

Zombies Evolved

By Derick Campbell

Smashwords Edition

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Dedications

This is my first fictional book. It would not have happened at all if it wasn't for my dear wife Dawn – who thought a sabbatical really should mean time away from it all. Thank you Dawn, I love you. I'd also like to thank my kids Parker and Rosie for all of your cool zombie ideas and encouragement.

Sunil, Pankaj, and Bash – thanks for brainstorming over dinner and drinks. Props to Darryl for his geo-political, medical, and plot feedback – the zombie captain is for you. Thanks to Jeremy for the late night military discussions and detailed editorial feedback. And thanks to Marcia for help understanding how to deal with a crime scene and appreciating when search warrants are required.

Several of the ideas from *Book in a Month*, by Victoria Lynn Schmidt, helped me organize my thoughts and write *Zombies Evolved* in twenty five days. The *Writer's Guide to Character Traits*, by Dr. Linda Edelstein, was also a useful reference for character development.

If you have a good idea for the author of this eBook or the movie sure to follow, email it to ZombiesEvolved@live.com or complete a review through <http://ZombiesEvolved.com>.

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This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Chapter Zero – Infection

Dr. Jake Zachman set out to change humanity by improving our quality of life. Little did he know that his creation would have just as much impact upon how we die.

Most would say that Dr. Zachman was an international biochemistry expert far before he received his PhD from the University of British Columbia. Shortly after he retained his degree in 2011, with his many patents and the university's blessing, he pulled together a half-dozen financiers to start his own blood research lab in the medium-sized city of Kelowna, BC.

He would tell people that the golf, wine, and outdoor activities are what attracted him to Kelowna – but those closer to him knew it had more to do with a girl he admired from afar.

And there he studied blood. Or more importantly, blood clotting and what he could do about it.

Many of the people that pass away each year die due to blood clotting – or more specifically one of the many health effects of blood clots. Prevent the flow of blood in the right place and you cause a brain hemorrhage that can result in a stroke. If blood flow is constrained in the heart, a heart attack can result for similar reasons.

When he was just a boy, Jake's father Earl passed away due to a heart attack at the young age of thirty nine. Everyone whispered that Earl had died young as his father before him, and they worried about Jake. Jake acted like he didn't hear these stories and gossiping around him – but he heard more than enough to know that his blood too would eventually conspire to kill him.

With an unquenchable (and unusual for his young age) thirst for medical knowledge – Jake learned that various forms of cancer increase clotting, as does heart disease. The constricted blood vessels that typically occur with age also make it easier for the blood to coagulate and clot. As he learned more, his nemesis grew larger and darker, and his interest in correcting problems of the blood set his educational course.

Jake's mother Gwen lived on for many years – healthy and eventually happy, more or less. In her later years she would develop symptoms consistent with Parkinson's disease. While Jake was an undergrad student her memory would occasionally fade and become unpredictable. Her problems became worse while he was a grad student.

In addition to strokes and heart attacks, researchers learned in 2011 that more health problems than most people realize are caused by blood clots, including muscle tremors, restricted movement, muscle fatigue, stooped posture, and even memory loss.

While still in school, Jake learned that yet again, health problems related to blood clots were targeting his family. His passion for understanding this area of medicine and research grew even more – if that was possible.

Dr. Zachman was clever to combine this massive set of health troubles into a single problem statement: “how do we prevent or eliminate blood clots the minute they appear?”

He enumerated the collective set of health issues and the massive market potential that could be addressed by solving this one problem. With this pitch, he was able to hook a half-dozen investors, wealthy family and friends, into learning more.

He took them (under non-disclosure) through his detailed plans of attack – and shared the numerous glowing references he amassed as a university researcher from world-wide experts. Not to mention that he had recurring funding plans through patent licenses to major drug companies on the way.

They each signed up as multi-million dollar investors on the spot, and this provided the starter capital necessary to equip the lab and fund sign-on bonuses for a small but incredibly bright staff.

And so – “Blood Behaviour Labs” was born – soon to become a major contributor to every country’s history books, and the destiny of humanity itself.

Dr. Zachman spent the first year building a small team of international rising stars and investigating several potential lines of research. Together, they calculated the probabilities of success in each area through rapid prototype research and lab testing.

They selected their top three research areas, split into smaller teams, and set short term goals and inspection points to help ensure each team regularly received peer feedback and encouragement.

They all agreed that the ideal solution would allow for proactive application – waiting for health problems to show up as clear symptoms is often too late for stroke and heart attack victims. Likewise, many other brain and health-related problems are caused by undetectable blood clots.

Shortly after, they eliminated blood thinners as an effective approach – many scientists were already in this field of study, and the fact that blood thinners often cause more health problems than they solve made it unworkable for an ideal solution. The mitigations they had hoped to pursue each led to dead ends – blood thinners were too problematic for proactive applications.

Dr. Zachman was convinced the solution to this problem lie in the chemistry of the blood. A reaction within blood itself – that would know and act when a clot was nearby. The answer, he discovered, is oxygen; or rather, the lack of oxygen.

The main purpose of blood is the delivery of oxygen (and nutrients) to the body. When a clot occurs, the blood near it continues to deliver oxygen in that area, until it runs out. With a clot in the way, blood in the area has no way to replenish its supply of oxygen.

Dr. Zachman led the team to a tremendous significant breakthrough. He created a biochemical reaction in blood, which responds to a lack of oxygen. They created and fine-tuned a proprietary

organic carbon compound that causes oxidation in blood, reacting to the right balance of CO₂ and the absence of oxygen.

In cases of clotting, the compound causes a localized biochemical/electrical reaction and creates oxygen, heat, and pressure – breaking down the clot while it is still weak – allowing the blood to flow again. They proved their results through distressed animal testing, while ensuring that blood flowing naturally would not have sufficient time or chemical makeup to cause the same reaction.

The team, thrilled with their success, discussed the challenges they still faced. Primary among them was the need to saturate the entire body with their compound – to ensure that the reaction would occur at the time and place needed as blood courses throughout the body.

This would be unnecessarily uncomfortable to apply in sufficiently large doses, and would gradually dissipate from the body – requiring regular re-administration. They projected that the drug volumes required to do this across a large populations of people didn't seem feasible. They needed a better solution.

What they needed, they decided – was a product that could replicate itself in the human body. They needed a viral deployment mechanism.

Thanks to Dr. Zackman's forward thinking, they already had a leading immunobiologist on staff – who could jump start the team's efforts. They studied related research in everything from microbial metabolism to government-sponsored flu vaccines. It took them over a year to crack the problem, only once requiring additional funding from new backers. They recreated their biochemical/electrical reaction through self-replicating bacteria – a bacteriophage derivative – one that thrives in the bloodstream without dominating.

In hindsight, it turned out to be far easier than expected. It was as if the virus was waiting to be found.

Everyone at the lab agreed that “Zachman-virus” (or z-virus, shortened) was the appropriate name – in tribute to Jake's insight and leadership. They were excited about future prospects as they looked ahead to years of clinical testing and research. Perhaps a partnership with a billion dollar player would be required, or should they attempt to forge ahead alone? The team was excited to discuss the many paths their future could take.

After much discussion and debate, Dr. Zachman decided that they needed the help of a large and established commercial pharmaceutical company to take them through these ever-important (and heavily regulated) steps. Using his professional connections, considerable personal charm, and business savvy – he quickly arranged a very attractive acquisition package with PharmaCom Family, a billion dollar multi-national corporation focused on medicine discovery, development, and distribution.

Blood Behaviour Labs became a wholly owned research lab of PCF within a few months, with healthy bonuses for each scientist and a substantial return on investment for the lab's investors. PCF fully acquired all of the recent intellectual property of BBL with confidentiality and one year minimum commitments from each BBL researcher.

Shortly thereafter, in the year 2013, the metaphorical “bomb” dropped on the lab. Their virus had a terrible side effect – one that wasn't discovered in the lab.

It was unfortunate that Zachman was Jake's given name – this made it all the easier for the press to call his creation the “zombie-virus”. Considering the effects, perhaps they would have called it that anyway.

Reporters and investigative writers have looked back at this point in history in great detail – several books have been published. Some of them called for greater biomedical research regulation (ensuring rigorous employee background and security checks), others called for increased distrust of other countries and a reduction or elimination of the numbers of resident aliens permitted into North America.

What they generally agree upon is that one of Dr. Zachman's top researchers stole the virus and took it with them to Singapore, where they made millions selling it to local business Southampton Pharmaceuticals Co.

SPC was a minor player back then – they profited providing inexpensive drugs to third world nations by violating international intellectual property rights, taking advantage of the lack of legal enforcement in their countries of business.

Limited government oversight and ruthless bribing of public officials (through monetary and criminal influence) allowed them to bring the Zachman-virus to market before anyone in Blood Behaviour Labs, PharmaCom Family, or North America realized it was even missing.

SPC's illegal distribution channels were already in place – quietly ignored by recipient countries, due to the medical benefits received by their underserved populations. The virus was easy to reproduce (by design), and their revolutionary “anti-aging cure” took much of Asia, India, Latin America, and Africa by storm. SPC's existing market presence and seemingly European name provided sufficient credibility to would-be buyers.

Thankfully, SPC set a high price on the anti-aging cure – which constrained its purchase and distribution to only those wealthy enough to afford it. Their customers were often older, respected, well established people with disposable income and a desire to postpone the effects of aging.

Think of how unimaginably terrifying it was – to witness these established, community leaders turn into mindless zombies overnight.

To be fair, they didn't all turn into zombies – at least not right away. “Zombies” isn't really the right word to describe their medical condition, as Zachman would proclaim later. But to everyone around them – and more importantly, the world press – zombies became the word used to describe the people in this condition.

The biochemical reaction of the z-virus definitely acts as a useful blood clot countermeasure. If this was the only effect, the market success and health impact of the product would have been phenomenal. As it was, their customers did in fact receive many health benefits, extending their length and quality of life.

But what happens when the infected die, and who would have thought this a necessary test?

In virtually all cases, death causes blood to stop flowing. Oxygen throughout the body is consumed, providing the necessary environment for the biochemical/electrical reaction of the virus to take effect. The reaction takes place across the entire body – and brain – all at once.

The shock to the system is not unlike that provided by a defibrillator, although the effective intensity is much greater and more direct. When death is caused by heart failure or the body going into shock, the electrical reaction restarts the heart, while providing fresh oxygen to the body and lungs. Life resumes, and the infected often have another chance – as long as death was not caused by severe physical trauma.

The brain doesn't fair as well, unfortunately. The power of this electrical shock, heat, and pressure – occurring throughout the brain all at once – is too much for the sensitive tissue within. The skull is no help whatsoever, giving the infected grey matter very little room to expand under these exceptional circumstances.

Research suggests that as much as 50% of the brain is damaged during a typical post-mortem reaction to the z-virus. The more advanced and fragile aspects of the brain are injured the most, leaving behind a hearty “reptilian core” – responsible for survival instincts like hunting for nourishment, fight or flight behavior, and a persistent interest in procreation. The rules and norms expected of a modern, civilized, human animal do not persist.

Touch and pain reception are reduced by the event. Portions of the brain not well understood, but thought to monitor the body for trauma and react accordingly, seem affected as well. Together, these symptoms allow the infected post-mortem living to endure conditions that would incapacitate normal humans.

Physical changes occur with turning. Eye pigmentation often becomes lighter, and on rare occasions the eyes turn incredibly pale. Asian and darker skin tones can take on a grey tint, and pale white skin can take on a reddish hue. In very rare occasions, people show bright red varicose veins after turning.

Some have suggested that these “original zombies”, as they have since come to be known, may have some enhanced senses – such as vision and smell. The principle being that their brains are no longer encumbered by all of the “distracting” thinking of the ego and super-ego. This presumably leaves more cycles to dedicate to the needs that remain.

Several videos, books, and even comics have documented the carnage caused by these original zombies between the years of 2013 and 2015 – especially in the early years when people didn’t know what caused them or what they were capable of. While the z-virus is blood-based and continues to spread (notably) beyond the customers originally infected, the zombies themselves did not end up being a significant source of trouble for any nation’s army or city police to handle.

There were no packs of zombies or zombie villages as the sensationalist press have suggested. The conditions necessary to turn an infected into a zombie are infrequent enough to allow people to react once they realize what and who they were dealing with.

Killing an original zombie was not as theatrical as cinematic fiction suggests – anything that can kill a normal person will usually do, with some exceptions. People just aren’t used to killing their neighbors to protect their community – some zombies did more damage than others.

Acts of rape, violence, and even cannibalism were reported. The worst documented cases occurred when an infected turned while living with only one or two other people – such as an elderly couple or small family.

Once the original source of the virus was located – Zachman himself was crucial to this important discovery – the United States government took action. PharmaCom Family (including Blood Behaviour Labs) and Southampton Pharmaceuticals were effectively placed under the oversight of a joint “Z-Virus Task Force” between the Department of Homeland Security and the Centers for Disease Control.

Permission for this intervention was granted by the Canadian and Singapore governments. Some have suggested that the underlying though unspoken threats (at least publically) of US military action influenced these decisions.

Dr. Zachman and several of the original z-virus scientists immediately went to work to find a cure, with the support of government funding and resources. Unlike flu vaccines – which are easy to develop by comparison – the z-virus was made by a new bacteriophage derivative that is not well understood by scientists, and can’t be counteracted in the same manner.

After months with no success and increasing public outcry, they changed strategies and worked on ways they might limit the damage caused by the phage virus in death.

They were somewhat successful in their efforts – rather than creating an anti-virus, they identified a reaction inhibitor that could be mass produced and regularly consumed by the

infected to limit the amount of brain damage that occurred during the post-mortem event. As expected, the knowledge to reproduce this drug was protected vigorously by PharmaCom Family lawyers and security personnel.

The general result of inhibitor testing was mixed – tests showed that the brain damage suffered post-mortem while the infected were on the drug was varied. Some that turned while on the drug suffered from moderate zombie-like impairments, while other unfortunates were almost as impaired as original zombies – depending on oxygen levels during their near-death experience.

The press created phrases such as “Version 2 Zombies” and “Evolved Zombies” to describe the post-event infected that were studied – this terminology easily superseded the more scientifically accurate “infected post-mortem living humans” in general conversation. They were still considered by most (with some notable exceptions) to be human, but they are missing several traits associated with humanity.

Evolved zombies have fewer emotions and greater primal urges than average humans. They can still speak and reason, learn and recognize, plan and co-ordinate. They can remember what they did as humans, but can’t always understand the motivations for their behavior. They have a sharp sense of humor, without the social filter that people are generally conditioned to put in place. They can become aggressive when hungry and violent when aroused or scared. Many evolved zombies are affected in somewhat unique ways. Some of them were closer in behavior to the original zombies than most people suspected or hoped.

Despite the drug’s imperfections, this was considered a vast improvement by countries with growing infected populations – many of whom were among the rich, political, and influential elite. The z-virus inhibitor (popularly known as the zombie-inhibitor drug) was fast-tracked and first made available to large populations of infected in 2015 – at a reasonable cost.

Five years later, by 2020, an estimated 19% of the human population was thought to be infected with the Zachman-virus, and 3% of the population have had at least one “near-death experience” that turned them into evolved zombies, or “humans with a reduced capacity for empathy”, as one perceptive journalist described them.

Evolved zombies now live and work with normal humans, and the infected that have yet to turn. Effectively, zombies and the infected have introduced new socio-economic classes for society to deal with – with behaviors far from norm. Most of polite society isn’t adequately prepared.

Some political theorists have suggested that the effective health benefits of the z-virus – plus the significant commercial interests behind the zombie-inhibitor drug – aren’t creating sufficient motivation for humanity to act in its own defense. Like the frog in a gradually boiling pot of water, we don’t fear what is yet to come.

Plus, post-mortem living humans have rights too.

Chapter One – Prescription

Monday June 21, 2021 – Seattle, WA

I meet my new partner today. She's a zombie.

Hey, don't get me wrong – my last partner was a zombie too. He was a pretty cool guy. He took too many risks though, and his behavior caught up with him. Early retirement, the wrong kind.

My name is Rob Stack, and I work with the Infected Affairs Bureau of the Seattle Police – known to cops as the IAB and most citizens as “Zombie Relations”.

Seattle's response to the increasing level of “post-mortem living” was not unlike other cities – to create a special police department trained to handle zombie crimes and hostile zombie/human interactions.

You see, regular cops aren't trained to understand or handle the zombie psyche. Once the cops arrived, most incidents involving zombies would turn bad, quickly. If zombies were the only ones involved, this result might have been overlooked. But many zombie incidents the cops get called for are domestic, and often humans are involved. When normal humans get hurt during police business – citizens take action.

The motives for zombies are different. Special training and zombie experience significantly helps with zombie crime investigations. Following traditional human motives sends untrained cops in the wrong directions.

Unlike other cops, teams in IAB handle all kinds of situations: domestic abuse, sexual assault, robbery, theft, narcotics, and even homicide and major crimes. Our informal motto is, “we go where the zombies take us.”

Quite often, this puts us into conflict with the cops that normally handle criminal investigations and narcotics. They are often put in a “support role” when zombie involvement is determined, and we take the lead – based on case load and the decision of our captain.

What's the best way for cops to learn the zombie psyche and gain working experience? After our twelve week zombie psychology training course, it comes through interacting with zombies every day. Each team in our unit is made up of a human/zombie pair. In case you're slow and haven't figured it out yet, this means I'm human.

There aren't many zombie cops around – and young zombie cops are practically non-existent – hence we're a small unit. Unfortunately, it seems that zombies are becoming a bigger source of criminal activity than their per-capita numbers. The bureau is growing about as fast as we can find new zombie cops.

It's time to meet my new zombie.

"Detective Stack, meet your new partner Detective Dana Light." Captain McDowell grimaced noticeably as he said her name. He's usually much more charming than this.

I don't think they got off on the right foot this morning, before I arrived. The captain is human, and although he works with zombie cops all the time, he can be turned off by their lack of kindness and compassion in conversation. He's the kind of boss a cop can depend on – and I trust his instincts.

"Great to meet you Detective," I nod to her, and then turn to address the captain. "How was your weekend Captain? Are your daughters still out of control?" I hate to see him grumpy – he's a good man.

McDowell ignores my questions with a barely visible smile, and turns away. "I'll leave you to it, then."

"I read your Zachman profile, says you're a level five. You're practically human."

"I'm still human, Detective", she replies. "Just because I've seen the light at the end of the tunnel doesn't take my human status away."

"Hmm, we'll see," I comment. "Let me introduce you to the drug operation we're investigating."

"I've read the files. You can tell me more as we go." She pauses, and says in a caring voice, "Rob, I'm sorry to hear about your partner Steve."

"Yeah, me too."

Hearing his name reminds me that he died while we were working this case. I really miss him. Steve was a great partner and a true friend.

"Okay, if you're ready – it looks like we have a warehouse to investigate."

We take my car. I've learned not to let zombies drive that often – they can get worked-up easily by bad drivers around them. We have a lot of those in Seattle.

Her watch alarm beeps at 9am, and she unwraps and eats a protein bar while we drive. Zombies need to eat regularly, or they can become irate or unfocused.

"Tell me about this warehouse", she asks.

"It's been abandoned for a year or two – no buyers in this market. Steve and I suspected that the drugs are being made downtown, close to Harbor Island Marina."

“Your report suggested they’ve been making and selling,” she pauses as if confused, “speedballs?”

“Yeah, we believe that zombies prefer the combination of cocaine and heroin to feel the full effect with their brain dam-, uh, medical condition.”

“I get it, go on.”

“Steve got a lead on a commercial shipment arriving. We suspect it has hidden drugs, and we have a team placed to follow any suspicious characters that arrive for a small pick-up. You know – anything smaller than an 18-wheeler.

“I received a call this morning with an address for us. Apparently a van arrived, and they followed it to this warehouse. They suspect the van evaded them by leaving through another exit.”

They had already checked the plates. The van was stolen.

“I hope they didn’t get made,” Dana suggests, “or we’re going to an empty warehouse.”

I’m a little surprised by her comment. She doesn’t talk like a rookie cop – I thought she was with the department for only two years.

“Yeah – that’s a possibility.” I want to learn more about her. “Tell me your story, Dana.”

“Well, let’s see. I was a civil servant for a long time, went back to school as the kids got older, and then became a paralegal with the D.A.’s office in San Diego. Did that for about five years.”

“Sounds like a great background for a cop.” I’m impressed; most cops only get their legal training through the department and life experience.

“It’s been helpful, I guess. They allowed me to take the detective’s exam after a year.”

And join the IAB, which needs more detective zombie cops. I can see why the bureaucrats would find a loophole for a zombie like Dana. She is relatively young – for a zombie – and has legal experience that will come in handy fighting fifteen different types of crime.

“How did you turn?” I ask. It is a pretty direct question, but zombies don’t get hung up on formalities, and they don’t require small talk before moving on to important topics.

“I’ve been a zombie for almost two years, as you’ve seen from my profile.” She takes a deep breath. “Apparently I had a heart attack in my sleep, and I woke up in the middle of the night – turned.”

I do not interrupt her – she continues.

“I’m pretty sure I caught the z-virus from my husband, John. He’s had cancer for the last few years. He went overseas for work, and was treated while abroad. He didn’t tell me at the time, though I would have supported him in his decision. I found out I was infected at my annual checkup.”

John’s story is pretty common these days. Many doctors unofficially inform their patients of the benefits of the z-virus if they have heart disease, cancer, or have suffered a stroke. Of course you can get infected here in the US – but as the virus is considered an illegal substance (outside the body) you’d have to deal with some shady characters to do it.

Several countries still have the original anti-aging product for sale. It’s a criminal activity to sell it, but many of the people involved aren’t like the career criminals trading z in the US. Web sites selling it even show up once in a while before they are found and shut down.

“What does your family think about your condition?” Again, I ask a direct question that a zombie won’t mind.

“My three kids aren’t sure what to think. I became a mom at a very young age. They are all adults – two of them have started families. John feels very guilty – he still doesn’t like to talk about it.”

“Are they still in California?” Mr. Tactful.

“Yes. I decided to give John and the kids and grandkids some space and time to deal with it, and moved to Seattle to join the Police shortly after turning. I’m finding it’s much easier to talk to them through email – in person they aren’t used to how I’ve changed.”

