

I am the Apocalypse

I peered out of the bunker. The slit only gave a view downhill, but everything looked quiet. The men had gone, back down to the village, I thought, but there was always a risk that someone had lingered.

I sighed. The woman and the child had been caught mere metres from the bunkers. They had been gunned down, and their bodies had been dragged off down the hill, probably for burning. I'd already reached the bunker when they appeared, and I had willed them to make it. But they didn't. I shed a tear. Except, of course, I didn't. I couldn't.

I waited another ten minutes or so, and listened carefully. No sounds. A bird landed on a nearby bush and started to sing. It paused and sang again, and then flew off. That was good. I eased open the door of the bunker, which squeaked, in spite of my caution.

I stepped out into the trench that was the entrance. I sniffed. I took another step. There was a click, and I spun around. I was looking at the business end of a hand gun held by the guy standing on top of the bunker.

“Goodbye, zombie,” he said.

I'd been a zombie from the first days of the epidemic. I was attacked by a dog that shot out of an alley near my flat, but of course, I didn't realize that it was a zombie dog at the time - I thought that it had rabies. I fought it off, with the help of passers-by, and it eventually disappeared down the alley. A passer-by called for an ambulance, and at the hospital I was stitched up and they pumped me full of antibiotics. They gave me a shot for rabies too, and a follow-up appointment for more rabies shots. They didn't give me a shot for the zombie disease, because of course, there wasn't one.

I limped home and slumped in front of the television. They didn't call it the zombie disease then. They didn't know what to call it. Patients grew sick, and apparently died. Two hours later, they woke up and started moving around. The television news was full of it, but it was the first time that I'd heard of it. The doctors tried to listen for heartbeats, to take blood pressures and so on, without success. Then the patients woke up and turned on the doctors, and many doctors were lost in those early days. They too became infected or were consumed by their patients.

I woke up and stretched. My dog bite wounds itched so I carefully removed the bandages. The doctors had told me to leave them on for a couple of days, but the wounds itched so much that I couldn't. The wounds were almost healed! The scars were prominent white lines across my skin, but over time they would fade. I congratulated myself on being a quick healer, but something about the process made me uneasy. It was the first time that I had experienced the fast healing that was a side effect of the zombie disease.

I was feeling hungry, so I looked in the fridge. Hmm, bacon. I started to fry a few rashers, thinking that I could make some sandwiches, but suddenly I was ravenous. I ate the whole packet of bacon, uncooked, before I realized what I was doing.

“Whoa, that was odd,” I said to myself, as I looked in the fridge again. My eyes were drawn to a packet of chops. I reached for them and ripped the wrapping from the package. To my own

astonishment, I started biting large chunks of raw meat and bones from the first chop. The bones crunched between my teeth and I swallowed.

“What is happening to me!”

I finished off all the chops in a minute or two, and slumped back in my seat.

“What on earth?”

I looked at the vegetables and fruits, and they just disgusted me. I didn't know, of course, but this was another side effect of the zombie disease. Already my jaw and teeth were stronger, and my digestion was now capable of processing raw meat and bones. Vegetables and fruit were now useless to me.

I didn't go out much in the next two days, except to buy fresh meat. I had to travel a long way as all the supermarkets nearby had been cleaned out by other people who were suffering from the disease. I was lucky. The disease hadn't really penetrated into the region yet, so some meat was available in outlying areas.

I watched the disaster unfolding on the television. At first, the message was reassuring.

“We'll soon have this under control. We are learning more about this disease every day. We do not need to panic, and we especially do not need to panic buy. Stay home. Avoid other people. If you have to shop, maintain separation from others.”

The very next day, the television started to show the looting and rioting. People were fighting for food and weapons, but other shops were broken into as well. Liquor shops were often targeted.

“Please stay calm. We will soon have this situation under control. However if the looting continues, we will have to deploy the army to keep maintain law and order.”

The very next day martial law was declared, and the death toll start to climb. The authorities were losing control. The television channels all switched to continual coverage of the progress of the epidemic and the breakdown of society. For the first time, the news channels called it the zombie disease.

“Sufferers become sick and 'die' in a matter of hours. Several hours later they wake up, and start experiencing a desire to eat red, uncooked meat. The zombie disease causes their jaws become stronger and their teeth to become more pointed.”

They showed before and after pictures. I looked in the mirror and stroked my chin. Hmm. I opened my mouth and recoiled at the strong pointed teeth. One or two of my old teeth were still clinging on, but they wobbled.

“Oh my god, I've got the disease!”

I stumbled back to the couch and put my head in my hands. The commentators were still talking about the disease.

