morning that some of the contaminated meat was in one of my meals last week. Tested this afternoon, came back positive for BDD :'"

"The reason for that kind of testing in medicine," he said to Melissa, "is that people don't really fully understand how the human brain and body work, so they just do trial and error. They guess at solutions, and then test whether they seem to do more good than harm. But when you have the kind of understanding I have, you don't need to guess at what might work--you just know."

At first, this made Melissa feel better. However after talking to her parents, Melissa sent Blaze multiple texts in a row explaining her decision to undergo the usual, doctor-recommended treatment instead:

"You view yourself as being so rational, but you're just really good at coming up with and selling rationalizations for your emotions. You're just in denial."

"Sorry, didn't mean to come across so harsh in the last text. It's just that we're only 20, and there are people who've been doing this for decades."

“Plus in general you’re sort of crazy. Even you have to admit that. Like you’re really smart, but you don’t always think straight. You’re not always right.”

After that, Melissa avoided Blaze for about a week and didn’t respond to any of the texts he sent her trying to convince her to change her mind. Then out of the blue, Blaze finally got a text from her:

“I changed my mind. I want more than a year left of life. Let’s go through with it.”

So here they were in CMU’s Cognitive Neuroscience Lab at 4:45AM in the morning, waiting for the sedatives Blaze had just given Melissa to kick in. Melissa lay face up on a metal rolling table, wearing a blue medical gown. Blaze, wearing a lab coat over his usual casual jeans and t-shirt, stood, leaning against the wall. A couch and TV were placed in front of the locked lab door--just in case.

Melissa broke the silence. “You would do this if you had Brain Diminutive Disease, right?”

Blaze was surprised by her question. “Well, I can’t perform the procedure on myself, and I’m not sure who else would do it. But if I were you, yeah. Of course,” he said.

“And for the reason of saving your life, not just for the sake of research?” she said.

Blaze was taken aback by this question. “Yeah, to save my life.” Blaze said. Melissa seemed somewhat satisfied Blaze’s responses, and relaxed a little.

“You know, at least I don’t have pozarovirus,” Melissa joked.

“You really think being a zombie is worse than having Brain Diminutive Disease?” Blaze said.

“Well, at least with BDD, I don’t have to worry about harming the people around me,” she

said.

“Neither do people with pozarovirus!” Blaze snapped. Melissa was taken aback by the sharpness in his voice. “There has never been a zombie-to-human transmission of pozarovirus, and the idea that zombies can’t stop themselves from eating brains isn’t based on any reliable data either.”

“Sorry, we’re both really stressed,” Melissa said.

“I’m not stressed,” Blaze snapped again.

“Yes you are. I wish you would put some of your intellectual energy toward figuring out emotions--and people in general for that matter,” Melissa said in a frustrated tone. Then, seeing things were about to devolve into an argument, she regained her composure, “Either way, I’m stressed, so let’s not get into politics right now. And you’re probably right; you know a lot more about diseases than I do. Plus, I’m starting to feel the sedatives.”

A couple minutes later, Melissa had completely passed out. Blaze turned on the drill, and prepared to make the initial incision.

Blaze was a bit nervous, but not about his research. Still, he shouldn’t be, he told himself. What he had said to Melissa was true, and there was nothing to worry about.

“To be honest, saying that zombies can’t help but eat brains is like saying that men can’t help but rape women,” John would say.

Blaze made the initial incision.

Blaze wasn’t quite sure whether or not he loved Melissa. Whenever he was around Melissa, he would feel warm on the inside. And whenever they decided to hang out, regardless of how bad his day had been, just seeing her face would make his break out in a beaming smile. However despite recognizing that most people found Melissa’s long, red hair, hazel-colored eyes, and slim physique attractive, Blaze never really felt much sexual desire toward her. Or anyone, recently, for that matter.

Until now.

Staring at Melissa's exposed brain, all of the surgical steps that Blaze had mentally gone through over and over again throughout the last couple days completely left his head. All he could think about is how turned on he was by the pink, juicy, luscious brain right in front of him. Everything else--the dryness of the surrounding air, the slow drumming of the laboratory A/C, the nauseating smell of orange-scented floor cleaner--dissolved out of focus.

It was at that moment that he realized there would be no surgery occurring that night.

Blaze moved his mouth toward Melissa's brain. Gravity disappeared, his breath slowed, and his heart jumped several feet in the air. He licked the exposed portion of her brain. Its smooth, creamy texture contrasted with the metallic, salty taste of her blood. He took a bite. Melissa's blood flowing down his throat was...disgusting, yet incredibly satisfying. He chewed, swallowed, and took another bite. He used the surgical drill to expose the rest of her brain and took another bite. And another.

Finally after the last bits of her brain slithered down his throat, his surroundings--the room, the table, and the rest of Melissa's now-dead body--all came back into focus at once. Blaze stood there for several minutes, staring at Melissa's now-dead body.

The digital clock buzzed, as it did every hour, when it hit 5:00AM, breaking Blaze's train of thought. He needed to get as far away from there as possible before people started waking up.

Blaze grabbed his backpack, pushed the couch and TV away from the lab door, ran out, locked the door from the inside as it closed, and began walking as fast as he could through the hallway, out the door, and then off campus. The only place Blaze knew of anywhere near Pittsburg was the warehouse. He took an autocab and had it drop him off about thirty minutes from the warehouse, in case its tracking data was later analyzed, and then walked the rest of the way in twenty.