We stop at a red light, so I take a moment to look Dana over while scanning the area. She is a good looking woman, in great athletic shape, with healthy curves. She looks to be in her early forties – which is quite young for the average zombie. She seems to have great taste in clothes, and she hasn’t forgotten to use deodorant or perfume like some that have turned.

Her eyes are blue – a little paler than average. This is likely a result of turning. Her skin tone seems normal. As expected for a cop, she wears the tattoo of the infected on her right wrist.

Shortly afterwards we arrive at the warehouse and check in with the on-site team.

“Hey Rob, who’s the new partner?”

She jumps in before I can answer. “I’m Dana Light. Good to meet you.”

“I’m Mac, this is Jake. He’s the zombie.”

“I can tell,” Dana answers. “Hi Jake. Hi Mac.”

Mac was briefly stunned. “What, can zombies smell each other or something? Jake – why didn’t you tell me?”

“Not quite.” Dana is being evasive in her answer. I’ll have to ask her about it later.

I interrupt to change the conversation. “What’s your recommended approach here guys?”

Jake chimes in, “we haven’t seen much activity while we’ve been waiting for you. To cover the bases we should go around the other side and catch anyone leaving in a hurry.”

“Sounds good. Give us a call when you’re in position.” Dana and I look around outside while we wait.

There is a small gang of older male teenagers hanging out, not far away. They seem to be paying too much attention, so I work my way over.

As I get closer, one of the teenagers approaches. He is wearing a red hoodie and black jeans. He stumbles a little as he walks. I think he might be drunk, but this early in the morning?

He comes a little too close – ever hear of personal space? “Yo brother, can you spare some coin?” I can smell that that he hasn’t showered in days. Great.

Without me noticing, Dana has caught up behind me. “Go back to your pack, mind your business.” She practically sneers at him. I haven’t seen her nasty side yet – I’m taken aback.

Not to be discouraged, the teenager ignores me and looks closely at Dana, pausing before he speaks. “Hey sweetie, what’cha hanging out with this stiff for; want to party with some real men?” He nods towards his friends.

Dana growls. “Not on your life, misfit,” she starts towards him.

I step in the way. “Okay, it’s time for us to head back to the car. Let’s leave the boys alone.” I emphasize the word ‘boys’ in an attempt to bring her back from her anger. I hold her elbow and turn us both away from the teen. With a zombie, ‘out of sight, out of mind’ always helps. She struggles against me, but only briefly – remembering that we’re partners, I hope. Her temper fades almost as quickly as it started.

The teen ignores us and goes back to his friends.

We walk a moment, and Dana turns to look at me. “I think he’s a zombie. I’m pretty sure he’s a zombie.”

“The kid? How would you know he’s a zombie?” I still want to know how she guessed that Jake is a zombie.

“Well, when men look at a woman like me – we notice things about their behavior.” I start to become flustered. She continues, “Most men are discreet when they look. Like you were, earlier in the car.”

I stammer a few half words, briefly.

“Don’t worry about it – happens all the time. That kid, like Jake, wasn’t discreet about staring. Instead of a brief glance or two, they spent a few seconds leering. The look in their eyes was unmistakable.”

“He’s a teenage boy. That’s all he thinks about.”

“Yeah, but even teenage boys learn not to stare, or they get embarrassed when caught – like you just were. I looked that boy right in the eye after he ogled me, and he practically smiled.”

“I don’t know. A teenager – how would a teenager become a zombie?”

“It’s been known to happen. Maybe suicide or an overdose.”

There have been a few instances of people becoming zombies after committing suicide – with drugs, not a knife. Suicides are usually younger, and the infected are usually older – so it is rare, but not unheard of. Perhaps she is right about the boy. I still have my doubts.

My phone rings, it is Mac.

“They’re in position; it’s time to head in.”

We position ourselves outside the main door, next to the garage. We each bring out our weapons, peek through the door, and head on in for cover.

It is well lit inside – the morning sun is coming in through the many windows in the building. There are a few rooms around the periphery of the warehouse – by the front and back. The remaining area in-between is open warehouse. It is empty – except for a car toward the back of the building, a black Taurus. Someone is still here.

I call out. “Attention warehouse dwellers, this is the police. Come on out. We’re not here for you – we’re just here to look around.”

There is no answer, but I can hear movement in the offices by the front. I motion to Dana that we should investigate. She noticed the sounds too.

We creep over slowly – who knows how many people are in here. I radio Jake and Mac. “We’ve got one car in here, and at least one person by the front. Stand by for support.”

“Roger, Rob. Keep us posted.”

I approach the door to the front offices, with Dana covering me.

“This is the police. Please come out of the office. We’re just here to talk.” I don’t want to get into anything more exciting than a discussion today.

“Screw you cop – mind your own business!”

Sigh. “Come on out. We’re here on police business.”

“You don’t have a warrant!” Okay, he’s using logic on me.

“We don’t need a warrant – we have the owner’s approval to be here. I repeat, please come out of the office. We just want to talk.”

“Well I’m the owner, and I say get the fuck out of here, cop!” His voice cracks a little as he speaks. Is this a kid? I hope this isn’t a kid.

“We aren’t going anywhere. Please calm down. We just want to talk.” I’m running out of things to say.

He starts to shout some more. “I’m not leaving and you better not come in here!” Just as he finishes, someone rounds the outside corner of the office holding a gun. While moving, he shoots towards me wildly. He gets off two shots. One shot goes into the wall behind me, another into the dirt. A little too close for comfort.

The logical shouter is trying to distract me, I realize. I turn towards the shooter, and aim for his legs. I know I should ‘shoot to stop’ – which means to hit him in the torso – but I need a lead.

I manage to squeeze off two shots – one in his thigh – before he shoots again in the dirt in front of me, missing me as he stumbles. He doesn’t go down though, and I’m momentarily stunned by his fortitude. He screams and lunges towards me, raising his weapon.

As he steps forward on his damaged leg, I realize that this guy isn’t going to go down easily – and squeeze the trigger two more times. Both shots hit him in the chest, and he collapses. The whole exchange took only a few seconds.

I’m shaken up, and walk towards him. I kick his gun away and start to look him over. As I stand over him, the office door behind me crashes open – slammed open by the shouter.

I turn around to see him heaving a large fire axe over his head, heading in my direction. I barely have time to register what’s happening – and he is practically on me already. This is going to end badly – for me.

Bang! He collapses in a heap. Dana had shot him in the forehead with one shot.

I take a deep breath, and scan around me for more crazies. “Not bad, for a paralegal,” I gasp. “Are you conserving ammo or something? You were pretty confident that you had him in one shot.”

“Don’t get your panties in a twist.” She smirks at me. “I had the door lined up for trouble since you walked over there.”

She winks and continues. “Besides, I was shooting gophers on my granddad’s farm since before I could drive.”

“Yeah, ok.” A likely story – axe-carrying gophers. This lady has more to her than she is letting on. Even as a zombie she is way too cool with all of the shooting and axe murderers running around. I’m emotionally exhausted and it isn’t even ten yet.

Jake and Mac are now inside the warehouse, and they call over. “Are you both ok?”

“Yes,” I reply back, “two perps down. But it’s not clear yet – keep your guard up.”

We call it in, and look through each of the rooms for more trouble. There are no more people around, but we do find one office area with some containers and boxes.

Dana was checking out my friend with the axe, and commented to me, “I think the shooter was a zombie. Did you see how he kept going after he was shot?”

“Yeah, and they were both kids too – neither of them seems more than 25.” I search their pockets for anything helpful. “No ID on them, but they look like kids.”

While Dana glances away I palm the cash the shooter is carrying; a couple hundred bucks. Not bad. I’m pretty sure Dana didn’t see me. It would be ok if she did though – you have to start these new cops while they are just getting started. Besides, I’m confident I can successfully rationalize my behavior to a level five zombie cop – I’ve done it before.

“That’s at least two young zombies in one day,” Dana exclaims. “That’s very unusual.”

“If your boyfriend outside is actually a zombie. I’m still not convinced. This one doesn’t have the mark, either. Is the kid still outside?”

Dana shakes her head no, “none of the kids are still around. And not all zombies wear the mark.” She looks at the tattoo around her right wrist, twisting her arm to see all of it.

We both walk back into the office, where Mac and Jake are going through the boxes and containers, and checking the area for more evidence.

“We’ve got what looks like traces of cocaine on the tables. Someone cleaned up, but they were in a hurry,” Jake looks confused as he speaks.

“So what’s bothering you?” Dana asks.

“These two boxes over here – they don’t contain any street drugs we recognize. They contain potassium chloride.”

“Okay, what’s that used for?” I ask.

“We’re not sure. It sounds familiar, but it isn’t used to make ecstasy, speedballs, or even meth.”

Jake would know. He joined the IAB from the narcotics bureau before he turned.

“I know what it’s for,” Dana explains, in a hushed, serious voice. “We have a big problem,” she pauses again, thinking. “Potassium chloride is used to stop the heart. For lethal injections and cardiac surgery.”

We all stare at her. She clearly has more to say.

She looks into my eyes with a serious expression on her face. “These bad guys aren’t just making drugs. They’re making zombies.”

Chapter Two – Education

Tuesday, June 22

It seems like Dana is right, someone is making zombies.

We had a full day yesterday, investigating the scene, looking for the nearby kids (we wanted to confirm if any of them were zombies), and getting any extra information we could behind the shipment and vehicles.

The two killed at the scene both tested as infected. The coroner couldn't say for sure, but she had a strong hunch she can see the effects of minor brain injuries consistent with turning. She is going to call us back today.

Oh, and she mentioned that they seemed to be low twenties in age. I'm glad we didn't have to pop a couple of teenagers.

Today we are going to follow up on our biggest lead generated yesterday.

It is Tuesday morning, which means that Dana is in Zombie school, and I have my weekly psych session since Steve's death.

My dad, the recently retired Deputy Chief of Police Dan Stack, created and presided over the original Infected Affairs Bureau in Seattle. His model for commanding and managing zombie cops has been studied and used in dozens of other police departments around North America and the world.

Although he's retired now, and has been for the past 18 months or so, he spends a great deal of time travelling and consulting to police and security agencies on zombie leadership.

Dad actually worked with that Canadian scientist who created the zombies – the scientist who studied and became an expert in zombie behaviors while looking for a cure. He designed the Zachman profile for measuring zombie aptitude. My dad built on Dr. Zachman's expertise to come up with "Zombie school", which includes the weekly love-in that Dana was attending right now.

Human cops don't attend the 'Inspiration Session' (Dad hates when people call it Zombie school – though all cops do), but I can tell you basically how it goes. There are five key steps in every inspiration session. They do all five, in order, every time. Zombies like the repetition, and they are suspicious of change.

One: Feed the Pack. A breakfast buffet is provided – lots of protein and meat. If you feed a zombie, they will love you forever. Or at least until they go hungry again. Feed a zombie regularly, and they won't forget it.

Snack-sized protein bars are made available – everyone grabs handfuls and puts them in their bag and pockets for the day. Good cop propaganda in words and images appear on each one, with statements like ‘Protect the Weak’ (that’s us humans) and ‘Honor the Pack’. Pictures of local political leaders, the Chief of Police, and other members of the command staff appear occasionally with an inspirational quote about zombies or cops.

Two: Pack Identity. You want zombies to strongly identify with being a cop – so when they meet other cops, they work together within minimal friction. First, they are part of the team of all cops world-wide. Second, they are part of a team of cops in their area (like Seattle). And finally, they are zombie cops, which make them better and stronger than everyone else. They really play this up.

Three: Personal Pride. It turns out that pride isn’t actually an emotion like most people would think – and tapping into zombie pride is a really powerful motivator. Apparently pride is instinctual in humans and animals – pride brings out the leaders in a group to help establish hierarchy. *If I go kill that tiger, all of the women will like me, grunt.* At this point in the session, they will call out the heroic actions of specific people in the group – the types of behaviors that they want to reinforce in other zombies. Zombies are encouraged to tell their stories of bravery to their captains at the end of the day, so they might get picked as examples for others.

Four: Pack Pride. Building on the pride theme, this part of the session will call out comparisons with other groups that place the local pack in a favorable light. Perhaps statistics like perpetrators caught and humans saved, or examples of bad guys caught in the area through teamwork. Much work is put into finding or manipulating statistics that show the local bureau in a favorable light compared to other cities.

Five: Protect and Lead. Zombies are smart, and they do know good from bad, right from wrong. There are plenty of grey areas in policing however – providing examples of the best choices in morally ambiguous areas are helpful for keeping zombies from crossing the line. This section of the meeting includes a video collage of morally uplifting stories from other zombies, where they made the right choices in potentially uncertain circumstances. The crime stoppers video team records zombie hero stories almost every day, and police precincts share video clips. This small local team is dedicated to managing and publishing these videos on an internal social network, so that each week our zombies have a new, interesting video to watch that aggrandizes obedience and compliance with the rules. The local zombie personality that narrates these videos is a huge sensation with the zombies. Any time he comes around the zombies get loud, excited, and full of bravado.

Throughout the meeting there’s lots of humor and sarcasm, swearing, and noise. Yelling and banging on tables in response to local victories is encouraged.

It’s just like coaching a college football team.

I am not having nearly as much fun in my meeting. We are about ten minutes in, the pleasantries finally dealt with. Sometimes I prefer dialogs with zombies.

“Remind me doc, these sessions are private, right?” I look at the shrink, already knowing the answer, but delaying what I need to get off my chest a little longer.

“That’s right Rob, everything you say here is confidential and protected. What we discuss here can’t be used for disciplinary or legal action against you. I’m only here to help get you through this trauma, nothing else.” She is very relaxed and open. I feel safe here.

“I got my partner killed.”

* * *

“Alright you bunch of ingrates, settle down. Finish getting your food and take a seat Jake – everyone else here is waiting for you. What, you need a special invitation?” Captain Darryl O’Neill was a zombie cop with a military background, and it showed. The zombies loved it when he poked fun at them. They all banged on their tables, smiling at the put-down, while giving big Jake an extra hard time. Everyone had a full plate of food in front of them; they ate loudly and with minimal table manners while O’Neill talked.

“Today is Tuesday June 22 and we’ve got some exciting news for you cretins – listen up.”

The room grew quiet with anticipation. The beginning was generally the same each time, and they loved it.

“This has got to be the best crew of cops that I have ever worked with. We got cops in Hawaii, cops in New York, even cops way up in fucking Alaska. U.S. cops are great. I mean, really great. Stick ‘em in a room full of bad guys and they walk out unscathed, and the bad guys are down.

“I’ve worked with cops all around the world, and I’m proud to be an American cop. But the Seattle PD is incredible! I haven’t seen this kind of top-notch police work since I started working as a cop over ten years ago. You should be proud to work here.

“I became a zombie almost five years ago – one of the first v2 zombies, I’m proud to say. Now I’m the strongest I’ve ever been! At least half of you guys in here are stronger than me though. Seattle has got to be the toughest zombie department I’ve ever seen. You are unstoppable.”

He paused for a good amount of hooting, yelling, and stomping.

“And our unit keeps getting better. Check this out... you all met Dana this morning. She is piping hot death in a tiny package. She has been with the IAB for just one day, and she already popped her first bad guy!” The room rumbled in appreciation, but they knew more was coming in the story – it always did.

“This was no ordinary bad guy though. This was an axe-wielding maniac that was rushing to kill her human partner, who was distracted and almost out of bullets. Dana here takes out a moving, axe hauling target with one shot, right between the eyes.”

Everyone in the room was ferocious in their approval. If a human was in the room, they would be terrified for their own safety.

O’Neill waited for things to calm down, and then finished with Dana’s story, “I tell you, I’ve got a nickname for you Dana – way sooner than usual for a newbie. I’m going to call you ‘Bullseye’.” The zombies burst in applause. Zombies were punching Dana in the arm, and patting her on the back.

“Ok, our next incredible story is about our favorite hungry-man Jake here.” Laughter. “Jake was following up on a domestic case to see how a zombie/human couple was doing about a week after she was beaten by her husband. Routine visit – what could possibly go wrong?” The zombies laughed again in anticipation.

“He arrives to find them fighting and screaming at each other. She is flinging plates at him, and swearing like a pirate! It’s so loud he can hear it all from outside.” The zombies laughed and thumped their feet in anticipation. “Well, Jake here enters the premises unknown to the couple, sneaks up behind the zombie and puts him in a choke hold until he passes out.

“Then he evades a few flying plates – this crazy lady isn’t stopping! So he puts her in cuffs and on the sofa where she can calm down.” Laughter and whooping filled the room. “Neither one is seriously hurt, and the lady is kicking her brute husband out with help from social services before she gets hurt again. You saved a human life there Jake. Nicely done.” O’Neill paused dramatically, for full effect. “Who protects the humans?”

“Zombie cops!” everyone roared. The room was filled with clapping and the zombies near him were patting Jake on the back.

“All right! With these arrests and the great work the rest of you have been putting in, we just pulled ahead of those pansies in Tacoma in major crime arrests per capita.” Thundering filled the room. “Lately, they’ve got their hands full with small-time drug arrests – keeps them so busy they don’t have time for the important crimes that you all get to work on every day. The criminals are smart and tough in Seattle – so we have to be even smarter, and tougher.” Affirmative responses and yells.

An aide rolled over a large plasma TV.

“Ok, who here is ready to see the stories Eric Gunner has for us this week?” Applause and whistles filled the room.

After some brief, reassuring, heartfelt words from the Chief of Police about zombies on the force, followed by boilerplate Seattle police department graphics, Eric Gunner appeared on screen. Low rumbling filled the room in anticipation. His zombie eyes are light green, and his square jaw gives him a rugged, handsome look.

Eric started, “you know that Seattle cops are my favorite,” supportive yells came from the room, “that’s why I moved here from Montana. This week we’re going to hear from my old home state in our first story. Let’s take a look.”

Another zombie reporter, he could almost pass for Eric’s twin, appeared on the screen with a large, muscular, African-American cop in a cowboy hat. The cop’s right wrist has an infected bracelet tattoo around it, which matches the same one Dana and all of the other zombies in the room have.

Wearing the black mark of the infected is optional in the US, unless you work for the government or the healthcare industry. In some countries with fewer personal freedoms, the tattoo is mandatory for the infected.

Many zombies will add red tear symbols to the tattoo after they turn, proud of their recent heritage and unafraid to show it. Dana has three red tears, equidistant around her wrist.

“Bubba, you were just involved in a public demonstration that turned violent. Can you tell us a bit about what happened?”

Bubba spoke slowly with a southern accent, “well, we were called in to protect a group of international politicians in town, when some protesters got out of hand.” He licked his lips. “There was this guy that got in my face and was calling me all kinds of hateful names. He wanted me to let him pass the line, but we had to hold the line to keep the humans safe.

“He picks up this bottle and waves it around at me, swinging it near my head. He’s poking me with his fingers and hitting my chest with his fist. I don’t move the line.

“Then, out of nowhere, he throws the bottle at my partner and it breaks, knocking him out.” Sounds of shocked and appalled zombies fill the room in Seattle.

“That must have been terrible, Bubba. What did you do next?”

“Well, I remembered that we aren’t supposed to shoot protesters unless they pull a gun, so I grabbed the pepper spray from my belt and nailed him right in the face with it.” Murmurs of approval from the zombies in the room.

“He went down hard, but I could tell he was going to come up again in a moment, and he was mad. I grabbed a pair of plasticuffs and hog-tied his arms and legs behind him. He was rolling on his side and yelling, but he couldn’t do nothing to nobody anymore.”

The reporter asked, “did you give him a punch or a kick while he was down? Surely he deserved to pay for what he did to your partner. You can’t hit a police officer and get away with it!”

“No sir, I did not. He was down, that’s all I needed to do with him for the moment. Rather than waste more time on him, I got back to protecting the humans and holding the line.”

“Wise words, from a wise cop,” the reporter looked at the camera, then at Bubba. “Bubba, you are an inspiration to us all. Nice job showing professional leadership to all the zombie cops out there in this great nation of ours. Anything else you want to say?”

“Missoula PD rules ya zombies!” The Seattle zombies laughed and applauded anyway, jeering at Montana and making supportive statements about Seattle.

Between introductions and some FOX News-like commentary from Eric, the video continued to show two more stories from across the US, other examples of zombie cops doing their jobs and making the right choices.

The meeting ended shortly thereafter, with O’Neill warning everyone not to get on Dana’s bad side or, “their days on this great earth were numbered.” The zombies had a great laugh, playing it up, and Dana was in heaven.

* * *

Dana and I meet up at our cubicles, after our respective meetings.

“And how are you doing this morning?” Dana asks. She is bouncing around and clapping like a teenage school girl. I hate zombie school. It is like she is full of adrenalin, or something.

“Just great. You got to meet the other zombies over breakfast?” I avoid asking how the meeting went. It is pretty clear already, and I really don’t want to know.

“Do you know Eric Gunner. Have you met Eric Gunner? You need to introduce me to Eric,” she is speaking more rapidly than usual. I can’t find the airtime to answer her questions. She puts a hand to her chest and exhales. “I’ll bet he is a wild-man in the sack.”

“Okay,” this is more information than I need this morning, time to change the subject. “We received print results overnight from yesterday’s perps. Our favorite lumberjack doesn’t have a record, but the shooter does. Theft, assault. Not a career criminal, just a wayward youth. Stayed out of jail – apparently he had good legal representation. Not too much more on his rap sheet. His name is John Middleton, and we have a recent address.”

“Let’s go find us some more bad guys,” Dana is already on the move.

Oh boy. I’m going to have to keep up today.

The address on file looks like it is for both John and his parents. I'm not looking forward to this meeting. The parents had been informed already, but according to police regulations, I'm going to have to reveal my very personal relationship with their son.

We arrive at John's home. It has a nice picket fence around it, and is part of a good neighborhood. This is not the location of your typical criminal upbringing.

I knock on the door, notice a female figure within, and call, "Mrs. Middleton, it's the police." The woman arrives at the door and looks through the window. Dana and I show her our IDs. "Mrs. Middleton? I'm Detective Stack, and this is Detective Light. We are truly sorry for your loss. May we come in to ask a few questions?"

She opens the door, and motions us inside. We walk into the living room where she says, "Please sit down. My husband is travelling on business. I'm the only one at home." She doesn't offer us anything; she may already know that a cop has killed her son.