“Is it a virus, doctor? Or a bacteria?”

“We don't know. Probably a virus. We know that you can be infected by a single bite from an infected animal. If you survive the attack, you will almost certainly come down with the disease.”

“If you survive it?”

“Yes. The attacking animal needs to slake its lust for meat, so will be extra aggressive. Most small animals can be beaten off fairly easily, but a larger animal, like a fair sized dog, would be a huge problem.”

“So we need to watch out for animals and carry a weapon at all times?”

“That will help, but don’t forget that humans are animals too.”

“Oh my God!”

“Yes, there have already been many cases. One woman killed and ate her daughter. When her husband came home, he barely escaped, and later he came down with the disease himself. The woman escaped when the police came to the house. The husband was killed when he attacked a policeman.”

“So we should make sure our guns are loaded and -”

“They are hard to kill. Bullets slow them down, and may drive them off for a while, but they recover quickly. It’s best to aim for the head. Blow the brains out, but be sure. There are some people who have been infected walking around with terrible brain injuries. To be certain, burn the body.”

But by then the burnings had already started.

The next day I started to get ready to leave my flat, but my girlfriend came round. She let herself in with the key that I had given her.

“Mack? Are you there, Mack? Oh, hi babe! Have you been watching the TV?”

“Yeah. It’s horrible, isn’t it? I’m going to get out.”

“Me too. Shall we go together?”

She smiled at me, and her teeth were pointed. The fight was brief and violent, and my flat was smashed up at the end of it. Blood was everywhere, hers and mine. The knife that I had picked up when I heard her key in the lock was embedded in the base of her skull, and she still twitched a little, now and then.

I feasted on her body, then sat down to watch the television.

The previous host was gone and the new one was obviously not used to fronting a television show. He nervously read from pieces of paper as they were passed to him, and it was obvious that the zombie disease was spreading fast. Little news was coming out of the eastern cities and vast fires were raging.

“Our helicopter did a flyover of the regional capital about an hour ago. As night falls the lights of the fires show the extent of the troubles.”

The camera showed a tower block blazing from top to bottom, then swung away and showed whole areas burning. Vast bonfires burned in open areas. The camera zoomed in to show mobs of

people roaming the streets. The infrared cameras also picked out other figures lurking in the shadows.

“The rioters have to be normals, hunting and burning those infected by the zombie disease. Zombies. But the rate of infection, either by human zombies or animal zombies remains high, and seems to be increasing. We have had no word from the authorities in the area since early yesterday. There are power blackouts across the region, and cell phone systems and conventional phone systems are out. We believe that thousands, if not millions, of people have died across the region.”

At that point camera swung away from the host, and there was crashing and banging off-screen. People were screaming and shouting. Guns fired, and fired again. The camera was pointed at a doorway and a curtain, showing nothing of interest, then the light flickered. Glass shattered, and the curtain caught fire. Much of the screaming had stopped, and a dark figure crossed the viewpoint of the camera. It appeared to be carrying a body over its shoulder. The screen went dark.

I removed my bloody clothes and found some clean ones. I threw some clothes into a backpack and considered. Nothing. Nothing in the flat would be any use to me in the future, I guessed.

The centre of the living room was covered in blood, fragments of bone, and pieces of flesh. I wondered what I felt about poor Anna, and the answer was nothing. She was a part of my past, and she would have killed me if she'd had been able. The Anna that I had killed and eaten was not the old Anna, just as I was not the old Mack.

I wondered briefly about my parents, back in the regional capital. I couldn't do anything for them, and the chances of them surviving as zombies was remote. I hoped that they didn't suffer.

I ran down the stairs to the ground floor, and as I started up the street, I smelled smoke and looked back. Someone had set fire to a flat on the ground floor. All the windows were open and flames roared from them. So much for the sprinkler system! It was as defective as the lifts.

I turned and walked away. Windows shattered behind me as the fire burned through to the flat above. There was screaming and shouting, but it was no concern of mine.

I passed a petrol station where someone was filling up their car. Like any good citizen, even in these chaotic times, he went to pay. Or maybe, just possibly, he didn't realize that the end of the world was happening. He'd left the key in the ignition, so I just jumped in and drove off. I could see him chasing me down the road. I assumed that he was a normal, but I didn't get a good look at him. He was lucky. I would have killed him to steal his car, and would probably have carried his body along with me.

I drove randomly at first, but then I remembered the bunkers. Yes, of course! They would serve as a base. I headed for the village below the hills where the bunkers were, and as I swung round the last corner into the village, I encountered a road block manned by a dozen or so men. I laughed. The road block consisted of a few road cones on one side of the road and rather large truck on the other.