Finally, Blaze was at the warehouse. Its single room was too big to be occupied by one person. Blaze turned all of the lights on and headed to one of the corners furthest from the entrance. Even fully lit, the warehouse still felt vacuous and lonely without the other inconspicuous zombies. Still, there was something comforting about the familiarity of the blank, grey walls and ceiling. Blaze buried his face in his backpack and started crying.

He probably did love Melissa, and he had just killed her. He was going to be arrested and quarantined if he ever went back to CMU or was recognized in public. And by eating infected brain, he had probably just contracted a brain disease that would eventually destroy his intelligence--the thing that had turned everything around--if he didn't find a neurosurgeon who was both skilled enough and willing to perform an untested, illegal operation. Things were going to be even worse than they were when he was alive. And he would rather die legitly than go back to the that.

Blaze spent the rest of the night in deep thought. He slept through the first part of the morning, using his backpack as a pillow, and then snacked on the bag of Pop Tarts that had been in his backpack for several weeks upon waking up.

He needed to stop being depressed and assess the situation in a rational manner. Success, love, and friends. If it turns out these are what make him happy, then at least he still had one. And he should have at least a couple weeks to tackle his BDD. Who knew? Maybe it actually had no effect at all on zombies, so getting back success wasn't completely infeasible. And in fact on top of all of that, he might even be able to get back love--if he acted fast.

Blaze spent the rest of the afternoon devising a plan.

That evening, John and Serena arrived together to the warehouse at 8pm sharp, exactly

on time. This week, Serenity's hair was green, and she was wearing green contacts. They had never hung out on a Wednesday evening before, but Blaze made it sound really important. Serenity kept asking Blaze to give some sort of explanation, but Blaze refused to say anything until they were all there. Finally, twenty minutes late, as always, Samantha and Jim arrived. Their ponytails fell over their equally baggy clothes. Jim was holding the last bits of a hotdog.

Blaze had two speeches prepared, one for each case. "Did I make the news at all?" he asked. His friends looked at him, perplexed.

Good. The second case it was.

In his opinion, he wasn't a murderer. With all of the misinformation surrounding pozarovirus, he had merely incorrectly concluded what the truth was. The real murderers were the people who were obfuscating the truth for their own personal or political reasons. Still, he was glad he wouldn't have to explain it to his friends right now. They probably wouldn't find out until after the next few hours, and after that, it wouldn't matter.

Blaze began, "Don't worry, no one followed me here and the warehouse is still a secret. But in a nutshell, I was found out." His friends gave sympathetic looks, and Samantha started to move forward, stretching her arms outward to give him a hug.

But Blaze kept talking, "I don't want sympathy. The reason for the emergency meeting is that I need your guys' help. I was very lucky in that I was happy and I need your help to be able to being like that. I don't think it's fair for me to have to exist in secrecy, as I'm sure none of you would think it was fair if you were in the same situation."

It was really important to get all of his friends behind his plan because he would need all of their overcompensations in order to pull it off. Which is why he wished he had more self-restraint. He felt a surge of anger as he started talking about fairness and started to veer from what he had prepared.

“But you know what? Apart from being fair, it’s not even rational. How often would a zombie *actually* come in contact with exposed human brain? LIKE SERIOUSLY! For the rare situations where that would be an issue, if society weren’t so FUCKING STUPID, approached us as people instead of things to round up and quarantine, and PUT *SOME FUCKING RESEARCH MONEY* TOWARD IT, I’m sure there’s a medication that could be found and produced to address those urges. And there’s absolutely no evidence that zombie-to-human transmission of the pozavirus is possible through any other means.”

“But you know what, I’ll go further. Even if it proves to somehow be possible, *WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL, HUH!? WHY IS BEING A ZOMBIE SUCH A BIG FUCKING DEAL TO THESE IDIOTS!?*”

“You guys always wonder how I was shot in the head. ‘Who did it?’ you ask. ‘Who did it, and why?’ Well, I’ll finally tell you who did it. I DID IT! I committed suicide. *I KILLED MYSELF.* And you want to know why? Because when I was alive--THINGS SUCKED! *THEY REALLY FUCKING SUCKED!!*”

“For the first time, I’ve been happy. And you know why!? BECAUSE I’M NOW A ZOMBIE, AND BEING A ZOMBIE IS AWESOME. I’M SMARTER AND BETTER THAN I WAS BEFORE. Thanks to our overcompensations, each of us is better than we were before.”

“That’s why everyone is so afraid of us.”

“BECAUSE. WE’RE. BETTER. THAN. THEM.”

“*WE’RE BETTER THAN THEM AS A RESULT OF BEING A ZOMBIES.*”

And at that moment, something clicked inside Blaze’s head. The anger in his expression subsided--somewhat--and was replaced with a sinister grin. He could do more than just get back love and success. Much more. And it would all fit so perfectly around the current plan.

“We’ve put up with the hiding, the discrimination, the social stigma long enough. *The world would be a better place if everyone were a zombie.* First came photosynthesis, then

prokaryotes, and then eukaryotes. It was the dinosaurs, then man, and now...ZOMBIES!”

John nodded his head in agreement. Serenity stared at Blaze as if he were insane.

“TONIGHT WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE. OUR FIRST STEP: FREEING THE CONSPICUOUS ZOMBIES!”

Samantha and Jim looked at each other.

“WHO’S WITH ME!?”

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