"Mrs. Middleton, before we get into our questions, I need to inform you that Detective Light and I were at the scene when your son was killed."

Tears start to well up in her eyes, and I can see her shake a little with rage. She looks closely at Dana's tattoo.

"You devil worshipping zombie bitch," she practically yells at Dana, "what did my beautiful son ever do to you?"

Dana is unmoved, and does not reply.

I answer her. "Ma'am, I'm the one who shot your son. I returned fire after he fired two shots at me, narrowly missing, as he started to shoot again. Your son tried to kill me."

She regains her composure, grows quiet and dabs a tear in her eye. She turns away from me.

"Perhaps I should excuse myself," I say and leave the room, glancing meaningfully at Dana on the way. I stay within partial visual range, a ways behind Mrs. Middleton in the kitchen, in case I need to intervene. I browse the items stuck on the fridge – just your average suburban household.

"Mrs. Middleton, we're trying to learn more about the people that put John up to this. Can you help us?" Dana is surprisingly warm in her delivery.

"You can call me Jane," she says. Jane looks at Dana's tattoo a second time and crosses herself with the religious movement. I think Dana scares her – she is trying to keep it together without appearing afraid.

I've seen this response before – it often works to our advantage in gaining information. This is why I revealed I was the shooter early, and left Dana with her. It's hard for people to concentrate

on lying when they think there is a monster in the room with them. As long as Dana stays tactful, we should be able to learn something here.

“Jane, thank you,” Dana replies. “We believe that John had fallen in with a zombie crowd. Would you know anything about that?”

Jane looks visibly shocked – clearly she doesn’t know this. “No. That is unlikely. He would have told me if this was the case.”

Sure, John would feel comfortable telling his religious zombie-fearing mother that he is now hanging with zombies. Not likely.

“Has anything about John’s behavior changed recently?” Dana avoids telling her than John was a zombie when he died. Good for her, this poor woman had suffered enough in two days – she would learn this in due course.

“I don’t think so, but John hasn’t been living here for the past two months. He’s been working and living with his friend Craig. Craig was so kind to get him a job. John lost his job almost six months ago and had been looking ever since. He moved in with us while he was getting back on his feet.”

Dana asks a few questions about Craig, but Jane doesn’t know much about him other than some basics – she had met him a couple times and has his phone number. No last name or address. From her description he could be Mr. Axe, but we don’t have enough details to go on.

She also doesn’t know anything about his new job; John was going to tell them later, “After he learned more about it himself.” Once he came up with a good alibi, I figure.

Dana stands up from the sofa. As a final question before we leave Dana asks, “Is there anything else you think we should know about for our investigation?”

Jane pauses then says, “Well, it’s nothing important, but John hasn’t been coming to church with us since he moved. I didn’t expect him to, living downtown and all.” I expect he didn’t feel welcome, being a zombie and all. Dana asks and she gives us her church’s name.

“Thank you Mrs. Middleton – Jane,” Dana gives her a sincere smile, “you’ve been very helpful.” Not really, I think. We let ourselves out, thanking her again. Jane does not say goodbye.

In the car while I’m driving, Dana calls in with Craig’s phone number – asking the police desk to work it over for any other details. While she’s on the line with them, they tell her about some new information just received from the harbor-master.

There’s another delivery in port from the same shipping company as last time. Steve had given them his card and explained we were interested in any other deliveries from this company; they called his number to let him know.

As I turn us around in the right direction, Dana asks them to run up an entry warrant – ideally we'll have permission by the time we get there.

While on route we discuss what we've learned about John from his mom, and we both agree that it does not seem like Jane is hiding anything. We hope that Craig's number will turn up with more info.

"Tell me about your dad," Dana says out of the blue, "I loved the inspiration session today. He created those, didn't he?"

"Yup – good old Dad – the zombie emperor," I joke. I'm not comfortable talking about him. He was a career cop – loved his job. His kids got considerably less time than the many, many criminals he put away.

I continue, "Dad was a beat cop for many years, then a detective and eventually Captain in narcotics. He had almost completed a master's in psychology before he decided to become a cop. He was great at reading people – and became infamous in the department. People still say he can read minds.

"It was awful growing up with him; I couldn't get away with ANYTHING." This isn't entirely true anymore, however. Working with zombies has taught me a few tricks. Dad doesn't know about everything I have going on as a cop.

"When the opportunity arose to put a unit together for zombie crime fighting, he was the top candidate for the job. Sparkling arrest record, great leadership skills, ready for promotion, and relevant educational experience. It was his idea, eventually, to pair humans and zombies as interdependent teams with complementary skill sets.

"He poured himself into the opportunity. He spent weeks with that Dr. Zachman in Canada learning about and living with zombies under study.

"He really seemed to figure out what makes zombies tick. He was partially responsible for evolved zombies becoming proud of the term 'zombie', shutting down liberal politicians looking for a more PC name. He even won Dr. Zachman over to using the term."

At first, zombies could care less what people called them. Once the name was turned into a source of pride however, the zombies were all over it, and the press certainly wanted to keep it. It stuck.

"The meeting today was invigorating," Dana shares. "It made me want to be a better zombie cop."

"Yeah, zombie school was made to have that effect. It also makes zombies better partners in action."

We arrive and park at the harbor, while Dana receives a call about the warrant – it is being faxed to the harbor-master’s office for our use.

“Ok, let’s go see what this shipment is all about,” I practically jump from the car. I’m delighted to be doing anything other than talking about my dad.

We meet with the harbor-master, collect our warrant, and he takes us to the recently delivered shipping containers. He points out which collection is part of the same shipment.

“I’ve got a good vibe about this one here,” I joke to Dana as I knock on the wall. The harbor-master unlocks it with his universal keys, a bolt cutter and a pry bar. Dana watches the area in full alert mode.

It is fully filled with all the same types of food – Asian salted snacks, in all your favorite flavors. My heart sinks a little, a little too soon. In a moment it will turn out we get very lucky.

Dana grabs one of the massive cardboard barrels with the familiar labeling, and cracks it open. She lifts the lid off and spills its contents to the floor. Chips and bags of wasabi peas fall everywhere. One large package falls with a thud instead of a light crunch.

The big brick noticeably contains a large quantity of white powder. Dana picks it up, tears open a small hole, and smells. Smart cops don’t put strange white powder in their mouths anymore – that’s just in the movies.

“Smells like the real thing Rob,” Dana comments. “I’ll run a chem. test with my kit to be sure.” Isn’t she just full of surprises?

“Ok everyone, we’ve now got a crime scene here,” I speak to the group. “We need to tape it down and call in the experts for a full search and seizure.”

Dana and I walk out of the container, just as I’m placing the phone to my ear to call it in.

“Rob,” Dana stops moving and whispers to me. She is looking down the line of containers. Walking towards us is our friend from yesterday – the lewd kid in the red hoodie.

I stop to consider my options and the kid looks up, recognizing us. I raise my hand and wave, walking toward him – and he turns around and bolts away from us, taking a ninety degree right turn from the path he was on.

Dammit, why can’t people make being a cop a little easier? We just have a couple of questions!

Dana reacts like a wolf – sprinting way ahead before I’ve even thought to start running. She turns down the line of shipping containers that is closer to us, but one hop away from the path he is on.

I finally get my act together and start running toward him as well. I choose to follow in the path directly behind him, where I can see him. I don’t have zombie hearing after all.

After a short run, I'm almost a full lengthwise shipping container behind him. I'm not gaining on him, even with me flat out sprinting. The air is burning my lungs – I know I won't be able to do this for much longer.

There I am, wishing I have a defensible reason to pull out my gun, so I start to reason with him – puffing out words with each breath.

“Please stop,” pace pace pace, “we just”, pace pace, “have questions,” pace wheeze.

He can hear that he's way ahead of me, and he turns his head a quarter turn to answer me, smiling and gloating, “You need to go the gym more bro.”

Just at that moment, Dana steps out from the container he's about the pass and clothes-lines him with her left arm.

“Whomp!” His body makes a hearty noise as it connects with the ground, the wind rushing out of his lungs. It dazes him briefly, but Dana is already on him, pulling him up by his jacket and setting him up against the container for questions.

Here is this diminutive woman, a mother of three, ten years my senior – and she runs circles around us then lifts a man above her head with her bare hands. My years working in the IAB has proven it again, zombies can do incredible things. Increased strength plus the innate ability to ignore most physical pain allows them to push themselves beyond human limits – at least for a while – before any permanent damage is done.

I bend over and wheeze, coughing and spitting up phlegm. Thank goodness this chase is over!

“Come on creep, we have some questions for you,” Dana takes the lead while I continue to noisily return from near-death. She pushes up his sleeves to look for tattoos – nothing.

“Am I under arrest, pretty cop?” This kid has cojones surprising for his age.

“How about you take a swing at me and I'll let you know?” Dana sneers back.

The two continue their increasingly tawdry verbal abuse towards each other, but the kid doesn't take the bait and try to fight her, escape, or break down and give in to her uttered assaults.

“Okay, okay Dana,” I've heard enough. “He's a zombie all right.”

“Is that all you wanted to know? Shit, you cops are easy to please.”

“We're not done with you yet, brainiac,” Dana is all through her best insults – and scraping the barrel.

She and I take turns asking him questions – some of which he answers, some he evades, and some he lies about. He works the harbor getting small hauling jobs – manual labor. He doesn't “know nothing about no drugs.” And he claims he doesn't “hang with other zombies.”

He doesn't tell us how he became a zombie, although his full reply is much more colorful.

His story fits with the harbor-master's perspective of him. We have nothing to hold him on, so after a few more fruitless questions we collect his name and info and let him go.

We stay at the harbor, taping in the area until the narcotics team arrives to do a full sweep of the shipment. One of the guys and I go way back.

He asks me, “how is the zombie marriage counseling business?” Ha ha. Funny.

“Not too shabby Phil. How's it been babysitting crack-heads and daytime hookers?”

“Touché, Rob,” we embrace in a man-hug and slap each other on the back.

“We'll take care of the crime scene Rob. I'll let you know if we find anything interesting.”

It is almost time for lunch. Dana and I grab a bite at a great seafood place nearby. We go back to the office in the afternoon, discussing all of the info we have, checking in with Mac and Jake's progress, planning our next move, and getting in the necessary reports for the past two days. I bounce our ideas off my captain – Captain McDowell – for suggestions.

And of course Dana tells her captain – Captain O'Neill – about her exciting capture of an escaping suspect zombie teenager earlier in the day, asking if Eric Gunner will need to interview her personally.

By the end of a very full day, we are clear on our next steps to pursue. It is time to pack it in.

* * *

“This is agent 6628, calling in from Seattle.” Dana was at her home alone. She had just dialed a number from memory on a second cell phone she pulled from a hidden compartment in her bedroom drawer.

“Connecting you 6628,” a woman's voice on the other end of the line stated. There was a silent pause, then a click.

“Dana, thanks for checking in. What do you have to share?” The voice on the other end was now male, and to the point.

“Nothing much,” Dana reported. “I've finally made it into the IAB. I got lucky, and was partnered with Detective Rob Stack like we hoped. Thanks for pulling strings and getting me into the detective's test when his partner died.”

“It was no trouble.” The voice waited.

“I haven’t seen anything really important for my mission yet. Rob seems on the take – he pilfered some cash from a dead zombie perp – we had to take down two of them. I’ve personally seen and confirmed cocaine shipments into Seattle. Got real lucky and quickly found evidence of zombie turning as we suspected. That’s about it.”

“You’re right, the cash is unimportant.” The implication, by omission, was that the drugs and zombie turning were important, although expected.

“I’ll continue to keep you up to date with a call twice a week, as we planned. We’re following several leads.”

“Have you met his family or the other executive officers yet?”

“No, haven’t had the chance,” Dana replied. “I have learned some background info about his dad that we already knew.”

“You need to make this happen, and soon. The FBI and your country are counting on you Dana. We now have additional reason to believe there is serious corruption in Seattle, and we fear that the plans underway are genuinely evil.”

Chapter Three – Sin

Tuesday June 22, 11pm

A darkly clothed and masked figure walked aside a concrete wall in the grass until they found a shaded, poorly lit area to jump and climb over. They dashed forward and leaped at the wall, flexing their right leg against the wall and launching even further upward, effectively doubling the height they could reach in a single jump. They bound high and gracefully, carefully avoiding the jagged, broken security glass built into the tall perimeter fence before they dropped down on the opposite side.

It was the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, which contains many single family homes, dozens of apartment buildings, and a few enormous palatial homes originally built by the city's founders – affectionately called the mansion district.

That particular well-shielded home is owned by Benito (Ben) Hernández, also known as Seattle's Chief of Police. Ben and his wife were not at home – they were at a non-profit fund raising dinner with the Mayor and her husband. Ben and his wife have kids, both away at college – no longer living at home.

The figure slinked across the grass, occasionally taking refuge behind trees and bushes, avoiding well-lit areas. They climbed a tree close to the house, using a thick branch as a launching point to grab on to the home's extravagant gables. From there, they inched across to a window sill and some exterior electrical piping – which they used to climb to the top of the window.

Using the window sill for footing, they reached above and slightly behind. They grabbed and hung from the roof, pulling them up and on top. From this vantage point they rested briefly and took a deep breath. A second later, they crouched and stepped around the perimeter of the home, occasionally peeking over the edge until they found the second floor balcony in the back.

After swinging over and hang-dropping to the concrete veranda below, they sidled in to the darkest corner to sit, rest, and watch for any signs of movement around them or an indication their intrusion was detected.

Once they were confident their approach was still a secret, they pulled out a small lock pick and got to work on the rolling glass door. It didn't have an elaborate lock, nor was the home alarmed. Less than a minute later, they quietly slid the door open, popped inside, and slid the door back to an almost closed position. They put the tools away.

Having memorized the home's layout earlier, the intruder walked quickly and quietly into the upstairs hallway, past the bathroom and one of the bedrooms, and directly into the Chief's home office. Sticking to the shadows, they gazed out the double-sized picture window to ensure that no

one from the area or a nearby building was watching. The front entry and driveway were visible – but no one was in sight, and no sounds could be heard from the rest of the home.

Confident they were still alone and unnoticed, the trespasser made their way over to the Chief's desk. They crouched down and opened each drawer, examining the contents of each closely. They took special note of the large filing drawer and its many folders and papers within, slowly going over them and noting the folder titles and any important documents.

A few minutes later, mission completed, the intruder made their way back out the veranda and down the side of the building. They headed back towards their original entry point, double-jumping up the wall and positioned themselves carefully over the glass.

Dropping down in a cat-like stance on the other side, and glancing around a full one hundred and eighty degrees, she looked for any witnesses to her misconduct.

Noticing that the area was clear, Dana took off her soft, silk balaclava mask and thin, rubbery black gloves, putting them away. She turned her jacket inside-out to a brighter, reflective color, and assumed the role of an evening jogger, running under the twilight.

* * *

Wednesday June 23

Dana is already in the office when I arrive shortly after 8am. She is doing internet research on some of our leads, while chomping on a Cinnabon. Thanks to a faster metabolism, zombies can eat crap all day and stay fit like a teenager. If I eat a Cinnabon in the morning I practically pass out from a carb coma an hour later.

We say our good mornings and I settle in next to her to see what she's learned so far.

As we are going over details of the food company that makes the Asian snacks concealing the drugs we uncovered yesterday, my boss steps in.

“Stack, Light, I'm glad you're both here,” McDowell interrupts. “The Chief needs to see both of you right away.”

“Yes sir,” I reply and stand up, brushing myself off and smoothing my jacket.

We follow the captain upstairs to the Chief's office. Captain O'Neill is already in the room.

Dana and I are motioned into two chairs in front of the Chief's desk. Our respective captains stand out of the line of fire, by the office walls behind us.

“Detectives, thank you for coming in. I heard the most interesting story from the Mayor last night,” the Chief pauses and looks back and forth between us.

“Apparently her office picked up on a little story – that the IAB believes that criminals are turning new zombies here in Seattle.”

The blood drains from my face a little and my seat becomes less comfortable. This is why we’re here. We’re about to get chewed out.

“The captains here tell me that you two are the source of this theory,” the Chief’s silence invites us to speak.

“I am sir,” Dana replies. “We’ve found evidence that…”

The Chief interrupts her. “From what I’ve heard – and I think I’ve heard everything I need to know,” the Chief glares at Dana while saying this, putting particular emphasis on the word ‘everything’, “we do not have any comprehensive proof that zombies are being turned.”

He continues. “This office cannot afford to have our god-fearing constituents in an up-rise because a couple of cops have a hunch that zombies are being made.

“The IAB is on political thin-ice as it is. Rob, of all people you should know this. What the hell were you thinking?”

I do not reply. I’ve seen this kind of performance before – the Chief has more to say, and nothing I say is going to make it any better.

But Dana hasn’t been to this play before, and she is being protective. The Chief’s words sound like an attack on her partner’s character, so she steps in it. “Sir, if I could explain…” she starts, but can’t finish.

The Chief raises his voice. “I’d like to make myself perfectly clear here detectives. As far as we are all concerned, there are no zombies being created in the city of Seattle.” The Chief stands up. “We will have no rumors escape from this office about zombie creation. You are welcome to continue this line of investigation – but you will keep these theories absolutely contained in the meantime.

“Dana, I hear you’re doing well here so far – this is great to see. I’d hate to see your career with the IAB interrupted too quickly.” It isn’t stated as one, but this is unmistakably a threat.

“If and only if you uncover any real evidence in this investigation,” the Chief goes on, “you will ask for guidance from your captains here on how to proceed. Any questions?”

“No sir,” I reply. Dana finally catches on and says the same.

“Dismissed.”

The four of us leave his office and close the door behind us.

“Hey Rob, Dana,” Captain McDowell’s voice is soft. “You’re both busy – we’ll talk more about this later.” Then he becomes comforting. “You are both doing really great with this investigation.”

He turns to Captain O’Neill, “Darryl and I will make sure we tighten up any loose lips around the office. Continue your investigation, but keep it on the down-low, if you know what I mean.”

“Sure thing boss,” I reply. Dana and I go back to our cubes.

Dana inquires of me, “under the circumstances that seemed a little extreme. What do you think has the Chief so upset?”

“The politics around zombie policing are touchy, to say the least. Plus, public sentiment towards zombies at large affects their willingness to allow zombies have jobs where they carry guns. Anything that makes zombies look bad, or worse, impacts the longevity of the IAB.”

Thank goodness the occasional ‘average’ cop keeps the bar low when it comes to setting public expectations. Zombie cops look no worse by comparison, even better in some ways. I stop to look directly at Dana. “Are you ok?”

She replies in a chipper voice. “Sure, why wouldn’t I be?”

Zombies and their emotional fortitude – they can take a licking, and keep on ticking. If she is ok, I resolve to shake it off too.

“We should investigate the address pulled on Craig Whiddy.” With the co-operation of the wireless phone company and the phone number we had from Jane Middleton, we managed to get name and address billing information they have on file.

We have hopes we will find evidence that Whiddy is the axe-wielding zombie that Dana had shot earlier, and some useful new leads.

“I’m driving,” I announce.

While in the car on route, Dana asks if I know the Chief very well.

“A little,” I reply. “I’ve met him at a couple of police functions, and I’ve heard stories about him from my dad.”

“Such as?”

“Well, my dad and the Chief got along well enough at the beginning, but as the IAB grew bigger, they had a bit of a falling out.” I pause to take a breath. “My dad insists that the Chief pushed him into taking early retirement.

“Dad believed that zombie cops partnered with humans were the future of the PD. He wants to take the IAB approach and start trying it elsewhere like major crimes, narcotics, and even CSI.

“The Chief felt that politically it was too early to try this, and would affect his chances of re-appointment. Dad continued pushing for it, trying to find ways outside the PD to influence the Chief.

“Like the mayor?” Dana inquires.

“Yes, I believe so. I always got the feeling there was much more to the story than this, something important Dad was hiding, but he insists that this is the only reason he was asked to step down.

“Today, he is not a big fan of the Chief. In his dealings with other police and security agencies, he continues to push for more zombie integration. I don’t think he’s been successful influencing anyone just yet.”

“Sounds like your dad is really committed to zombie human relations,” Dana suggests.

“I guess so. Anyway, pretty much everything else I know about the Chief is about his career. Anyone can learn it online.”

We pull into street parking near Whiddy’s apartment. Dana calls ahead to the superintendent as we walk to the building. We knock and announce ourselves with no response, and then the superintendent lets us in and leaves us.

The apartment is well furnished and anointed with art and other flourishes. It doesn’t look like the apartment of a zombie – who care less of appearances.

It doesn’t take us long, but we soon find pictures and some ID that confirms for us that Craig is the axe man. We collect and bag it carefully, along with other recently used items we hope have Craig’s fingerprints for verification.

Dana is look at some pictures and paper documents, while I look through what appear to be drug apparatus in the living room. No actual drugs unfortunately. There does seem to be evidence that someone was sleeping here and someone was in the bedroom.

I suspect that his guest is John Middleton, as John’s mother Jane suggested. I bag and tag some personal items in the area for confirmation.

Dana calls over to me. “Have you ever heard of the Church of Progressive Faith?”

I haven’t. “Nope. But I’m not what you’d call an ‘expert’ in the religious field.” I supplement my statement with air quotes.

“Hmmm. These two didn’t seem like the religious type,” Dana muses.

“John’s mother seemed to suggest that he was,” I remind her.

“Yeah, ok,” Dana moves on.

Dana bags the brochure, along with some photos and government forms, to file back at the office. We tape the door with police tape, and head back to the car for the next stop on our list. We are going to meet with the local office of the food company, Tasty Snacks. Their product shipment contains the drugs we found.

On our way there, Dana receives a call from the police desk.

“We just took a call about a theft we figured you’d want to know about,” the young man from the desk explains to Dana.

“Yes, go on,” she replies.

“It’s a pharmaceuticals manufacturing company. They called to report a theft. Potassium chloride.”

Dana takes down the details, thanks him, and assures him we will respond to the call in person. “Sounds like our plans just changed, Rob.” She explains the reason and gives me the address.

I flip on the siren and lights and turn us around – surprising and pissing off a few nearby drivers in the process – the pharmaceutical company is in the opposite direction. Once properly headed, I turn off the lights and speed up a little.