A man in a police uniform held up his hand, requesting me to stop. I just put my foot down and his body sailed over the roof of the car. The road cones disappeared off to the side somewhere and someone dived out of my way. I laughed and hit someone else.

I roared through the town and turned up the lane to the hills, just missing a woman and her child who were headed up the hill. I stopped and looked back.

“No, better not. I don’t want any complications.”

I accelerated away. Near the top I stopped and pushed the car off the road, and it crashed and smashed its way into the valley. I erased the marks where the car had gone over as best I could, and headed up towards the bunkers. They were at top of the hills, near to an abandoned airfield. Built during the last war, some seventy years ago, they looked out over the lowlands. Gun emplacements between the bunkers had protected the airfield, but the guns were long gone and only the concrete bases remained. The bunkers themselves had sheltered the off duty gunners and aircraft spotters from enemy bombs and aircraft.

The bunkers were like any such relic – covered in graffiti, full of rubbish, and they stank. I chose one that had a clear view of the path up from the lowlands. I was aware that the group at the road block would likely follow me up the hill, but hopefully, they would think that I had continued along the road over the top, and down into the next village.

The woman and child appeared, struggling up the road, and started to climb the stile. They looked tired. They were obviously headed for the bunkers. As they climbed the stile a car’s headlight picked them out and they turned. Someone got out of the car, a shotgun fired twice and the fugitives fell.

Three or four men climbed out of the car and carefully approached the two bodies. There was a discussion and the two bodies were dragged back to the car and thrown into the boot. The car reversed down the hill, turned, and headed back to the village.

I sighed. The woman and child were probably normals. If either of them had been a zombie, they would have attacked the other one. I had been hoping that they would reach the bunkers and provide me with a meal.

I stared down the barrel of the gun.

“Wait!” I said.

“Why should I?”

“How many bullets do you have?”

“What? Enough to kill you, zombie.”

“Is it six? Seven? Or maybe you have a store of them? A hundred?”

“Five,” he answered, raising the gun again.

“So you shoot me. And maybe burn me. And four others. Then what?”

“What?”

I gestured down to the lowlands. Fire dotted the countryside.

“The woman and the child were probably normals,” I said. “Is this the world that you want to live in? You might be lucky and become a zombie. Or you might just become a zombie’s meal. Or someone might simply suspect that you are a zombie and kill you anyway.”

The man raised the gun. He looked at the fires. Some were small, possibly the pyres of zombies, or suspected zombies. The larger ones appeared to be houses, and one particularly large one seemed to be a block of flats. There were no sirens.

He looked at me, and raised the gun.

“Angela,” he said, and blew his brains out.

I consumed his body, and took the gun.

“The normals are doomed,” said the Professor.

“Why, Prof? Can’t they kill all us zombies?”

We were sitting under a bridge. The Professor, who I’d just met, was eating a cat. Someone’s pet. We were about three metres apart, but I still felt the occasional urge to attack him.

“You know, I was a vegetarian. Verging on vegan. Oh well. They can try to kill us off, but we are hard to kill, and this disease, or whatever it is, is pan-specific. Across many species. They would need to kill all infected animals and humans, and, frankly, they have fallen apart so badly that there is no organization left capable of doing it. You know, before I left, the Red Cross was chasing down and killing and burning zombies! The Red Cross! Or at least mobs who carried Red Cross banners.

“The two-way cross-infection between animals, including us, is unusual. You were bitten by a dog, right? My cat infected me. I killed her and put her body in the garage, and when I woke up, she was gone. Hmmm. I didn’t do a good enough job, it seems.”

“They’ll be killed or zombified by their pets?”

“Or their neighbours. But, it’s not their pets or their neighbours that are their real problem. It’s the rats and mice and bats. An expert on television said that there were zombie rats and mice and bats, and probably the disease originated in those species. The normals can barricade themselves in, but rats and mice and bats will get in anywhere. But if they do manage to keep them out, they will run out of food eventually, and they will have to forage. There will be some stuff in supermarkets and shops, but that will quickly run out, and they won’t be resupplied. And when they start to forage, we will be waiting.”

“What about us, Prof?”

“Well, it depends on whether we can get along with each other, with other zombies, or not. We would need to breed, somehow, and that seems unlikely. You know that when you get too near to another zombie, you have an urge to kill and eat them. Of course, we could raise animals, but I don’t think that we could cooperate on farming. What do you think, Mack?”

I didn’t answer him. Later, I shot him with the gun. As I crunched his bones, I said to myself “Not a chance, Prof. Not a chance.”