We arrive at the scene, introduce ourselves to reception, and the warehouse manager joins us almost immediately.

“Hi. I’m Detective Stack, and this is Detective Light. We are responding to the theft call that was put in.”

“I’m Paul Smithson, the warehouse manager here.” He has a British accent. “I’m the one that called the police. Let me take you to the warehouse where we noticed the robbery.”

We walk and talk. I ask, “Who are your customers for potassium chloride, Paul?”

“We have quite a few customers for this drug, in both powder and liquid form. It was the liquid drug that was stolen.”

We wait for him to answer the question.

“Oh, yes. We have hundreds of customers for KCI – that’s the name of its chemical formula – hospitals, doctors, and veterinarians. We’re the largest supplier of KCI on the west coast – in the US and Canada.”

“We understand that KCI is used for lethal injections?” I inquire.

“Well, yes – but we don’t sell it for that. Frankly, that’s not a very big market, and that’s not the type of image our company would like to portray. KCI has many good uses too. Primarily, in its liquid form, it is used to help people and animals with potassium deficiencies. A small amount of hospital sales are also used for heart operations.

“The powder, which was not stolen, is used to make fertilizer and no-sodium table salt. It also has some manufacturing and food processing uses.”

We arrive at the warehouse, and follow Paul to the scene of the crime.

“Here we are,” he says. It looks just like a regular warehouse. I can’t see anything wrong.

Paul notices me regarding the area with a slightly confused look, and he helps by pointing, “that area there. That is where the KCI was stolen from.”

It is just a boring empty shelf. Sigh.

“Was anything else out of the ordinary?” I ask, searching for more useful information.

“Not really,” Paul answers. “Yesterday’s stock count showed that twelve gallons of KCI was missing. We store KCI in one gallon jugs, but usually portion and sell it in racks of bottles containing 50 ml or less. We do a warehouse stock count every two weeks.

“Two boxes, each containing six one gallon jugs have been taken.” This matches the count we had found in our warehouse retrieval.

“Do you know who might have taken them?” Dana inquires.

“Not yet, and we might never know. Security is going through the tapes.” He points to a video camera a fair distance away. I doubted a video from it could ascertain someone’s face. “They suspect an inside job, as there have been no external security issues for the past two weeks.”

“We’ll need to get a list of all your employees that have access to the warehouse, if that’s ok,” I explain to Paul.

“Absolutely. I’ll have it prepared right now.” Paul steps away.

I look at Dana. While this visit confirms the source of our medical drug find, it is so far pretty unhelpful in every other way. Perhaps the employee listing will come in handy.

We finish up with Paul, giving him my card in case any new information comes up. I write the police case number on the back of the card for his insurance purposes.

We drive back towards Tasty Snacks, a wholly owned subsidiary of a major food empire that you've probably heard about.

Dana and I chat about the case and a few other personal topics on the way until we arrive.

"We're here about the drug investigation we called about earlier."

"Oh yes, let me get the manager right away," the receptionist dashes off.

A tall, heavy man comes in and introduces himself as Geeman Chou. It seems to me that he quite enjoys their product – regularly. We introduce ourselves and he suggests we talk in his office. We follow him.

"I've already done some research on the background behind this shipment for you. We want to help the police in this investigation in every possible way." He is clearly scared, but authentic. He doesn't seem guilty to me, at least not yet.

"Why don't you take us through what you have," Dana suggests.

"Ok – here's what I've learned." Geeman wipes his hair down with his hands nervously. "This particular shipment was a little unusual for two reasons. First, it was a special order for a new event that's just been organized. The Asian Cultural Fair."

Geeman places a customer profile down on the table in front of us and continues speaking.

"They are a new customer, we hadn't heard of them before – but it was a big order, and their credit card down payment processed without a hitch. I spoke earlier with the sales rep that took the order, and she commented that they seemed disorganized. They asked for a rush order, and paid extra for it. It seemed to her that this was the first time they were organizing an event of this size. They had many more questions than our usual customers."

He tells us these paper photocopies are ours to keep, and continues the story.

"Our previous shipment from China had already left, and we didn't have sufficient stock in town to fill the order, so we arranged for an extra delivery. The size of this shipment wasn't big enough to go with our usual carrier, but big enough that UPS and FedEx didn't make financial sense."

He places another set of photocopies on the table.

"Here is all of the faxed information we sent to the new Chinese shipping company we found to do the delivery for us, in the timelines we needed. We've never used them before, but they seemed to have the best prices of everyone we researched for the quick turnaround we needed."

I can hear the commercial now – we ship drugs with your product, and we pass the savings on to you!

Geeman continues to politely answer all of the additional questions Dana and I can think of, and we collect our things and prepare to go. He is never evasive, and he answers all of our questions as fully as we require of him. I feel confident that Tasty Snacks is not moving into the drug business.

Just as we are about to leave, Geeman politely interrupts. “Umm, detectives? Would it be possible for us to collect our snack foods? We still need to supply our customer for their event, and we don’t have any other way to do it.”

I take back the card I gave Geeman earlier, and write another number on the back.

“This phone number is for the detective in charge of the seizure, Phil Bronson.” I feel a little sorry for Geeman. “No guarantees, but if you wait until later today to call him, I’ll put in a good word for you in the meantime.”

We leave Geeman to his worrying, and exit the building.

True to my word, I give a call to my buddy Phil as we walk back to the car. I want to get an update on the seizure anyway.

“Phil, this is Rob. How’s the candy store?”

He snorts in laughter and replies, “Jesus Rob, this bust is big. We’re calling it the biggest Seattle drug seizure of the decade. That brick you found in one barrel was just the tip of the iceberg. Practically every box and barrel in the entire shipment has a similar sized brick or bag. We’ve got cocaine and heroin.”

I stop walking to consider the scope of what I’m hearing.

Phil continues. “We even had to send for a bigger impound truck after we shipped our first small batch back to HQ lockup. Shit, this is crazy! Some of the newer cops in narcotics don’t even know how to handle a situation like this. Feels like I’ve been playing teacher all day with all of the questions I’m getting.”

I’m trying to get my head around the size of the find. “Break it down for me Phil – what’s the commercial market for this many drugs?”

“Let me put it this way old friend. You suggested to me that zombies are speedballing this stuff and that makes sense given the other evidence. Even a tenth of this much heroin is unquestionably rare for a bust these days.

“There aren’t enough drug customers in the Northwest to consume this product, not without changing price and distribution dramatically. That would piss off the biggest Tacoma gangs. Even if they were involved, I don’t think they could move this much product anyway.

“My working hypothesis is that this many drugs would be packaged and distributed widely. If people didn’t think I was crazy for thinking it – and don’t you tell anyone I said this – I’d suspect someone was preparing to pump up the entire zombie population of North America.”

Wow. I am floored. I take a seat at a nearby bus stop to think. Dana sits down next to me.

“It’s a good thing I’m not responsible for zombie-related investigations, hey Rob?” I’m still thinking as he talks. “Rob, you there?”

“Yeah – I’m still here Phil. You’ve given me a lot to think about.” I remember one of the reasons I originally called. “Phil, we just talked to a dude named Geeman Chou with Tasty Snacks. He was very co-operative, gave us some information on the shipping company that is likely involved.”

Phil interrupts, “oh yeah, before I forget – I wanted to tell you that all of the boxes and barrels were tampered with, or at least a few of the ones that we looked at really closely. The tape closing them up was sliced open carefully; we believe to add the drugs.

“Clear packing tape was used to reclose each container. It is hard to see if you’re just looking casually, but if you work it with a knife you can peel the extra tape layer off, revealing the original tape underneath.”

This confirms my theory that the Asian shipping company is responsible for adding the pricey payload.

“This is great news to hear Phil, thank you. Do you think Geeman will be able to pick up his food anytime soon, or will it all be impounded?”

Phil answers, “We don’t need the snack food. We’ll have everything we need from the drugs and some CSI work underway. Besides, there’s way too much of it for us to reasonably impound. Some of the guys have been snacking on it, and some of it has been stepped on – but most of the shipment should be fine.

“If he calls, I’ll let Geeman know he can take delivery of the food in a few days – a week tops if things continue to go as planned. We should be done in the next day or two.”

“Thanks Phil, much appreciated.” We say our goodbyes with some good-natured ribbing, and I turn to fill Dana in on all the new info.

Dana calls in the shipping company info for a background search while I drive us there. We had planned this trip already – I know the area and where to go.

Upon arrival, we discover that the address given for the shipping company was a façade. There is no actual suite 303 in the office building, and none of the other offices are remotely related to

shipping, or even Asia. I hope that the background search will learn something useful from the local police in China. My Chinese is horrible. Actually, it is non-existent.

Dana and I hang out in a local coffee shop to go over what we've learned today, in case either of us is missing something important.

My phone rings. It is Jake, the big zombie cop we had asked to tail our friend in the red hoodie. Turns out he was at the harbor in the morning, working. He got a little nosy around the drug bust, and then went for a drive. Jake followed him.

Jake continues to explain, "The kid came downtown, and I followed him to an old community center that was closed down – used by runaways and bums to sleep. It's opened up again."

"Yeah, what is it now," ask as I stifle a yawn. I'm tired from all of the dead ends we've investigated today.

"Have you ever heard of the Church of Progressive Faith?"

* * *

Unaware of his tail, but inside the church where Jake could not see him, the hoodie wearing zombie kid ignored the other options and went up the stairs. He had clearly been here before. He found the main office to meet with the pastor and another gentleman with him.

The pastor was white, older, and wearing garments with a clearly religious appearance. His companion was a little younger, wearing a suit and a hat. His suit concealed a gun.

"Ya'all wanted an update on the delivery situation at the harbor?" The kid commented. He was clearly trying to speak in a professional manner, but he didn't have much skills or experience in the area.

The pastor's companion nodded for the kid to continue.

"There's 5-0 all over the place, and they been filling up a wacked-out cop cargo van with all of the drugs." The kid shifted uneasily, looking back and forth between them. "You gonna need to act damn quick if you want to get them back before they end up in a big cop building with steel walls and shit."

"We better call the Chief; he'll know what to do."

The pastor nodded in agreement with his mysterious companion.

* * *

Jake's question hits me like a ton of bricks. Of course I immediately connect the dots with the church brochure Dana had noticed in Craig's apartment. I'm a detective after all.

“Jake, stay put unless the kid leaves. Call us if he does. Dana and I are on the way.” He gives me the address, and I grab Dana to leave while I’m still talking. She stuffs her biscotti in her mouth and follows me out.

We arrive at the church about ten minutes later, and hook up with Jake.

“Aww, you’re here to take me to church!” Jake is always full of one-liners. He is just like a cop from the movies, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. If Arnie was a zombie, that is. Actually, now that I think about it – he is exactly like Arnie.

We ensure our guns are easily accessible, but don’t pull them out. We’re entering a church.

The front door is open; we can’t see movement or anyone inside through the cloudy though occasionally transparent windows. We let ourselves in. Inside it is dark, but the atrium is visible from light coming in the front windows. There are stairs going downstairs, upstairs, and double doors in front of us.

Dana peeks in through the double doors. “This is the chapel – it’s a large room – but it’s empty.”

Jake whispers, “I can smell something downstairs, and hear movement.”

Dana looks contemplative and nods in agreement, “me too.”

Downstairs it is. I take the lead. I don’t want to look like a chicken-shit in front of Jake and Dana.

None of the lights are on downstairs, and the switch doesn’t have any effect.

I pull out a small flashlight and push ahead. My colleague’s enhanced visibility seems to suit them fine; they don’t seem to need the help of any extra light.

There are two doors in the hallway, the first to a small janitor’s closet. Unoccupied and uninteresting. Dana nods toward the other door.

The door is stuck in a closed position. Years of dampness and neglect have engorged the wood. I turn the handle, set my shoulder behind it, and give it a solid push.

“Shit, that hurts,” I exclaim. Why am I doing this manual labor when I have two zombie companions? I have no idea. I’m being stubborn and stupid. Plus, I’m creeped out by the surroundings and the smell. It is rank in here.

I re-double my efforts, putting some more shoulder, weight, and muscle into my door opening prowess. The door gives way and lets us inside.

It is pitch black in here – none of the light from above makes it into this room. The immediate direction of my flashlight gives me the only visibility I have. I swear I can hear breathing and footsteps ahead of me in the dark. I think I'm going to need new underwear after this.

I can hear Dana and Jake split up behind me; the room is large enough for us to spread out. I continue forward, darting my light towards any sounds I can hear, barely making anything out. Is that a rat? Can spiders get that large? Shivers run down my spine.

It smells like excrement in here, or is it death? I'm not an expert – I just know I want to barf. I start panting through my mouth, at the same time disgusted with what I am breathing in. At least the smell is reduced. If there is a hell on earth, we've found it.

I move forward for a while, taking special caution with each step – aiming the flashlight down as I go. I don't quite know where Dana is, but I can still hear Jake behind me and to the right.

Then, I hear them.

From various corners around me, the floor and walls start to move. I freeze, terrified. I swear that my flashlight starts to dim, just now. *Really Duracell, now's the time you pick?*

I flip my light from place to place, catching an arm here, or a leg there. My left side, my right side, and in front of me. Then, behind me.

I'm sweating like crazy, and my eyes are starting to sting. Is it incredibly hot in here?

I turn around slowly, keeping my dimming light by my head, aiming forward. My eyes finally start to adjust, and they start to come into view.

One, two, three, four, five zombies – all around me. They are walking towards me with arms reaching out to seize my flesh. They are attracted by the light – or fresh meat. I don't care why; I just need to find a way out. Part of me wants to scream for help, but I can't get over my fears, or breathe in enough, to make enough sound.

These aren't evolved zombies. I haven't seen any original zombies in person, but I've seen enough videos and books to know the signs. I've read lots of the comics too; they scared the crap out of me. These zombies have the signs – in their eyes and their walk. I'm completely surrounded by original zombies.

I can't find an escape path, and I can't run where I can't see. If I trip near all these original zombies they will pounce on me and I'm history. I need to move very cautiously or I'm going to die, today.

At this exact moment, the zombie in front thrusts towards me, far faster than I would expect. I shudder and start to completely freak out – then my training kicks in.

I grab my pistol, aim, and pull down on the trigger – barely without thinking. A millisecond later as the cylinder starts to turn; my arm is grabbed and pushed to the right by someone behind me. I'm sure the rest of the horde has started to pounce on me.

The bullet leaves the chamber and embeds itself in the brick outer wall, missing the zombie. The strength in my arm is inadequate to raise my gun up again against the zombie. *I'm a goner.*

“What the hell is wrong with you? Can't you find a less lethal way to protect yourself?” Dana has now pushed my arm and gun all the way towards the floor. “These people are unarmed and mentally debilitated, Rob.”

“What the fuck am I supposed to do, serve up my brains on a fucking platter?” But now that she is beside me, and I start to calm down a little, I know she is right. I don't need to shoot these zombies to deal with them – original or not.

“You don't need to do anything, fraidy-cat, just sit here while Jake and I handle it.” And they quickly proceeded to incapacitate each zombie in the room, one or two at a time.

Some of them she zip-ties to chairs, or each other. One whole group she simply piles on top of one-another, then puts a table over and around them. They squirm but can't figure out how to stand up or move past the metal legs.

“I have someone I'd like you to meet,” exclaims Jake as he handles two zombies by conking their heads together, effectively knocking them out. This is followed by a stern reprimand from Dana. He sheepishly uses his plasticuffs to zip-tie them after that.

It is only a few moments later, and they are done. My eyes are much better adjusted to the darkness now. My flashlight is standing on a table, pointing up and reflecting light off the ceiling. There are at least a dozen zombies sitting or lying around the room, not including cops. Many of the zombies are young, some may even be teenagers.

Jake and Dana go through their protein-bar rations, breaking them in half and distributing them to the zombies. The original zombies act like puppies, some stroking the two zombie cops with affection and humming while they eat.

Dana and Jake regroup by where I am sitting.

I speak first. “Dana, Jake, I'm really sorry for my behavior – that was completely uncalled for. I've never encountered a real original zombie before, and I had no idea what to expect.” I take a deep breath and try to change the subject. “I didn't know there were this many original zombies anywhere, let alone Seattle.”

Dana listens, but is clearly thinking about something else. She is livid. “Why the fuck aren't they feeding these zombies?”

Chapter Four – Faith

The pastor, the zombie kid, and the man in the suit upstairs all stopped talking at once.

“That sounded like gunfire downstairs.”

“Shit.”

The man in the suit pulled out his gun and started to head for the stairs.

“Wait,” said the parson. “You don’t know what’s going on down there. Come with me.”

The parson led them to a small locked office containing a panel of LCD screens. Black and white security camera images appeared on each one. One of the images was black.

At first, they didn’t see anything. They waited.

After a few moments they saw three people taking the stairs up, and then talking in the atrium. Two men and one woman.

“Hey! Those are the cops that chased me and asked a bunch of questions at the harbor,” the kid exclaimed, while pointing at the screen. “I don’t know who the big one is though.”

The woman called someone on her cell phone, while the other two talked to each other. As the woman talked on the phone, she occasionally asked the others short questions.

“It looks like they’ve been to the pit,” said the man in the suit, looking at the parson.

The zombie kid looked back and forth between them, clearly confused by this subject.

“Ted – you two should leave right now,” said the parson emphatically.

The man in the suit looked angry, then nervous. “Damn it, the Chief is going to be furious with us. He needs those level ones. Those cops are likely going to take ‘em away. This will fuck up his plans.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” said the parson. “Regardless of if we can keep the level ones or not, you two should leave.”

“Okay, okay,” said the suit. “Let’s go kid.” He turned to the parson. “I’ll call the Chief on the way out Peter. See you later.”

The kid was still confused, but did what he was asked without talking. He followed Ted out of the room. The parson came out, locking the door behind them.

As the parson got ready to head downstairs, the two others left the back way. They exited quietly via a large metal door, headed down the fire escape stairs, and into the alley behind.

“Chief, its Ted,” the man in the suit said over his cell phone as he walked. “It looks like the police have found the level ones in the church. “

“Why can’t you ever call with good news, Ted,” said the male voice on the other end.

“Yeah, sorry about that – it’s been a bad day. The cops have been moving more quickly than we expected.”

“Agreed. If the police keep interfering, we’ll have to accelerate our plans. In the meantime, we need to shake them off. Deliver the package as we discussed.”

“Ok, will do,” said Ted.

“Now we’ll have to find out where they take those level ones, or find another way to scare the mayor.”

* * *

As Dana finishes with a few phone calls, we are joined in the atrium by a short man in religious clothing.

“What the hell is going on here?” Dana is about to charge over to him.

“Okay Dana, take it easy. Let me handle this,” I say quietly to her, touching her arm and then walking ahead.

Dana is still angry about finding the malnourished, mistreated zombies downstairs. I can’t figure out why she is taking this so personally. Although as a level five, she has more emotional capacity than some evolved zombies. Not the same intensity as her original human emotions, but some.

Dana had just finished calling social services to have these original zombies taken in for care. We are waiting for them to arrive.

“I’m the pastor of the Seattle branch of the Church of Progressive Faith, officer,” he holds his hand towards me to shake. I grab and raise my notebook and pen as an evasive maneuver.

“What makes you think I’m a cop?” I’m already suspicious of this guy, and this confirms it for me.

“Oh, I’ve worked with many officers of the law before my calling, and I know the gestures, and the equipment,” he explains, nodding at my notebook. “My name is Peter. How can I help you?”

I wonder in what capacity he has ‘worked’ with officers of the law before. The wrong side, I bet.

“I’m Detective Stack. We found several hungry zombies downstairs. Why haven’t you been feeding them?”

“Ah, the originals. I was about to feed them before our service tonight, we feed them three times a day. They get hungry so fast.”

“You keep original zombies?” I am still in shock with this development, even though I had seen them with my own eyes.

“Well, we’re the first faith to embrace both zombies and humans in the same congregation,” Peter explains. “Occasionally, people find out about our good work dealing with the turned, and they bring the unfortunate ones here for help.

“You’d be surprised how many original zombies are still out there, being cared for by friends and family, he continues. “But it is a heavy burden, too much for most to handle.” He looks down at the floor, then back up. “We do what we can to help.”

Bullshit, I think to myself. Something about this story is off, but I don’t know what yet.

“You weren’t caring for them in a very hospitable environment,” I exclaim. “The lights are off, and the zombies are crapping all over the place.”

“Oh that darn power. This is an old building, in serious disrepair,” he claims, “I’ll have to ask our parishioners if they know a good electrician that can help us get things working again.

“I’m sorry about the conditions, officer. We have some people helping us keep the zombies clean every day. They don’t use the restrooms you know. I’m afraid you’ve caught us between cleanings. Good help has been hard to find, and we don’t have many financial resources just yet. We’re barely holding things together.”

This guy’s story smells as bad as it does downstairs. I ask him if he has seen a kid in a red hoodie, and he claims not to. I ask a few more questions, learning little. He continues to play the “old, overwhelmed but helpful parson” as we talk.

Meanwhile, the social services bus has arrived and Dana is bringing them up to speed. She helps bring the zombies upstairs and get them seated for transport.

Peter notices the zombies leaving for the bus. “Oh! Thank you officer for calling in help for us. I can’t tell you how challenging it has been getting this location up and running. Perhaps it is too much for an old man like me to handle.

“Once we have our act together I’m sure we’ll be better able to care for the originals. Could you tell me where you’re taking them?”

“We’ll be in touch,” I tell him, and dismiss him with a nod.

“Thank you again officer. You’re welcome to stay tonight if you’d like to hear more about the church.” He left to prepare for the church’s guests that were apparently coming tonight.

I go back to my partner outside.

Dana has already sent Jake off on his next investigation. She is just finishing up with the zombie bus.

“This guy has a million excuses Dana,” I share, “I’m not sure we can nail him for much right now, perhaps endangerment.”

Dana looks a little upset, even contemplative.

“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire, I always say. If we keep an eye on this place, I bet we’ll uncover more going on.”

“Okay,” Dana replies, “I like to get this place shut down. Endangerment isn’t enough.”

The bus leaves with its zombie cargo. I have no idea where they’ll go or who will look after them. I hope they know what they’re doing.

A few minutes later, people start arriving at the church.

Most of the people arriving seem to be entering in pairs. I see a few people carrying those “Progressive Faith” brochures like Dana found in Craig’s apartment.

I look closely at the pairs arriving and notice that many of them have one person wearing the tattoo of the infected.

I point it out to Dana, and she nods.

“Say Dana, it seems that destiny has put us here at just the right time. I’d like to stay and watch. See if I can learn anything useful.”

“Ok Rob,” she replies, “I can’t stand it here. I’m going to head home and file our report against this place. I’ll catch a bus. See you tomorrow.”

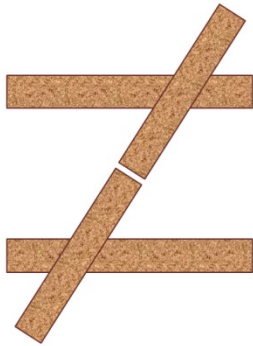
“Sure thing, take it easy. Call me if I can help.”

I follow a few people back into the church, and take a seat by myself behind the others. I catch up on email on my Windows Phone while I wait. It is so much fun to use.

Peter begins the service. “Friends and neighbors, thank you for joining us today to learn more about the Church of Progressive Faith.

“I see several new faces – this is wonderful! Tonight won’t be exactly like our sermon held on the weekends. Tonight is a social gathering to help you learn more about us and decide if you’d like to join.”

At this point, I notice the unique symbol hanging behind Peter and his pulpit. It is a Z made with two crosses on their sides, pointing in opposite directions. The traditionally horizontal part on each cross is placed at an angle to create a diagonal line connecting the top and bottom lines in the Z.



Peter the pastor continues his presentation. “As you may know, Progressive Faith is the first church to welcome and integrate humans and zombies together. If you have friends that are zombies, I’m sure you realize that they aren’t all that different.”

Peter glances towards me, “even our local police department have humans and zombies successfully working together. They are inspirational.” He smiles at me, the bastard.

He goes on to talk about how the Seattle location is joining a growing list of churches becoming part of the Progressive Faith, and how Zombies are becoming an increasing asset to all of our communities.

“Now folks, I don’t know if this is true, but it makes sense to me. Some say that Jesus was the first zombie.”

I gape at him. This is quite the observation!

“Jesus died, and then rose from the dead. Then hundreds of years passed without anyone ever doing this again. Now, it happens all the time. Several of you here today have turned in just the same way. I leave you to draw your own conclusions.” He pauses for dramatic effect. “I know what I believe.”

Peter then leaves the pulpit, and walks over to a pair sitting in front on the right.

“I’d like you all to meet Meg. She is a zombie that’s been with our church since the beginning, and she has been instrumental in our success so far.”

Meg is middle aged, with light grey hair. She's wearing a hat and a sun dress. She has the infected tattoo with red tears.

"Meg here helped us find this wonderful building, and pulled together many volunteers to help us clean it up and get the church running."

There is scattered clapping throughout the hall. Meg is beaming. I wonder what she thinks of the basement.

"But her contributions don't stop there my friends. She has continued to be a pillar of the community, and has introduced several new zombies to the church. Meg, thank you so much for everything you do. You are our sacred sister. We wouldn't be here without you."

Several zombies nearby pat Meg on the back, or rub her shoulders in affection, while others in the room cheer.

The pastor continues to call out the good works of two others, an older zombie named Jerry, and a teenage zombie named Simon. The stories he shares are interesting, dramatic, and both result in the zombies cheering and patting each other vigorously.

"Now I know we're only getting started in Seattle," Peter continues, "but I have to tell you how well we're doing so far. We've already got more people in our church than in Portland Oregon, Coeur d'Alene Idaho, and Vancouver Canada. I'm really proud of the work you've all been able to accomplish. It seems that people are really enjoying the church and our activities. You should feel great about the success of your church."

Peter finishes his short sermon with two zombies getting up to tell their personal stories of why they love the church, and how the pastor and church helped them pull through or make the right decision in times of need. The attendees applaud and cheer them on.

"Thank you all again for coming," Peter wraps up, "let's break for some refreshments and pleasant conversation. If any of you have any questions, please do come and see me."

The order is different, and the content of course, but I've seen this type of show before.

I don't have a reason to talk to anyone here; it is time for me to go. I leave the building and head to the car.

Peter stood near the refreshments with a drink in his hand, smiling. He had noticed Detective Stack leaving earlier. None of the police from before remained.

A young girl no older than twenty one approached him. "Hi pastor, I'm Jennifer. My friend here tells me that I can become a zombie just like him." She had a hopeful look on her face. Her clothes were a little ragged, and she had dirt smeared on her cheeks. Perhaps it was from crying a while ago. She wore the tattoo of the infected.

“My dear child, are you saying you’d like to progress to the next level of human evolution, and join the flock?” Peter’s voice was soft and caring.

“Yes, I think I would.”

“We will be happy to help you, young Jennifer.” Peter smiled warmly.

* * *

Thursday June 24, early morning

I had trouble sleeping, and got up earlier than usual. My mind raced through the night, and after awaking too early, couldn’t return to sleep.

I got up, walked to the kitchen, started some coffee, and put two slices of bread in the toaster.

As I am standing here slightly dazed and staring at the wall, I hear a light thump by the front door.

I stumble over, scratching my back side as I walk. I peek through the spyhole to find nobody there.

I open the door and notice a brown, wrapped package with just my first and last name written on it in black marker. *It must be Christmas*, I joke to myself.

Carrying the package inside, I place it on the dining room table. I notice that the toast is ready, add some butter, and grab the fresh cup of hot coffee waiting for me. I smell it – black, just as I like it.

I bring my hearty breakfast to the table and take a closer look at the small package.

It doesn’t seem that suspicious, and it’s not big or heavy enough for a bomb. I open it. It contains a folder with pictures and many photocopies of various types of documents. I spread them out on the table while having a sip of coffee and a bite of toast.

There are black and white photos of various people I don’t recognize, and a few that I do. Some of the people are circled and named. I spend at least ten minutes going through all of the information within.

After reading through everything twice and connecting the dots, I realize that the information here suggests that an important person has been deeply involved with the drug shipment we found at the harbor.

The evidence incriminates Ben Hernández, the Chief of Police. It was just yesterday that he tore a strip in my hide for the zombie turning implications of our investigation.

Nobody is here to hear me, but I speak aloud anyway. “Shit. Today is going to suck.”

* * *

“Ok mercs – attention! The fight against drugs is in our own backyard today, and we’ve been brought in through special request by the DEA and the Department of Homeland Security for our special brand of assistance. They need a quiet recovery operation with zero casualties – today we’ll be working within US borders.” The head mercenary looked over the tough zombie crew, and continued.

“This is not a drill. We’ll be in civilian territory in the harbor of Seattle – and therefore civilian protection protocols are in place. We’re under the radar – everyone should be wearing civilian clothes over your body armor. We don’t want a press circus implicating the government if things go bad.

“Apparently the Chinese have sent in a big drug shipment. A police unit led by corrupt cops is currently in possession of the drugs, and without our help it will go missing today and end up in our schools and streets. We must not let that happen.

“Our job will be to re-take and secure the shipment while the FBI handles the crooked cops.”

This zombie team was one of the first of its kind in the US. All of them were ex-military; men who went looking for work after the government decided that zombies were too much of a risk for protecting the nation’s borders. These young men were well trained and could take a beating in battle, as recent freelance missions in Africa and elsewhere have shown. As zombies with the right inspiration protocols in place, they were incredibly dedicated to their chain of command.

“Most of the cops at the scene do not know what’s going on. They are NOT part of the conspiracy. They are simply following tainted orders. They’re good cops, they are human, and they are Americans.”

On mention of this, a few of them whispered under their breath – “protect the Americans.”

“The point being we do not want any casualties here, even though they won’t like us. We immobilize, tranquilize, and recover. Then we’ll rendezvous and then secure the drugs for safe shipment.” The head merc walked up and down the unit as he spoke.

“Each of you will be equipped with non-lethal pneumatic tranquilizer guns and shotguns pre-loaded with heavy sand bags as your primary offensive weapons. Reserve your handguns as a last resort. We shouldn’t need to use the weapons too much – we’ll be hitting them with gas.

“I know you zombies don’t mind the gas too much – but I want to see masks on today.” A few of the zombies smiled knowingly.

He continued. “We’ll be headed to the city via different routes – we don’t want to call more attention to ourselves than necessary. We’ll have three plus a driver in each vehicle. We’ve got Cheetas and Mark 4 Balkans – two of each. They’re new and I like the paint on them. Don’t scratch ‘em up too much.

“We’ll be intersecting the police shipment vehicle on route. They’ll be on an isolated commercial road with little to no civilians around. They’ll have standard police vehicles in protective formation – two in front, two in back – you know the drill.

“Ok, time to gear up for transport. Let’s do this zombies!”

A while later, the lead zombie was in his command vehicle with a good view of the target zone. He watched the zone through binoculars.

“This is the command unit. Vehicles A through D, are you in position?”

“Copy command unit, Vehicle A ready to go.” The other three vehicles checked in as well.

Time passed.

“We’ve received the signal from our man on the ground, the target has been tagged. You should see it on your maps now.

“The target is in on the move, in the expected formation. Set your one minute timers in three, two, one, now. Converge on the target at zero. Scrambling local police radio signals.”

The loaded police cargo van was driving on a long dirt road leading out of the harbor area. It passed through an unoccupied, open fenced area and turned onto the paved road at a four-way intersection.

The four military vehicles quickly drove in to the area from three directions. One vehicle blocked and separated the rear police cars from the cargo van, causing them to slam and squeal the brakes. Another stopped in front of the van. The two police vehicles in front slammed on the brakes, hitting each other and a third military vehicle coming to a stop in front of them.

The fourth vehicle of mercenaries approached the convoy from the side, and four men rushed from it as it came to a stop. They each ran to their assigned police vehicles, carrying grenade launchers equipped with the latest in military knock-out gas.

At practically the same time, they launched grenades tailing smoke at the side windows of each police car. The windows shattered on impact, and the grenades landed within each car, pouring out smoke and gas.

This was sufficient to incapacitate one of the police vehicle’s occupants, but the five cops in each of the other three vehicles opened their doors and jumped out coughing, weeping, and reaching

for their weapons. The side windows of the two intruding military vehicles rolled down a bit, allowing tranquilizer guns to emerge from within – one in front, one in back – to shoot the police. Each of the five cops went down.

All eight police accompanying the van were out of commission.

Two zombies emerged from the vehicle in front of the van, carrying what looked like fire extinguishers. They walked up to the van and doused the side windows of the front cab with nitrogen, freezing the Plexiglas while making it incredibly fragile.

At the same time, two of the men with grenade launchers moved to the front of the van, while two headed towards the back. Four men from the vehicle behind the van positioned themselves in relative safety behind their vehicle, with tranquilizer guns and shotguns at the ready.

The two men in front launched gas grenades into the frozen windows, shattering the windows and filling up the vehicle with smoke.

The driver passed out, but his passenger – Phil, the detective leading the narcotics bust – grabbed his gun and opened the door. He took a shot at a man with a grenade launcher, hitting him in the side. As he stepped forward out of the cab to shoot again, he was hit by two tranquilizer darts – one in the neck, and one in the back.

Right at this moment, the back of the police cargo van burst open and the four police inside received a barrage of bean bags, tranquilizer darts, and gas. They managed to get a few shots off before went go down, but nobody with the zombie's team is hit.

“Ok units,” the zombie in charge yelled, “let's get this van to the rendezvous point.”

Two zombies got in to the van, while the other zombie drivers got ready to pull out. All of the remaining military zombies carried bodies out of the way of their vehicle's future paths.

The rendezvous point was an empty logging yard nearby. The van and its four new protectors rushed inside. The military vehicles took up positions by the perimeter while the van drove into a massive garage.

“Set up a security perimeter around this building while they secure the package. Nobody gets in.”

Zombie guards took position around the gate to the logging yard and the garage. Only the cargo van was inside the building.

A few minutes passed.

“Ok everyone, get ready to pull out,” the zombie captain called out and on radio. The garage door raised and the cargo van emerged.

The four military vehicles took point around the police van, and accompanied it as they returned to base. The ride would take approximately 20 minutes.

“Excellent work zombies,” their sergeant beamed proudly, “no civilian casualties and only one patch-up job for our side.”

Shortly after the military vehicles left, twelve ordinary cars of various descriptions and colors exit the garage and drove out of the logging yard, each turning and heading in different directions.

Ted walked out of the garage and into the yard, flipping open his phone.

“Chief, it’s Ted,” he declared excitedly into the phone. “The recovery operation was a success. We retrieved at least 80% of the product.”

“Good.”

“That mercenary zombie unit was amazing to watch. Our crew won’t get caught with our pants down again – you have my word on that.”

Silence on the line.

“We’ve learned our lesson, Chief. We won’t be keeping all of our product in one place anymore.”

The mysterious voice speaks. “Finally something is going our way.”

Chapter Five – Doubt

Dana and I meet Phil at the hospital rather than heading in to the office first. We both heard about the early attack on the narcotics unit – and a gag order – through email.

Cops are everywhere. A few of them notice Dana's tattoo and sneer. I recognize several of the guys here and say hello. Dana knows a couple as well.

"Anyone know where Phil is?" I ask the group.

"He's down the hall, in room 206."

We weave through the cops and family. Some of the narcotics cops are leaving, after being given a clean bill of health.

"Hey Phil – why didn't you call me when you were moving the drugs?"

Phil is up and awake. He has an IV in his arm and equipment monitoring his health. Seeing Phil like this brings back memories of Steve. I still miss him, the big lug.

"Morning Rob, Dana. We limited communicating our plans to those with a need to know Rob – you know the drill."

I pull up beside him and put a hand on his arm. "How are you doing anyway?"

"Oh, I'm pretty much ready to leave. They keep testing my blood to see if the tranquilizers are out of my system. I got a double shot, and the doctors were a little worried before, but they say I'm on the road to recovery now."

"Tranquilizers?" I'm surprised. This isn't like any criminal drug operation I've heard of.

"Yeah, the bad guys were using gas grenades, tranquilizer guns, and riot control shotguns. It was unreal how co-ordinated they were. They incapacitated all of us within five minutes or less, and no cop casualties. I got drugged pretty badly, and some of the guys took a beating in the face and ribs, but the rest went down without much damage. What kind of a criminal cares about cops?"

A criminal that is a cop, I think to myself, recalling the incriminating evidence plus the fact that only a few cops would have known the drug transfer details.

Phil continues, "they got everything Rob, the entire van. We had put away some of the drugs earlier – but the van had most of what we found."

"Tell us more about these bad guys," I inquire.

“Four military vehicles, incredibly organized. Three of the vehicles they use to separate the van from our backup. Another vehicle comes from the side carrying guys with grenade launchers and knock-out gas.

“Oh, before I forget – I grabbed a couple of snaps with my phone. Let me mail them to you.” He pulled out his phone and used it for a while.

Dana and I spend a moment looking at the images. Phil is in the van’s passenger seat, from which we can see a vehicle in front and a vehicle on the side. He also has a photo of two guys running, carrying grenade launchers.

Dana speaks up next, “are you sure this is a military vehicle, Phil?” The image is a little fuzzy, and only shows the front side of the vehicle. It could be just a Hummer.

“Yeah, pretty sure. It was all tricked out with armor plating. Didn’t look like any family car I’ve ever seen.”

“No plates though,” I comment.

“Sorry about that. It all happened so fast. They even knew how to take care of our bulletproof glass protecting the cab. They froze it with nitrogen.”

“Wow – that’s extreme, but effective,” I’m quietly impressed. “Do you know anything about the perps?”

“I’m thinking they were military trained Rob. Our radios went out just before we were hit. They gassed and tranquilized all of our support. They gassed us in the van.

“Oh, and I shot one of them, in the side I think. Didn’t phase him. I think he was a zombie, Rob. I think they might have all been zombies.”

“Are you sure?” Dana asks.

“No, not one hundred percent. Call it a hunch. But I’m pretty sure at least one of them was a zombie. Shot him and he didn’t go down, or even flinch. I’ve never heard of a military zombie unit though. I thought the military didn’t trust zombies yet.”

After some more discussion, the nurse comes in and asks us to let Phil rest.

As we say our goodbyes and are on the way out, Phil asks one more question.

“Are you on this Rob?”

“We’re on it Phil. Dana and I will do everything we can to find these characters and bring them in.”

* * *

A familiar looking man in a nice suit walked down the hall of the main social services building in downtown Seattle. He walked to a small office titled “Shelter and Housing”.

Ted mustered up his best fatherly smile and entered, walking up to the young woman working the front desk.

“Hi. I’m wondering if you can help me. I’m looking for my son.” He smiled, with a touch of sadness.

“What is your son’s name?” she replied.

“He’s Sean O’Malley,” Ted replied. “But I suspect you don’t have his name.” He paused and emotionally choked a little. “He’s one of those zombies that was staying with the church. I really need to go see him.”

“We can help you Mr. O’Malley. I’ll just need you to complete this release of information form for me, and provide some ID.”

He completed the form, while she took a photocopy of his fake ID, with a photo that looked a little bit like him, but wasn’t him.

She printed out some information and handed it to him.

“Ok, here you go Mr. O’Malley. This has got the name and address of the group home your son is staying with.”

“Thank you very much dear,” Ted spoke softly. “It will be good to see him again.”

* * *

On the way out of the hospital, I ask Dana to walk with me to a nearby park. “I have something to show you, but not with so many police around.”

We sit down at a bench under a tree, and I start to show her the mysterious evidence I had received. It takes several minutes for her to get through it all. The evidence links the Chief of Police to a company connected with the original harbor bust I had been investigating at the warehouse. Not the big drug shipment afterwards though.

“Wow. This sure paints a picture,” Dana takes a deep breath and continues, “but I’m not sure how much of this we can use.”

“I agree. We can’t get anyone with the police to follow these leads, or do background research for us,” I share.

“Plus, most of this isn’t sufficient as evidence. These photocopies could have been photoshopped or doctored. We need to see originals,” Dana continues, “where did you get these?”

“They were dropped off at my home.”

“Also suspicious,” Dana comments. “These might give us some ideas for our investigation, but we can’t use any of it more directly than that. We can’t show this to anyone else in the department without real supporting evidence or it will get us in more trouble.”

“Yes, you’re right.” I put the documents and photos away. “Ok, what are our next steps?”

“I’d like to get back to investigating that church,” Dana’s words were direct, and without emotion.

“Sounds good, let’s go.”

Dana had put in for a covert entry search warrant, also known as a sneak and peek, after our spectacle at the church yesterday. I’d like to poke around more without Peter knowing about it.

Dana and I take our separate vehicles to watch the front and back at the same time. Dana suspects that Peter is inside after seeing some movement through an upstairs window. This is confirmed about 90 minutes later when he leaves via the front door for lunch.

“He’s locked the front entrance,” Dana explains over the radio. “You could force it, but there might be witnesses – and he’ll know someone was here.”

“That’s alright. I can see a fire escape here in the back alley. I’ll check it out first.”

“Sounds good. I’ll keep an eye on the pastor and let you know when he returns. Keep your head down; he might not be the only one with the keys. Locking the door was a good sign that it is empty now though.”

Dana follows Peter from an extreme distance, using her enhanced eye-sight.

I exit the vehicle, walk down the alley, and jump up for the stairway. After a second try, I catch it and it rolls down under my weight. I ascend the stairs, and then hold the stairway to keep it quiet as it rises back up.

There is a fire door on the second floor. It is locked, but there is a window next to it that has been left ajar. I swing it open fully, and count my blessings that there is enough room for me to fit through.

I glance around the alley, checking for witnesses. *I should have let Dana do this*, I say under my breath as I kneel and squeeze through the opening. I tumble inside ungracefully, and then stand up quietly, listening.

The pastor's office is upstairs. With my gloves on, I rummage through some papers on the desk and odds and ends. I take a few photos with my phone.

The desk has a drawer, but it contains very few items – just some documentation about the building owner and real estate purchase information. I snap a photo.

There's a locked room or closet upstairs, that won't open easily. I figure I'll come back to it later, if I have time.

There's not much more to the upstairs – several empty, unused rooms. Some are larger than others – but still empty. Although they are clean, many of them require work on the walls, floors, and electrical.

I head downstairs. I'm quite familiar with the basement already, thank you; I go to check the main level next.

I enter the ceremony hall and look around. The pews don't have anything inside – no traditional bibles for example – and the pulpit is empty except for some hand-written sermon notes. The stage is similarly uninteresting.

But behind the stage and curtain, there is a door. The door is lockable, but unlocked. I open it slowly and make my way inside.

It is a small room, with two adjustable beds and two IV setups. There is another double-cross Z on the wall, with two candles on either side. They are unlit.

They look similar to hospital beds, but are covered in black sheets and fluffy dark red comforters. The sheets feel silky to the touch. I wonder if they are a 600 thread count.

The IVs are empty, as are the small tables next to each bed. There's a cabinet nearby however, and it is loaded with evidence.

I snap photos of the IV drip bags and other medical equipment. This is a gold mine. One of the drawers contains, you guessed it, potassium chloride. Not in big gallon containers like we confiscated, but rather a half-dozen 40 ml glass bottles.

There are a couple of these bottles in the trash. I desperately want to take them as evidence for fingerprints. Instead, I'm snapping photos – a sneak and peek doesn't allow you to confiscate evidence.

Dana calls me on the phone. “Ok Rob, he's on his way back. You've got maybe 5 minutes.”

“Shit. There's one more room I want to get in to,” I scramble to put things back in place the way I found them.

“We’ll have to come back another time Rob. You’ve got to go. I recommend you leave out the back alley, the way you came in.”

“Alright, I’m on my way out.”

I make my way upstairs. The metal fire door exit is locked from the outside, but it can be pushed open from the inside. I don’t see any emergency alarm warnings – I push it open.

I take the stairs down part way, then hang drop the remainder of the way instead of noisily using the rolling metal stairs.

I call Dana on my cell phone. “Dana, let’s meet at the DA’s office. I think we’ve found some compelling evidence to nail this bastard – we’ll need their advice.”

“On my way,” she replies, and we both hang up.

* * *

Jill Simpson is an assistant DA. We’ve worked together before on zombie investigations – her legal specialty. Dana and I arrive within five minutes of each other. I had called ahead, and we’ve both brought Jill up to speed in person.

“Let me see if I understand this correctly,” Jill summarizes. “You believe the Church of Progressive Faith is creating zombies by using potassium chloride to stop people’s heart.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Are they doing this against people’s will?”

“What do you mean?” I understand the question, but not why she is asking it.

“An injection of potassium chloride is a medical procedure, any doctor can do it.” She continues. “There’s nothing illegal about performing this as a medical procedure, if the patient agrees to it.”

“Yeah, but it’s killing them.”

“No, it isn’t killing them. You said it yourself, it is turning them. Zombies are still defined as living persons, even if their reduced mental capacity has been used to limit certain career options. Stopping someone’s heart temporarily isn’t the same as killing them. As long as their heart beats again – there’s no crime here.”

“But they are making zombies!”

“Becoming a zombie isn’t a crime. And helping an infected person turn isn’t seen as a crime either, as long as the infected approves of the procedure in advance.”

“What about brain damage – isn’t it criminal to knowingly do this to people?” I’m desperate to find a crime here.

“Every time you drink alcohol – and I know you drink Rob – you are knowingly damaging your brain. Every medical drug we take has known side-effects, some worse than others. Any time you are treated by a doctor or hospital you sign forms indicating that you are aware of the medical risks. The whole medical profession is based on delivering patients benefits that outweigh the risks.

“The medical industry is already familiar with the benefits of becoming infected. I know a few doctors that have started to enumerate the health benefits of becoming a zombie. Some are even suggesting that the loss of emotions a zombie may go through when turning can be beneficial for the depressed and mentally unstable. I don’t think we can build a credible case this way.”

Dana interjects, “wait a minute, what about all of the original zombies we found?”

I was enthusiastic. “That’s right! The church had about a dozen original zombies they were keeping. What about them?”

“If you could show that these original zombies were knowingly created into original zombies or that a large percentage of people turned became original zombies – say 20% or more – then we might be able to make a case from that. But you said earlier that the parson claims the originals were brought to the church. You’d need to show that when they first came to the church they were fully human.”

She takes a different line of questioning. “How about Z. Did you find any Z-virus?”

“No.”

“Okay, here’s what you need to do if you want to make zombie turning a successful criminal investigation. You need to find someone storing or selling Z-virus outside of the body, find someone injecting KCI that isn’t a certified medical professional, find evidence they have turned too many originals, or determine that people are being turned against their will.”

She pauses thoughtfully and adds, “You mentioned some of the new zombies were young. Were any of them under 18? Okay, that would be hard to tell. If they are under 18, they need a parent or guardian’s approval for a medical procedure like this. I doubt any parent would approve of something like this.

“If you can find a young child that’s been turned, we can likely make a case against them.”

“Okay, thanks for your help Jill. I’m not happy we don’t have enough evidence yet, but now we know where to look next.”

Dana and I leave to discuss our recent lessons and next steps. I suggest a diner nearby. It is late, and I'm starving from skipping lunch to sneak around the church, collecting what it turns out was useless evidence. I don't have my own collection of zombie granola bars.

* * *

Later that evening, I decide to visit my club and check in with a few friends for advice. It's not that far from my place – I decide to walk. The evening is cool and cloudy, with none of our famous Seattle drizzle.

I walk down Cedar Street and into Chuck's Bar. Chuck and I have an agreement in place for how we split earnings. Plus, he sells the booze on both sides of the building.

"Hi Chuck!" I wander up to the bar. "How are things?"

"Doin' fine."

Chuck is an ex-surfer who runs this bar after he messed up his leg. He is always super relaxed, though I've never seen him use any drugs, or even drink. This is partially why I trust him as a business partner.

"Rob, you hear about the big drug hit? Some of the guys have been talking about it."

We have a few ex-cops as patrons. They would have definitely heard something, although it's been successfully kept from the press so far.

"Yeah – I did. Phil was there. It looks like he's going to be ok."

"Geez – that's rough," Chuck empathizes.

"Give me a Pike's on tap. I'm going to head around back."

"Sure thing Rob, here you go."

I sip my beer and wander back beyond the restrooms, around a corner, and close to the back door entrance. This area isn't visible from the bar area. Still inside the building, my two guys are here as usual. One zombie and one human.

"Hey Rob – good to see you. What's the word?"

Even though I own the place in back, we have a security protocol we follow, so I can tell them if I'm being followed or investigated.

It's Thursday. "I'm just out to have a beer and enjoy myself."

The door unlocks. A third security person is inside the building, monitoring our conversation on camera. I go in.

This is my private gambling hall. We have high stakes card games, poker usually, plus betting on horse racing and other sporting events. A few large TVs are distributed around the room showing different games. Several computer screens show the odds of active and upcoming events.

We cater to the elite middle class – people with money to burn. Everyone here was specifically invited to be here – by a small private group of my most trusted patrons. I’m a big gambler myself.

The original location, before Chuck and I purchased it, had a huge kitchen and storage areas in back. We took out most of the kitchen, leaving just a small area with a deep fryer, a grill, and a fridge, and converted the rest including storage areas into open area seating. Chuck has a small second bar area in the back, with a low window they can pass bottles through. Sally is working the half-bar tonight.

There’s a bulletproof windowed area in the corner for taking bets and cash. We also take bets by phone from pre-approved phone numbers. Nothing online yet, although I’m considering it.

It doesn’t bring in too much, but I’m putting enough away for an early retirement.

I see the reason I came here tonight, and head over by the baseball game.

“Hey zombies.” I settle in to sit down with two friends. Retired zombie cops that I know pretty well – Dave and Jim.

“Hey Rob,” they both raise a glass, we clink and drink. “Haven’t seen you in a while. Sorry about Steve.”

“Yeah, me too.” I pause before continuing. Steve really liked it here.

“I’ve got some detective legwork that needs doing. Are either of you interested?”

They glance at each other. Dave shrugs his shoulders, gives Jim a slightly negative expression.

“Sure Rob, I can handle it,” Jim says.

I pass him an envelope containing a few company names. “I need to know the background information on these companies. How long they’ve been around, ownership, what they do – that kind of thing.”

“Hmmm,” Jim is thoughtful, “there’s some reason you aren’t getting help from the PD on this. Is this related to your side-business, or are you investigating someone official?”

“Let’s just say I don’t want to get chewed out at the office.” Jim nods at me, and I continue.

“You want to get paid in cash, or shall I put it on your tab?”

“Put it on my tab Rob. The Mariners have sucked the last couple of months.”

“I told you not to put your faith in them this season,” Dave smiles and drinks his beer. “Their trades were for crap.”

I recall the other business I want to discuss. “Say, have you guys heard about this drug raid against the PD?”

“Shit, yeah – it’s all any cops have been talking about. I’m surprised it’s not all over the news,” Dave is enthusiastic while mentioning it.

“Did you hear the bad guys may have been military? And possibly zombies?” I look into their eyes for recognition or surprise.

“No way! Now I’ve heard it all,” Jim replies.

Dave adds, “That makes me think. Remember when we each retired?”

“Yeah, I see where you’re going with this. Tell him.”

Dave looks right in my eyes and lowers his voice a bit. “When I retired from the PD, about three weeks later this zombie comes to my house to recruit me. He’s looking for zombies with police, military, or security experience. I’m comfortable retiring – I’ve been a cop my whole life, and only been a zombie about a year. I tell him to get lost.”

“Why haven’t you guys told me this before?”

“You never asked Rob.” Dave replies and drinks his beer again.

Jim adds, “I retired about a year after Dave. Three months ago I get a visit from the same kind of zombie. I tell him I’m not interested. He is really persistent – he wants me to contact him if I change my mind.”

“Please tell me one of you remembers who this guy is?” I plead.

“I can do better than that,” Jim reaches into his pocket, and pulls out his wallet. “Here’s his card.”

I finish drinking my beer with them, cover their tab for the night, and head back home.

Chapter Six – Innocence

Friday June 25

Jake, the big zombie cop from the IAB, and his partner Mac have continued to tail the zombie kid from the harbor, watching for anything suspicious. Dana and Rob still believe the kid is tightly connected to drug activity at the harbor.

Jake and Mac have been taking turns, and this morning Jake was arriving to replace Mac.

Mac was sitting on the second floor above the harbor master's office, listening to talk radio, eating peanuts, and clandestinely checking in on the kid regularly through binoculars.

The radio announcer was discussing US politics. "It seems that an ex-republican member of Congress has established the Modern Zombie Party after turning into a zombie himself. The former Senator of Texas is quickly gaining popularity with his 'tough love' campaign towards social services, healthcare, and education, and his fight to drop the latest federal gun control legislation.

"Support for his new Party seems to be building, primarily by stealing right-wing voters from the state's Republican Party. The new Party's tag line, 'You don't have to be a zombie to see what's wrong with America' is making headlines."

"Hey Mac, what's up?" Jake whispered, and tossed a tennis ball at Mac. Jake liked to bounce a tennis ball around while on surveillance.

Mac caught it. "The usual gang of home boys."

Jake picked up the binoculars and watched for a while. "Who is this guy showing up? I haven't seen him before."

Mac took a look. "I don't know – but he's carrying a sports bag. We haven't seen this kind of activity before."

"Keep watching, Mac."

"Okay... it's a switch. The kid's buddy handed the cash they've been collecting from drug sales. The bag has been left behind and the delivery boy is on the move. Get your car Jake, I'll follow this new one on foot – you come pick me up. This is exactly the kind of lead we're looking for."

Jake took off down the stairs, and back towards his vehicle – running faster than a human his size possibly could. He sprinted past shipping containers, past delivery trucks, and into the large

parking area. He found his car, and brought it toward the front of the lot for Mac, hiding in plain sight in a handicap parking spot.

Mac called. “Jake, are you ready?”

“Yup – waiting for you in the handicap zone.”

“Are you trying to say something about my physical condition Jake?” Mac joked while breathing a little heavier than normal. “The delivery boy is coming into the parking lot now. Keep your head down.”

Jake scrunched down in the vehicle, while staying on the phone. “Is he gone yet Mac?”

“Yeah – he’s past you now, heading into the middle of the lot. I’ll be with you in a sec.” Mac hung up the phone.

Mac joined Jake in the car. “If we head out now, slowly, we should be behind him closer to the exit. There aren’t many others around – we should be able to spot him.”

Jake drove slowly around the lot toward the exit, looking all around.

“There he is Jake. Stop for a moment.” Mac pulled out the binoculars to watch the moving vehicle. “Yup, that’s still him. Pull up behind him, but don’t get too close.”

Jake drove a few cars behind the target in a different lane, while Mac typed in the license plate for additional info.

“Yup, this kid has a rap sheet a mile long. Let’s see where he takes us while I call Rob.”

* * *

Dana and I park the car, walk two cars ahead, and sit down in the back of Jake’s car.

“Morning guys,” I say, “tell me what we’re looking at here.”

“Hey Rob and Dana,” Mac replies, “we’re watching the guy who delivers drugs to your zombie kid at the harbor. First time we’ve seen him, so we left the kid behind to track him here.”

“Nice job. We have any info on this dude?”

“If this is his car – and from the photo the computer has on file I think it is – he’s got a long record of causing mischief. He’s in the blue house up ahead on the left. The house isn’t in his name though, might be a rental.”

“You both deserve a break. We’ll watch him now.”

We catch up briefly on other news and then break up. Dana and I head back to my car, looking over the delivery boy's info and photo on Dana's laptop.

A few minutes later, the delivery boy emerges and gets in his car.

Dana asks, "Should we follow him?"

"Nah, we've got a trail of evidence that led us here – we should search his place. We know who he is and where he hangs out – hopefully we can catch up with him again if we need to."

"Sounds good. Let's go."

We walk to the blue house, guns at the ready in our unclipped holsters.

Dana stands close to the side of the house while I knock on the front door.

No answer, so I knock again, louder, and announce our presence.

The front door doesn't open for us; we wander around toward the back. The garage area is open and the house door within it opens easily.

Once inside the home, Dana and I look around.

"Someone forgot to charge their phone," I call out to Dana. "Look what we have here."

Dana joins me in the bedroom. "It's an iPhone – perfect."

"Why's that?"

"The security on these is a joke, and it contains a record of all the recent locations it has been taken."

Dana leaves briefly to grab her laptop, then plugs the phone into it with a cable she has with all kinds of connectors on it. I'm not familiar with the software she is using, but it sure doesn't look like Apple standard issue.

"This will take me a few minutes," she explains.

"I'll keep poking around in the meantime." I check through drawers and closets, even look in the fridge. I don't find anything that seems important.

"Okay, I've got a ton of data from this thing," Dana explains excitedly, resting the iPhone back in its charger. I didn't expect her to be a technology geek.

"I hope it's useful, because it's the only interesting thing in this place."

We head back towards the car to research the location data. Dana plans a route for us to investigate.

* * *

It's late in the morning, and the church contained a small contingent of zombie worshippers, Peter the pastor, and two humans.

“We are gathered here today to welcome two humans to the exciting and carefree domain of zombie evolution.”

Peter's clothing today is darker and more dazzling than before. This was a special ceremony for the church. Peter has presided over at least fifty of these rituals, turning two people each time.

“Jennifer and Roy, do you wish to see the light, and return with the improved senses of your zombie brothers and sisters?”

“I do.” They each respond.

“By the power vested in me – I grant you the right of passage. I accept you into the zombie brotherhood.”

Peter thought back to the beginning over a year ago, once they were just getting started. The church was made up of the elderly – people cast out of their original faiths, and families, looking for acceptance.

They received that here. And they contributed happily to the small fortune the church has been growing.

“Humans – let us adjourn into the inner sanctuary where your passage may begin. Zombies, make some noise, and keep Jennifer and Roy in your thoughts.”

The zombies murmured and hummed, creating a full, resonating sound in the hall. Peter and the two humans walked into the back area. The doctor was waiting, also dressed ceremonially. He looked more like the religiously devout rather than a doctor.

“Here is your spiritual agreement with the church and our zombie nation. Within, it describes the improved strength, greater emotional fortitude, improved senses, and improved pain resistance you may receive upon joining the zombie enlightened.”

A highly paid lawyer helped put this contract together. They agreed to have it written after they first attempted to turn humans into zombies. They needed to protect themselves after what had happened.

“This agreement also describes the risks you face when entering the zombie brotherhood. Some zombies cannot feel any emotion, and have a complete disregard for the rules and laws followed by humanity. They have evolved beyond the pack – they are our zombie spiritual guides.”

At least half of the humans which were first turned ended up as level ones, also known as original zombies. Peter was terrified of the level ones. Deep down, he was glad they were gone. He did not know what the Chief had planned for them, nor did he care.

“When you are ready to follow the path to your greater zombie selves, please sign the spiritual agreement and lie down in one of the beds. The church’s medical specialist here will lovingly administer your zombie nectar, and you will sleep for the last time in your life as a human.”

The young adults signed the papers and walked to their beds. Potassium chloride was not how they initially created zombies. The initial waves of youthful zombie church-goers were created through suffocation. Apparently the longer duration of low oxygen levels people retained through suffocation increased the level of brain damage inflicted. It was not a productive way of creating zombie churchgoers.

“Our specialist is now administering your IV – this is not the zombie nectar yet.” The doctor used a topical anesthetic on their arms, and administered a sub-dermal anesthetic as well. The patients felt nothing as the IV needle entered. Peter didn’t want any discomfort to affect their response to this final question.

Peter stood before them, out of the way of the monitoring camera, with a caring smile on his face. He wanted the camera to capture this scene perfectly. “Before we continue, let me ask you both one final time. Are you sure you want to proceed, understanding the medical risks and benefits involved?”

Each of the young adults had taken an anti-depressant/sedative earlier, given to them by one of the zombie patrons.

“Yes,” they both answered with a smile.

“Then we shall receive you into the pack. Welcome my children, welcome.”

The doctor administered the KCI, and they waited.

Peter watched for it closely. He is certain he can see the flash of the divine under their skin, in the darkness of the room. As he has seen, so many times before.

More young zombies for his church.

* * *

Two tough zombies were working in a large room that had been used to process drugs and package them into smaller speedball portions. There are about a dozen boxes left in the room to be carried into the garage, and packed into the van.

The smaller zombie accidentally knocked a tall arrangement of boxes over, causing the top box to fall over, open, and spill some of its contents on the floor.

The bigger zombie looked over and yelled at him. “You dumb level three, can’t you do anything right?”

The smaller zombie had started to put the drug packages back into the box. “Fuck you, egghead. Why did you have to pile up the boxes so high in the first place?”

As they continue to bicker, a familiar vehicle arrived outside.

Inside the building, the zombies continued moving boxes and taking verbal swings at each other.

The taller, smarter zombie noticed through a small garage window that they had company.

* * *

“Dana, I’m getting tired of visiting every Jack in the Box and 7-11 in town. This rundown old place hasn’t had anyone in it in years. Perhaps he just drove by it.”

Dana looks around, and then replies. “Nope, he stayed here. And there are fresh tire tracks going through that muddy puddle over there.”

She is right. After a long day of wild goose chases we’ve finally found a location worth looking into.

“Okay, I take it back. Let’s investigate.”

We exit the vehicle and get our handguns ready.

I call out to the building, “Hello! Any zombies in there?”

Ah zombies, you can count on the lower levels to fill in the silence. From inside, “Who wants to know?”

“Shut up you idiot,” another person yells from in the building, quietly.

Dana calls to me, “I can hear at least two people in there.”

I continue to harass who I now assume are zombies. If they were human, they would react differently. “We know you’re keeping the drugs in there! We’re going to come in and take it all away from you.”

The first zombie sounds like he is boiling over in frustration. “Just you try it!”

“Stop talking to them,” the second zombie yells back, loud enough for me to hear.

I just know I can get the first one to show himself. “Your boss is going to be so pissed that you lost all your drugs to a couple of rookie human cops.”

“Not going to happen!” The first zombie states, anxiously.

At this point, the second zombie scolds the first. “Would you keep your mouth shut you idiot! These cops don’t know anything.”

“They know we have drugs here and they know we’re inside guarding it. What else is there to fucking know?”

I call in again. Zombie psyche training doesn’t just teach you how to calm a zombie down.

“We’re going to take all of your drugs away and make you look stupid. All of the other zombies are going to laugh at you. Just a couple of brainless zombies, they’re going to say. So stupid, can’t even stop two humans.”

“Arrrggh – I’m not stupid!” The first zombie yells and shoots through the front door. Apparently his partner is too slow to stop him.

“Damn it – now we’re screwed,” the second zombie swears under his breath.

Yikes – that shot was a little too close for comfort. “At least now we don’t need a search warrant, hey Dana?”

“Yes, but perhaps you could make fun of some unarmed zombies next time Rob?”

We crouch and wander together around the building, looking for another entrance. No sense going in right where the zombies are shooting.

Around the side, we find a large wooden door with glass window and shutters. It’s locked. I pull my sleeve over my hand and tap a hole through the glass with the butt of my gun. I pause – there’s no shooting towards us – then push my other hand through the window and open the door. It opens outwards.

Still crouching, I peek inside. No zombies, so I enter.

I’m in an office kitchenette area. I wonder, *perhaps everyone would like to sit down over some coffee?* Somehow I don’t think this is how it will go down.

I wander around the corner of offices, checking into each cubicle for any hidden zombies.

I arrive at the hallway leading to the front entrance. So much for surprise – I’m going to have walk right by where the zombie first shot at me.

I peek around the corner with my handheld mirror. These things are great – pick them up at any Bartell Drugs. I can see one zombie hiding behind a tall stack of disheveled boxes. The other zombie is out of view.

“Hey guys, I’m Police Detective Stack. You like the police, right?”

No answer. These two zombies are finally on to my mischief.

“Okay, I’m going to come in to talk. Don’t shoot at me, I just want to talk.”

I roll a tall, executive-style office chair into the hallway, swinging it towards the front door as I release. It gets shot at six times before the zombies realize it isn’t a person. I expected this kind of friendly reception.

I turn to ask Dana her advice. “Dana?” She isn’t here. “Dana, where are you?”

Then I hear a window breaking, followed by two shots in rapid succession.

“It’s ok Rob, you can come out now,” Dana calls to me. “Two shooters are down. I think they are the only ones.”

Dana walks back around from the opposite side of the building, and to the front door. I open it and welcome her in.

“You and your ammo conservation talents. One of these days you’re going to tell me the real story behind your mad shooting skills.”

She smiles.

We walk over to the boxes, and find drugs mixed for zombie consumption. Not nearly as much as the harbor seizure, but quite a bit. I call it in, and narcotics soon arrives. Phil isn’t with them.

Dana and I are looking over any other information we can find. I take a snapshot of a list of names and phone numbers before we put it into evidence.

Dana is talking with the officer assigned to the scene about the shootings while they take notes. My phone rings, so I wander away where it is quieter. It’s Jim, the retired cop working on assignment for me.

“Rob, I’ve got the information you’re looking for.” Jim the zombie gets right to the point.

“Shoot.”

“These two companies you asked me to look in to. The first one is owned by the second one. The first one is an import/export business, and the second umbrella company is an LLC.”

“Okay.”

“There’s nothing too interesting about their business filings, except the owner.”

“Let me guess; is it the Chief of Police?”

“Nope, but you’re close. It’s his wife’s.”

“Maria Hernández?”

“She didn’t take the Chief’s last name, although at public events she often uses it. Her name is Maria Gonzales. It’s a common name, so I checked the address records on the company. It’s their address – for a cottage they own on Lopez Island.”

Maria Gonzales. I’ve seen that name twice lately. On the church deed, and the last name Gonzales is on the list of phone numbers I just photographed. This is our second connection between the drugs and the church, the first being the potassium chloride we found. The KCI could be coincidental, although I doubt it. Having the same person involved is a more direct link.

“Thanks Jim – this is great information.”

“Don’t mention it.” We hang up.

I wander over to Dana. I do not share what I’ve just learned; I need to think about it first.

“Dana, I forgot to mention this.” I give her the zombie security business card Jim gave me last night. “I received this from a retired zombie cop, a friend of mine, last night.”

I explain the story that Dave and Jim shared.

“I was thinking we could look into it, but then we got caught up following the path of our delivery boy. And now the week is ending. Perhaps next week.”

“What are your plans for the weekend Rob?” She looks contemplative as she asks.

“I don’t know, I have a few personal things I need to take care of. Plus I need to relax – this week has been a little crazier than usual. How about you?”

“I think I might visit this security company.” Dana looks into my eyes.

“Really? Are you sure? I should come with you. Won’t you need backup?”

She replies. “No, having you there will blow my cover. I’m going to be looking for a job.”

* * *

It’s Friday evening.

I don’t know exactly why, but I’m headed to Ben Hernández’s house in Capitol Hill.

Maybe I think I can get in on some action. Maybe I want to have something to hold over the Chief, just in case. Maybe I just want to know what the hell is going on.

The church and some of our recent drug finds are connected, in more than one way.

The drugs are connected somehow to a paramilitary organization that values cops while stealing seized drugs from the PD.

The church is making zombies.

Who is behind it all, and why are they doing it? Is the motive just money, or something more?

And what do the Hernández's have to do with everything?

I pull up to their house, park the car, and walk to the front gate. I press the buzzer.

“Yes?”

“This is Rob Stack. I’m here to see Ben.” I don’t say detective or chief on purpose – I’m not here in any official capacity.

“Rob, this is Ben. It’s good that you are here, there’s something I want to discuss. Come on up.”

The gate buzzes and I let myself in. I walk along a long driveway to the front door of the house. I notice a large picture window above me – someone is moving around inside. The front door is open.

He yells down. “Come right up Ben. I’m in my office above you.”

Okay. I take the rounded stairs up, and walk around past several rooms. I enter the Chief’s office – nice digs.

The Chief is clearly frazzled. His hair is untidy and he is pacing around the room.

“I’m glad you’re here. I can’t figure out what’s going on. I need your help Rob.” He looks over some papers on his desk.

I wander over to his desk – it is a mess. Drawers are opened, and papers are all over the place, spilling onto the floor.

The Chief walks away from me. “I just don’t know what to think. I know you have been investigating this church.” His hand waves and points to his desk. He regains his composure and turns to look at me. “Just what the hell is going on here Detective?”

And then he collapses. I notice a small crack in the picture window. A vehicle on the road by the gate drives away.

I call 911 while kneeling down to check on Ben. “This is Detective Stack, and I need emergency medical assistance. The Chief of Police has just been shot.”

Chapter Seven – Mortality

Saturday June 26, after midnight

It was a long night, and I had a long trip ahead of me.

The bullet had entered the Chief from behind, beneath his left shoulder. As he collapsed, he hit his head on a side table. He is unconscious but breathing. His breathing is a little ragged – I wonder if the bullet has punctured a lung.

I attempt to control the bleeding, and seal the wound with plastic to prevent air from being sucked into the wound – or worse, collapsing his lung. I use a small evidence bag I have in my jacket pocket. I sit on the floor, holding the Chief in the recovery position while listening to his breathing and putting pressure on the wound. I speak to him gently, even though he probably can't hear me.

The EMT arrives and takes the Chief to Harborview very quickly. He is in critical condition; thank goodness he isn't dead. Harborview is the best place to go in Seattle if you've been shot. They have top-notch emergency services here. Doctors that are way too familiar with removing bullets.

All through the evening, I am thinking about this turn of events. If the Chief – or his wife – is the bad guy, then why was he shot? Is someone trying to take him out and move into his place? Does this represent internal conflict within the criminal organization? It doesn't make any sense to me.

Of course, the PD dispatched someone from homicide to hear my story and take a statement. Even though the Chief wasn't dead, if the intent was to kill and someone ends up with life-threatening injuries, we treat it like a homicide. Plus, there were no zombies involved – that we could tell – this case would not be handled by the IAB.

This kid is pretty young, a little green behind the ears you might say. The young ones usually get the late shifts. I'm sure his boss is on the way in as well – he is working hard to do everything right.

We already went through the big details; now he has a few follow up questions. “You're telling me that you went to visit the Chief of Police – at home, on a Friday night – to discuss a case?”

“Sure, why not?” I explain, attempting to look casual about my visit.

The kid looks at me funny. “What case were you discussing?”

“We didn't have a chance to discuss anything.”

He is getting impatient with my answers. “Ok, what case were you going to discuss, before the Chief was shot?”

“We’re investigating a new zombie church.”

“I haven’t heard of those before. What was the investigation about?”

“I can’t say.”

The kid is increasingly irate with my evasion. “Why not?”

“The Chief told me not to.” I stifle a grin at this somber event.

“He said this tonight?”

“No, earlier this week.”

The kid looks surprised, for the second time tonight. “Just how often to you talk with the Chief about your cases?”

“As little as often – it’s been a bad week.”

He finishes with me, and goes to speak with the doctor for an update.

Maria, the Chief’s wife, arrives from an event she has been attending. She also talks with the doctor, and then leaves for the family member’s waiting room. I do not go to see her; I didn’t know what to say to her just yet.

Captain McDowell arrives to see me. I had called him from the hospital as soon as they took the Chief in to emergency.

“Stack, what the hell happened tonight?” McDowell looks tired and haggard. I think I look worse.

I guide him away from the other people and police. “You mean besides someone attempting to kill the Chief?”

“You know what I mean Rob, how are you involved in all this?”

“Captain, the reason I called you here is because we need to lock down the Chief’s place, and limit who enters the crime scene.”

“Okay, I’ll see what I can do. But it’s homicide’s call.”

I look him in the eyes. “You need to make this an IAB case Captain. I was visiting the Chief to discuss incriminating evidence related to zombie drug running and turning zombies at the Church. Personally incriminating evidence.”

He does a double-take, and then starts to ask the million questions I can imagine are running through his head right now.

I cut him off. “I’ll explain everything boss. But you need to do this first. The evidence I went to discuss incriminates the Chief – or more specifically his wife. If we don’t get this under control soon, it will blow up into even more of a press circus.”

“I don’t get it Rob, if you’ve got the evidence, what’s the big deal?”

“That’s just it Captain, when I was there, more evidence was all over the Chief’s desk – he had been looking through it. He wanted to talk to me about it, and then he was shot.”

“What kind of evidence Rob?”

“Ownership information that incriminates the Chief – or more specifically, his wife – in both zombie drug running and turning zombies at the church.”

He processes this information for a moment, and then comments. “If this is real evidence, then why stop homicide from investigating it?”

“I don’t want anyone coming to the wrong conclusions with incomplete evidence boss. I have good reason to believe that the Chief is being set up. And we need to protect him and his wife with our best people; I’m pretty sure they will try again – they may try to take out Maria as well.”

“Okay Rob, we’ll do this your way. I’ll go make this an IAB investigation, lock down the crime scene, and double up on protection.”

He pauses for a moment, and then continues. “You must be tired. You’ve had more shooting incidents this week than most cops have in a year. You should go home now. Please tell me you’re going to take a short break this weekend.”

“I’m glad you mentioned that Captain. In fact, I’m thinking of visiting Canada.”

* * *

Bright and early, Dana arrived at the security company – Fundamental Defense Services – that had been attempting to recruit zombie cops.

Dana was dressed simply in khaki pants, a tight white tank top, and a green police baseball cap with her hair pulled through the back of it in a ponytail. “Hi, could I speak with Joseph Smith in recruiting? I have his card here.”

It was the weekend, and there was no receptionist at the front desk. However, there was someone working in view inside, and the front door was open.

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No, but I’m pretty sure he’ll want to see a zombie like me.” Dana looked around.

He glanced at her wrist. “I think I saw him here earlier, I’ll see if I can find him.”

A short while later a tall, muscular, well-tanned man arrived. “Hi, I’m Joseph – I hear you are looking for me?”

“I sure am.” She walked over to shake hands. She licked her lips and continued. “I’m Detective Dana Light. I hear you are hiring tough zombies with police experience.”

“We are always in the market for fresh talent.”

“Well, I’m in the market. The PD is great for benefits, but I’m hoping to earn a little more salary for putting my life on the line every day. A retired friend of mine recommended that I check you out.” She looked him up and down, slowly.

“What do you do?”

“I’m with the IAB of the Seattle Police. I have my resume here, but I thought this interview would be a little more hands on.” Dana put her hands on her hips, and adjusted her shirt.

“You look like you can handle yourself. We have three physical tests we give all our candidates. Interested in giving them a try?”

“Sounds like a great way to spend the morning.”

* * *

I’ve been driving through the night for over five hours. The sun has just come up, and my destination is about 30 minutes away.

I’m in Canada, on the way to Kelowna, BC. I’m here to visit the famous Dr. Jake Zachman – creator of the z-virus and international expert on zombies of all kinds.

I’ve got questions for the good doctor – questions about zombies that people in Seattle likely don’t have answers to. I suppose I could have called, but these questions need to be asked in person. I need to know if he is surprised by my questions, or being evasive and lying to me.

I’ll be asking the doctor about creating zombies, military zombie organizations, and the techniques available for controlling zombies for criminal purposes.

I park outside the Infected Research Center at the corner of Harvey and Vasile – where Dr. Zachman is supposed to spend most of his time. It is still too early for people to be up and working, so I take advantage of the opportunity to sleep for a couple of hours.

I dream of Steve, my earlier partner.

Before he died, Steve was investigating Maria Gonzales' company (we didn't know it was hers at the time), and their recent shipping details. He was tracing drug movement patterns between Seattle and Mexico with DEA officers in the Mexico City Country Office.

He had followed a major drug delivery to an underprivileged housing project in central Seattle. I had just checked in on my gambling hall because of a minor issue – I can't even remember what – and was on route to join him.

In my dream, I arrived at the site he had directed me to earlier. Barely, but clearly, I can hear Steve yelling from upstairs – at who I don't know yet. Steve was a level four zombie, and while he was usually quite amiable and calm, he could be riled into a temper that has gotten him in trouble before.

I took off to join him, on the third floor.

These projects were built for maximum housing, with several apartments all crammed together. While I was running, I heard more of Steve's angry dialog.

"Keep talking like that and I'll show you what a bullet looks like up close." Even when he was angry, Steve was always suave under fire.

"Listen to the dumb zombie cop. He can't even make a worthwhile threat. It's pathetic really."

Steve yells back. "Just peek your head out and I'll show you who's pathetic."

"I'm right here – come and get me, you stupid zombie."

I knew these tactics. Steve was being incited to action. "Steve – don't listen to him! He's just making you angry." I bounded up the stairs.

"Rob, is that you? Good timing buddy, help me get this asshole – I've got him pinned down where he can't move." It's a Mexican standoff.

The assailant continued with his scheme. "Yes, this zombie needs all the help he can get – he is really quite daft. Is your partner the one with the brains?"

I burst into the open apartment, but it was the wrong one. They were next door. Some lady carrying her laundry screamed at my presence. "Shit," I exclaimed loudly.

The assailant picked up on this opportunity. "I can't tell who is more stupid – the zombie or the human. Hey you brainless zombie – you're the perfect match for each other!"

This was too much for Steve – not only was his intelligence being questioned, but his partner's as well. I could hear him scream and move, and I heard several shots fire.

“Steve no,” I whispered, barely audible. I ran out into the hallway, and into the apartment next door. Steve was around the corner bleeding on the kitchen floor. He pointed toward the back of the apartment.

I ran to the back balcony, where I could see the assailant on the ground floor. He must have jumped to the second floor balcony and then the first. He smiled and waved at me, then ran around the building next door before I could take a shot.

For a moment, I considered jumping after him. Cooler heads prevailed however, and I called in to report an officer down.

I held Steve’s hands and told him that we were going to get this guy. *Come on Steve, you can pull through this you zombie thug.*

Steve and I had been working together for almost three years. I can still remember our first day together. He was so entertaining and courageous. We had bonded quickly. He made me want to be a better cop. We were like brothers.

I pleaded with him. *Just hold on – and I will help you get this guy Steve. We’ve got help coming – they are on the way now. You can pull through.*

With Steve’s blood pooling beneath me, he looked me in the eyes, said something brave and funny, and then he took his last breath and died.

I couldn’t cry about it then, but I am crying in my dream now. God damn it Steve, why couldn’t you wait?

That man in the suit. I will never forget what he looks like.

* * *

Dana and Joseph walked into a well-equipped gymnasium where several big zombies were working out. They looked like military-trained men: short hair, tight muscles, and their clothes had that “back from fighting in the desert” quality.

She recognized a symbol on the wall that she’d seen before. It’s the double-cross symbol she caught a glimpse of at the church, when she looked into the hall.

“Hey guys, this is Dana. She’d like to interview with us for a job.”

They all stopped working out and came to meet the new recruit.

Joseph announced to the group, “How about we start with some one on one sparring? Jack – you look like you’re ready for some action.”

Jack grunted in acknowledgement, and made his way over to a large padded square zone in the gym.

Joseph turned to Dana. “In this test, you are trying to incapacitate – but not kill – an attacker. No weapons allowed, and no using any equipment in the gym. You can put items from your pockets over here. Just say uncle or tap out if you wish the test to end.”

Dana emptied her pockets and walked over to Jack in the middle of the area. She bowed her head slightly and went to shake Jack’s hand. “Great to meet you Jack.”

Jack took a swing at her – she ducked.

“So much for formalities, hey Jack?”

Jack rushed towards her, arms in an outstretched position, ready to tackle.

Dana jumped to the side with a tuck and roll.

Jack was at least a foot taller than Dana, and likely twice as heavy. Dana considered her options.

Jack lumbered over to grab her again. Dana stepped toward him, and attempted to push him over Judo-style, leveraging his weight and velocity.

He stumbled, but did not go down. As he passed her, while stumbling, he grabbed some of her shirt.

She twisted and pulled her shirt away from his grasp while positioning herself behind him. Using his hunched position to her advantage, she leap-frogged on to his broad shoulders. She wrapped her arms around his throat in a choke hold, and cemented her position by wrapping her legs around his arms and chest.

“Learned this one from my friend Jake,” she chatted conversationally into his ear.

For the first time, Jack spoke. “I’d recommend you go back for some more lessons.” He jumped up, higher than she expected he could, as he turned his upper back toward the floor.

This is going to hurt, she realized as she scrambled up to get out of the way. As his body headed towards the floor, she launched off his shoulders, ramming him into the ground at twice the velocity.

Jack was clearly winded from the fall, but he was determined. He slowly got up on one arm, swinging his body around.

This is the best chance I’m going to have, Dana realized. She grabbed his free arm and pulled it behind him while pushing him off balance. He landed on his chest.

Dana pulled his arm up behind his back, almost enough to break it.

“Okay, I give!” Jack rumbles. “You don’t have to break my arm.”

Sprinkled clapping erupted from the room as the men looked at each other, nodding their heads with wide eyes. She had passed the first test. Clearly, several of the zombies didn’t think she would.

“Impressive Dana – that was quick.” Joseph ran up to pat her on the back. “If you’d like to take a break before the next test – that’s ok.”

“I’m ready.”

“You two – in the ring.” He pointed at one small and one large-ish zombie in the room. “In this test, you are attempting to evade two officers of the law that are going to take you down. Again, there are no weapons allowed. This is a timed test – to see how long you can evade them before capture. You can step outside the ring – but just one or two steps please. No running elsewhere in the gym. Okay?”

Dana nodded, and walked to one corner. The other two zombies stepped into the opposite corner.

“Ready – go!” Joseph declared, setting the timer on his watch.

The shorter zombie came into the ring with a pair of handcuffs. He opened one side and held it menacingly as they both advanced on Dana slowly.

Dana stayed on the right side, with the big one next to her. He reached for her casually as she swatted and kicked his hands away a few times. She kept moving as she struck, in an attempt to keep the big guy between her and the little zombie with the cuffs.

Dana realized that they could easily tire her and wear her down with this approach. She was expending much more energy than the large zombie was. She needed to change tactics while she still had the energy.

The big zombie lunged for her, but it was only a half-hearted attempt – he was saving his strength, waiting for a real opportunity. She butted into his side and threw him over her shoulder. As she watched the big zombie go down, she feigned a loss of balance, holding herself up with one arm. The little zombie rushed to place her remaining wrist in the cuffs while in her weakened position.

She caught this out of the corner of her eye, grabbed the small zombie’s arms, pulled, and tripped him over the large fallen zombie. She took control of the open cuff and to the small zombie’s surprise, put it on him.

While he was still in shock from this turn of events, she flipped open the other side of the cuffs and wrapped it around the big zombie's ankle, locking them together.

She took a small step back to gaze over her handiwork. The small zombie, leaning over with his legs spread around his friend, was not to be discouraged. He pulled his keys out of his pocket to unlock himself.

As he looked over the keys to find the small handcuff key, Dana kicked them out of his hand and into the air, catching them with one hand. She then throws them across the gym and into a large wastebasket in the corner.

All of the big tough zombies in the room were amazed, and their impressively loud and generous applause showed it.

“Dana, that was incredible! We have never seen that outcome before, just brilliant. Let's take a quick break and meet the guys here before we introduce you to the third test.”

Clearly she was making an impression.

* * *

I was meeting with Dr. Zachman inside, after introductions.

“Please Rob, call me Jake. After all the world's consequences of my actions as a doctor, I don't really feel I deserve the title.”

This research center is part hospital, part zombie community center, and part lab. Zombies in gowns and casual clothes walk the grounds around us. We are seated in comfortable chairs in the common area.

“I'm here to see what you might know about some zombie developments we're becoming aware of in Seattle Jake.”

“Ask away. I'm always happy to help the police.”

“Have you heard of any private or government zombie military units?”

Jake is clearly surprised. “No – I haven't – have you encountered such a thing?”

“We think so.”

“I imagine there could be some of this type of activity overseas. They don't tell us much about what's happening with their zombie population in many other countries. They still don't entirely trust us. But here in North America, I'm pretty sure every state and province is only using zombies – in a limited way mind you – for police services. Our governments have been very

vocal about not giving zombies any military privileges.” His answer and demeanor seem open and honest, he isn’t hiding anything.

“Another question for you Jake. How about controlling zombies for criminal purposes – is that possible?”

The doctor starts into a long-winded explanation as he thinks about the question. “Each zombie has their own special mix of empathy, ego, and emotional control – plus of course their personal tendencies before they turned.

“Our test rates each zombie in all of these areas to determine how well they will do socially. Will they be empathetic to the plight of others? Do they have good self-awareness; do they recognize the impact of their behavior on others? How good are they at controlling their diminished emotions during times of stress?

“Zombies below level five are more childlike and susceptible to suggestion. If they receive sufficient positive reinforcement for inappropriate behaviors, they can be influenced to behave badly. This is why regular reminders of good compliance with the rules are periodically included in all zombie police programs.

“Even zombies in levels five to seven can be fooled into thinking their bad behaviors were in fact good and ethical if those in power omit certain details or stress the right facts.”

There is something here I don’t understand. “But I thought level seven zombies were practically human? Isn’t level seven pretty much the same as human?”

“Oh no, not at all. Level ten is human. Level seven is the highest level of zombie we have ever encountered, which is why people often make this mistake.”

We sit quietly for a while, as I go over this new information.

“Doc, in the wrong hands, understanding their level is an invitation to manipulate hordes of zombies.”

He considers this, and then replies. “I never thought about it that way, but you may be right. Yes, now that I think about it – you are absolutely right.”

We both sit quietly for another moment.

“Hmm,” Jake says. He is thinking about the right way to say something.

“Yes?” I inquire.

“No disrespect intended here Rob, as I have nothing but the best feelings towards your father. He thinks about the world in terms of security and control, much like you do.”

“Go on.”

“In all of the weeks that we worked together on the zombie police training program, I wonder why he never mentioned this perspective.”

* * *

“What level are you Dana?” Joseph inquired of the new potential hire.

“Level four.” Dana hoped that by lying now, Joseph will underestimate her to her advantage later.

“Wow – you show great self-control for a four.”

Dana had a chance to rest and meet with all of the guys that were in the gym. They were a good bunch of zombies – although she recognized two of them from the pictures Phil had taken of the illegal drug recovery.

Joseph sent three of the zombies ahead for the final test – they waited for Dana and Joseph to join them outside in a barricaded area used for combat training. The area was made up of walls and obstacles. No ceiling however – it was open to the sky.

Joseph gave Dana a light-weight paintball pellet gun for the final firearms test, and he took one himself.

Dana asked him, “no goggles?”

Joseph looked surprised. “What, you need goggles?”

“No, but you will.”

The other three waiting hear this exchange and laughed. “Ha – I like this lady boss. Reminds me of my mom.”

Joseph smiled and addressed them all. “Okay guys, go ahead and get into position. Dana, I’ll be the target in this test. Your job is to take me out, without being taken out yourself. You’ll face the other three on the way. True to our zombie strengths, only body shots and headshots count as kill shots – removing the player from the game. If you are hit anywhere else, such as a leg or arm – you may continue, and so can we. Once we start, you must stay in the barricaded area. Sound good?”

“Yup.”

“Okay Dana, good luck. Hopefully I’ll see you in there. Give me one minute to get into position.” He smiled and ran inside.

Dana waited for a minute, and then looked inside. A protected hallway began the course, followed by an opening to the left, with a small area for cover beyond it. The remainder of the course was obscured from view in her current location.

She approached the opening. “How’s it going guys?”

Two guys answered with, “Doing great Dana,” and “Having fun.”

She then had their approximate position in her mind. Leaping to the covered area in front of her would put her in the cross-fire between them. It’s a trap.

The wall next to her was about ten feet high. She launched towards it and quietly pushed off, giving her enough height to reach for the top with her left arm.

While dangling, she jutted her right foot forward into the open area, drawing fire from two directions. She leaned her head and her firearm a little to the right and took out the first man standing behind cover on the right, who was shooting at her from about three yards away. She quickly peeked around the corner even further and did the same to the second man on the left. Both of them were shot in the head. She looked around the area briefly from this vantage point, and then dropped down.

“Awww Dana – you’re no fun at all. That was too quick!” They both walked past her, heads hanging low.

She could hear movement from behind where the first man was. Quickly, she strode around the corner and took a crouched position near where the second man was. The area had good protection from multiple directions.

The third man hadn’t shown himself yet, but Dana had the upper hand. She could see fairly clearly in the direction his noises were coming from. She kept her gun pointed in that direction, and waited.

Almost a minute passed, and he made his mistake. He poked his head around the corner to look for Dana. Dana shot him in the head before he could hone in on her for a shot.

“Damn it.” He walked out by her towards the front.

Dana hadn’t heard any other movement in the area, and she was pretty sure Joseph was not behind her current cover that she had seen earlier from on high. She took the opportunity to come out from cover and moved into a new position.

Still, there was no sound. The area she was in led to a single doorway containing a hall going in both directions.

“Just you and me Joseph,” Dana asked to see if he would reveal his location.

Silence.

She waited at the entrance, on the left side. He was likely in one of two directions, left or right. She could see a little of the hallway to the right – it was the location of the third shooter. It didn't look like he was there. She gambled that he was on the left.

She moved around and over to the other side of the entrance, with her sights aimed down the left of the hall. Nothing yet.

She slid her hand and gun into the area, hoping to draw fire. Nothing. Perhaps he was around another corner beyond this one.

She peeked her head out to take a look. Just as she thought to herself, *I am right – he is on the left side*, she was shot in the forehead.

Joseph stood up to join her. “That was a great run there Dana. Nice job. Lots of people don't even make it past the first three guards, and nobody has shot me yet in this exercise. If you had jumped in to surprise me, you might have had a chance.”

They headed back inside and wrapped up, with Dana giving her resume and contact information. Joseph explained that he would be in touch after they reviewed her resume and background.

She asked Joseph a few questions about the type of work they take on. “Typically mercenary jobs for government defense,” he explained, “mostly overseas.”

“Any domestic jobs?” She asked.

“From time to time, but they make up less of our portfolio.”

Dana was pleased with the outcome of the morning – she had seen what she needed to see.

She had positively confirmed that these were the men involved in the illegal drug recovery operation.

* * *

The doctor and I were having a good conversation about zombie levels – I've learned much more than I already knew.

For example, I now know that while zombies have fewer emotions than most humans – they do still have several emotions – such as anger, fear, and happiness. We see a lack of empathy and insensitive responses to social events, and this comes across incorrectly as no emotion.

I ask if anyone has been creating groups of zombies anywhere.

Jake replies. “I haven’t heard about groups of zombies being created anywhere, although from time to time I will hear reports or questions from people asking how someone may have become a zombie at a young age. I figured it was just probabilities – some zombies will be younger than others.

“I and several other doctors have theorized about how there would be many positive health benefits to turning – for people in some conditions – if we could eliminate or control the most injurious brain damage. But no doctors have acted on this that I know of.”

I inquire, “what if we’re seeing lots of youth show up as zombies. Perhaps a dozen or more, in Seattle.”

“Yes.”

“Yes what?” I am confused.

“Yes, in that case, someone is creating zombies.”

“Jake, how would someone create original zombies?”

“Level ones? I don’t rightly know, and I can’t imagine why anyone would want to do that. Level ones just have basic instincts and wouldn’t be much use to anyone.”

“I hear you, but how might they be created.”

“Hmmm. The obvious way is to not take the inhibitor drug. We’ve had a few poor people around the world end up as original zombies because of this.”

“Anything else?”

“Now that you mention it, we did have a couple of fresh level ones come to the center about two years ago. They were caught in a house on fire. They were likely asphyxiated before they were rescued.”

We talk for a while about why asphyxiation might cause the creation of a level one. I explain the potassium chloride we found and our suspicions of what it is used for. He is shocked, but he agrees that this approach will turn the infected into a zombie.

“Okay doc, I have just one more set of questions for you. Have you heard of the Church of the Progressive Faith, or any churches that accept zombies?”

“Yes, this group we have heard of. They are starting to turn up all over the place – every major city in the US, even some here in Canada. I can get you a list of the ones we know about.

“They sound like a good bunch, allowing zombies and humans to worship together. I don’t know of any other religions that have been so accepting yet of these poor people.”

I explain our suspicions of the church in Seattle, and the chamber I had found. He is shocked again, and I believe his shock is genuine.

After a few more related questions, a bit of a tour around the center, and picking up some files he said I could have, I wrap up our meeting by thanking him for the generous donation of his time in answering my queries. He insists that it was no trouble, and that I am welcome back at any time.

He suggests I can make my own way out at my convenience – stay as long as I like – as he turns to speak with a zombie patient in the area.

I wander back to the front entrance, making my way through the foyer. I admire some of the artwork on the walls and pedestals. Most of the art here was done by zombie patients that have stayed with the center.

There are some photos of different groups of zombies, with Jake and various other doctors caring for them or having fun with them. I'm amused by some of the antics of the various groups. Zombies are people too.

Just then, right by the exit, I see her. She is looking directly at me, with the same intensity I have come to appreciate over the past week.

It is a picture of Dana.

Chapter Eight – Suspicion

The FBI! I can't believe Dana worked for the FBI.

At least that is what Dr. Jake Zachman insisted, when I brought him over to the photo to ask about Dana.

I recall what he said earlier. "Oh, that's Dana Light. She worked with the FBI five years ago, and joined us for one of our original evolved zombie studies, through co-operation with the U.S. Government. They sent in several evolved zombies – just about anyone with the federal government that had turned. With over two million civilian employees, many reaching retirement years, they had quite a few. Gave them time to think about what they were going to do with zombie employees while they were here."

"The FBI doesn't employ zombies though, do they?" The FBI was one of those slow-changing institutions who still refused to employ zombies today.

"Yes, I think you're correct. I don't know what Dana did after her study group finished with us. If you see her, say hi for me."

That was about two hours ago.

I stop at a coffee shop – something called a Tim Hortons – in Hope, BC, just off of Canada's highway number one. Good coffee, and these things they call 'timbits'.

Maybe Dana can't tell me about her FBI past for confidentiality reasons. Whatever the explanation, I need to do some digging. I'm pretty sure she told me she turned three years ago. What is she hiding, and why? At least this information helps explain why she's such a great shot in action. I'm not buying the 'girl from the farm' routine.

"Hey Jim, how are you doing? You at the club?" I called Jim, the retired Seattle cop that helped me earlier.

"Yup. The Mariners have just started playing – I've got a good feeling about them." I can hear Dave razzing his team choice in the background.

"Do you still have a friend with the FBI?"

"You mean my cousin? Yes – the old battleaxe hasn't retired yet, even though she looks older than me."

"I'm going to send you a picture and a name. Could you find out where she worked?"

"Sure thing – will do."

We hang up.

I recall what my dad would always tell me. “Get your ducks in a row, Robbie.” Ok Dad.

I have a bad feeling that my dad is deeply involved in the zombie cases I’ve been working. This includes the church, turning zombies, and selling drugs to zombies. I need to find out just how big this is.

“Captain – how is the Chief doing?” I have a few calls to make – this one is to my boss.

“It’s not looking good Rob. Doctors are worried that he’s not making sufficient progress.” The captain pauses a moment to take a breath. “I’ve seen that evidence you talked about earlier – we’re not going to be able to sit on that for much longer. Even less if the Chief passes away.”

“Damn it. I understand Captain. Thanks for bearing with me on this.” I pause as I think about what I’m about to ask. Do I really trust the captain? “Boss, I need you to dig something up for me.”

“What, do I sound like reception to you?”

“It’s sensitive Captain, and I don’t know who to trust with this. I think we have corruption within the department. Or may have had.”

“Damn son – you sure know how to put together a story. Zombies turning, corrupt cops. What’s next – is the mayor in on it too?” He is busting my balls. “Alright, go on.”

“I need a complete list of all of my dad’s travel plans while he was with the department. Including any of the agencies, governments, or similar that he visited to train in our zombie program.”

“That shouldn’t be too hard. I’ll check with the admin staff and email what they give me.”

“Make up something about needing to follow up with them on some adjustments we’ve been making to the program – something like that.”

“Sounds good. Anything else? Dinner reservations I can make for you?”

“You’re the best, boss. See you later.”

“Later.”

We hang up.

I finish my coffee and donuts, and get back on the road. I’m headed to Vancouver, BC to meet with the Vancouver PD, and check on the Church of Progressive Faith in town.

* * *

Back in Seattle, in the Church of Progressive Faith, Pastor Peter waited outside of the inner sanctuary for his two new zombies – Jenn and Roy. It was customary to leave them overnight to rest after turning. He walked in on them having sex, and quickly excused himself. He was quite embarrassed by this. They hardly noticed, and certainly didn't stop.

Once they were ready and dressed, they emerged from the room. Like some that are affected by turning, her eyes were a lighter, paler color of blue – beautiful. His Asian skin had taken on a greyish quality. Peter didn't know the scientific reasons for these color changes – he just knew they happened sometimes when turning.

“Jennifer and Roy – I'd like to officially welcome you as zombies to the church. I suspect you're hungry. Here, I've picked up two wonderful zombie feasts for you.”

He handed both of them a six dollar Jumbo Deal from Jack in the Box – a hamburger and two tacos for each of them. They were quite filling, with a good amount of beef for a hungry zombie. Even if they were before, no zombies are ever vegetarian.

“Awesome.” “Thanks!”

While they ate, he spoke to them. “Now I want you that the church looks after our zombies. If you are ever hungry, you can always come to me for food. The church will always feed you.”

They nodded and smiled at this, crunching loudly on tacos and stuffing hamburger into their mouths.

“Do either of you have jobs?” Peter asked.

They both nodded no, while continuing to eat.

“The church provides for its zombies. You shall both always have jobs while you are with the church.”

He took a moment to write down information on two pieces of paper.

“Jennifer, take this. This is the name and phone number of your personal coach, Ada. She will set you up with a job and living quarters if you so desire.”

Ada is the madam of a cat house in downtown Seattle. Zombie women make great prostitutes, especially if they are below level five. They become part of a pack, have sex all the time, drink and do drugs on the job, all while getting paid. Without anyone to help guide them with alternative choices, hooking becomes second nature.

“Roy – this is for you. Ted is a great guy. He'll get you a really awesome job. He can also hook you up with a place if you need.”

Of course, Ted was the man in the suit that was with the Parson earlier. He'll employ Roy in the local drug business, drug security, or for heavy labor – depending on Roy's z-level and skills.

The zombies finished eating in record time.

“Well now that you are done eating, perhaps this would be a great time for you to enjoy the outdoors and see everything for the first time with zombie eyes?” Peter held them by the arms and led them both to the front door.

“Remember now; call Ada and Ted when you're ready to get those cool zombie jobs and a place to stay. And come back tomorrow for our weekly sermon and more food!”

They opened the door and wandered outside, blinking in the light.

* * *

I arrive and wait just outside the Vancouver PD, and meet with Detective Glenn Latimer of the Zombie Crimes Division. It is his day off, but he offered to meet me anyway in the spirit of international co-operation.

“Nice to meet you in person Glenn.” I shake his hand.

“You too Rob.”

“Did you learn anything from your narcotics group?”

“Well, it's the damndest thing. I mentioned speedballs to the guys in the Drug Unit – expecting them to laugh at me – and they tell me that yes, they have caught a zombie dealing speedballs recently. Young kid – way too young to be a zombie, but he is.”

“Wow. How about the zombie church, do you know anything about it?”

“I can do you one better Rob. That drug dealing zombie I mentioned, well the guys brought in one of our – ahem – hotter looking officers to ask him some questions. She fed him cake and milk, held the fork to his lips and everything.

“Apparently this worked just as well on her fellow officers watching through the one way glass – she received several personal inquiries afterwards.

“Anyway, he told her all about getting the job selling drugs from someone at the church – someone he thought might work with the church. It was good enough for a judge to get a search warrant.”

He waves some papers at me. “Want to join us?”

A short while later and Glenn is driving me to visit the Vancouver edition of the zombie church to execute their search warrant, and Jim calls.

“Rob here.”

“Hey Rob, its Jim. I’ve got some info for you.”

“That was fast.”

“My cousin didn’t need to look at the photo for long before recognizing the picture of Dana you sent me.”

“Ok.”

“Yeah, turns out there aren’t many women in the FBI – they all kind of know each other. She didn’t even need to look anything up.” Jim pauses.

“You’re killing me here Jim – what did you learn?”

“My cousin says yes, Dana works for the FBI. I asked her to clarify – did she mean before or now?”

“And…”

“Dana works for the FBI now – she is pretty sure of that. They don’t see each other often, but she has seen her at the Seattle office within the last year.”

“Wow – what does she do?”

“Now that she doesn’t know. When she looked it up in their online address book, it simply said ‘active assignment’. No indication of department or what the active assignment is.”

“This is great info Jim – you’re awesome. How did the Mariners do today?”

“Fuck Rob, thanks for reminding me. I lost two hundred bucks in today’s game. God damn Mariners.”

“Don’t worry about it Jim – that game was on me.”

“Thanks Rob!”

“No problem – thank you too.” We both hang up.

We arrive at the church – I let the Canucks lead the way. This church has a Parson Peter equivalent that gets all huffy with the police about the search warrant. They handcuff him to one of the pews for the duration of the search.

The search doesn't take too long – there isn't much to go through. This church is also newly established, and the space is fairly small.

They don't find any illegal drugs, but we do find another room done up for turning zombies, with similar equipment. They also find several consent forms that have been signed from people that have agreed to become zombies.

Glenn goes to harass the parson about zombie turning, to which the parson explains that it is all good and legal.

I zone out and stop listening. I've heard this song before.

There are over thirty big cities listed – in the file I received from Doctor Zachman – that contain a zombie church. How many of these zombie churches are turning zombies?

* * *

“Connecting you 6628,” said a different voice on the other end of the line this time. There was a familiar silent pause, then a click.

“Dana – good to hear from you. We heard about the shooting of the Chief of Police. What else do you have for us?” It was the same male voice as last time.

“We've made progress in uncovering the source of corruption in the Seattle PD.” Dana was all business. “The police found evidence that the corruption is with the Chief and his wife at the scene of his shooting, in his home. They've been involved in massive drug shipments and they own the church that has been turning zombies.”

“This is quite the development. Will you need our assistance?”

“I don't think so. It seems like the Seattle Police will figure this out on their own, and take care of things for us. They will never need to know we've been investigating.”

“This is good news Dana. And how about the Stack family?”

“So far, there is nothing to connect them with the corruption. They seem clear. I will keep looking though.”

“The military-like drug recovery operation and the Chief's shooting, do you know who was behind either of these?”

“The drug recovery operation had inside police knowledge – it is possible the Chief was behind it. We haven't found the military group involved yet, but are following some leads. As for the shooting, the Chief's wife may have been involved, or someone else in their criminal organization, trying to get ahead. We are investigating that too.”

“Thank you for the update Dana. We have some information for you.”

“Oh.” This surprised Dana – usually the information went the other way.

“Your position within the Seattle police may be compromised. One of the clerks in human resources was looking at your information online. She did this after receiving a phone call from a cell phone owned by a retired Seattle cop. Now a registered zombie.”

“How do you want to play this Dana?”

“Give me a few days. I think I know who has been looking into my background. My new partner hasn’t been satisfied with my reasons for having good shooting skills.”

“He sounds perceptive. Is your life in jeopardy?”

“No – I don’t think so.”

* * *

It’s getting late – I’m staying in a hotel just outside of Vancouver on the way back to Seattle. I’m tired from driving all through the night yesterday; I decide not to push it again.

I’m cross comparing the list of church cities with the travel schedule I received from the Captain. There’s an overlap of at least 90%. In his email, the Captain points out that these cities are pretty much the ones with a population of half a million or more.

I do some online research – to find and list all of the zombie police units covering each of these churches. All of the people I’m going to need to contact. Whew – it’s going to take a while!

My cell phone rings. I can tell from the caller ID that it’s the captain.

“Hey Captain – you know they have this feature on email called Read Receipt. You can use it to tell if I got your email, you don’t need to call me.”

“Nice one, whippersnapper – I know how to use email. That’s not what I’m calling about.”

He pauses for effect.

“Are you going to make me beg?”

“Ha, just yanking your chain Rob. We received a call earlier today from social services, I just heard about it while looking over the daily reports. You know those original zombies you, Jake, and Dana rescued from the church?”

“Yes.” A shiver goes up my spine. Don’t remind me.

“They were kidnapped this morning.”

Chapter Nine – Trust

Sunday June 27

I wake up a little late on Sunday, still in Canada. I must have really needed the sleep.

I've given it a lot of thought, and I figure that I should trust Dana with some of the info I've learned.

I give her a call while I'm on the road back to Seattle.

"Hey Dana – it's Rob."

"Morning Rob – how are you?"

"I'm ok. I've been doing some additional background research on our church. I have some information to give you."

"That's great. I visited the zombie security company yesterday. Took a test and got to meet some of their staff."

"Wow Dana – that was quick! Learn anything useful?"

"I think two of the guys working there are in Phil's photos."

"That seems more than coincidental. What do you think we should do next?"

"Well, it seems to me that these guys are all right. Many ex-military, working primarily on contract work for the US government. They don't seem like your average street thugs."

"Okay, what does this mean for us?"

"I think we need to figure out who hired them, and what story they were given. I got to know their local unit commander, a guy named Joseph Smith. He's the key to understanding what happened here."

"We'll get a full work-up on him, and perhaps see about a search warrant?"

"That seems logical. Let me think about it – we might not want them to know we're on to them."

"Yeah, ok. Hey – I have something for you. I've been putting together a list of all of the zombie church locations I can find. There are over thirty of them. Turns out they are often in big cities, same kinds of cities that have zombie relations departments with the police." (I decide not to share the connection with my dad, just yet.)

“That makes sense – big cities have the largest zombie populations to grow a church with, and the largest quantity of zombie crime. How did you find so many of them so quickly?”

“Just me and my mad internet skills.” I decide I don’t want her to know I was with the zombie doctor in Canada – at least not yet.

“I see.” She doesn’t sound quite convinced. I change the subject.

“Hey Dana – tell me, how did you get to be such a great shot with a handgun?”

“I told you Rob, years on the farm taking out gophers.”

“I see.” Now she knows that I’m not entirely convinced either.

I continue. “It’s just that for shooting gophers on a farm, you probably used some kind of rifle. Not really developing the same shooting skills that you’ve got now with a handgun Dana.” *Just say it Dana – tell me you’re with the FBI so I can trust you.*

“Perhaps there is more to it than that Rob. I’ve got a few more stories to share. Not on the phone though.”

Okay, she is going to meet me part way. I can accept that for now. We’ve only known each other for a week.

“Fair enough Dana. I’ll send you an email with the church details I’ve been digging up.”

I decide to share a little more. “Incidentally, I contacted I guy I know with the zombie police unit up in Vancouver. They told me they’ve been having zombie drug problems too. And they found a hospital-style room in the church like we have in Seattle – for turning zombies.”

“I wonder how many of the zombie churches are turning people?”

“Yeah, this could be an epidemic we have on our hands.”

* * *

In the University District of Seattle, the city mayor, her husband, and their kids were enjoying a luncheon. They were in attendance with other Seattle officials, local business executives, some University of Washington faculty and staff, and a couple dozen honor roll students from the University.

All told, there were about one hundred and fifty people at the charity event for the University – raising money for student scholarships. At each table, honor roll students shared their own personal stories of hope and commitment to education with the attendees.

Maria Gonzales, the Chief's wife, sat down with the mayor. "I can only stay for a quick lunch, and then I am headed back to the hospital."

The mayor was surprised to see her here. "Of course Maria, I'm impressed that you joined us at all. You are so committed to educating children." She paused and looked more serious. "Our hearts and prayers are with you and Ben."

Maria nodded and sat down. "Thank you."

Nearby, her plainclothes police security detail arranged to join a half-full table where they could continue to ensure her safety while respecting her privacy.

About thirty minutes after the main course, coffee, tea, and desserts were being served throughout the crowd. The alcohol enjoyed earlier had everyone in a congenial mood. Quiet, pleasant conversation was taking place at every table.

From the far corner, a young girl's shriek cut through the calm of the room like a knife. "Zombies!" She pointed.

Entering from the side hall was a group of at least ten hungry zombies. They ambled over, arms outstretched in search of sustenance.

Several of the zombies had scratches and cuts on their face, arms, and bodies – where their shirts had been partially torn away. Bleeding and infected sores were on a few – leaking pus and blood.

The lead zombie had pale eyes, greyish skin, and disheveled hair – he was wearing a dirty Huskies sweatshirt, the mascot of the University. Some of the dirt looked like dried blood.

The people sitting at the closest three tables all rose, and backed away. More screaming and yelling came from the crowd. Mass confusion occurred, as people scrambled to get away. They stumbled over each other. Some people pushed others out of the way as they ran.

One particularly pretty young student was chased by a large zombie, screaming. The zombie yelled with its own throaty scream in reply.

Some of the zombies started eating the food left on nearby tables, thrusting their hands into cake and ice cream, and generally made a huge mess of things. They had icing and cake on their hands, face, and hair.

Some zombies continued further in to the room, causing more panic and uprising. Students screamed, and some of the athletic young men in the room assumed a defensive position – protecting those that had run away. As two zombies approached, they lost their nerve and ran away as well.

The Husky wearing zombie scrambled further into the room. In the center of the room contained an ice statue centerpiece and three large chocolate fondue fountains surrounded by fruit, cookies, cake, and marshmallows.

He let out a blood-curdling roar and lunged forward into the room.

* * *

It should be easy to break in to Dad's house.

I grew up here. Mom and Dad would usually keep a spare key in a hollow of the apple tree in the front yard. It is still here.

Mom doesn't live here anymore – she and Dad divorced years ago. She moved to live closer to my sister in California, who was busy cranking out grandkids for Mom to adore.

I'm pretty sure Dad is travelling this weekend, and not back until later tonight. I've got a few hours to poke around.

I spend some time going over a few of Dad's mementos, books, and keepsakes.

I notice that he has some new pictures up. A few of them are with him and the Chief and other city officials. There are two with him, the Chief, and the Chief's wife Maria. I put them down to get to some serious investigating.

Dad still isn't keeping a password on his computer. I don't know how many times I've told him to do that. Today I'm ok that he didn't.

I look through his itinerary for the past eighteen months or so, since he retired from the department. He's got some email records of a few trips – more of the same places he'd travelled to while working for the department.

Two trips catch my eye however, a trip to Mexico a while back and a more recent trip to China.
Hmmm.

I copy a spreadsheet containing a list of addresses for various buildings around town. One of the addresses I recognize – Dana and I had visited it late last week and encountered some friendly zombies.

I put my USB drive away and start to clean my tracks. I don't want it to be obvious to Dad that someone's been here looking.

* * *

“Chief, its Ted.”

“Ted – good to hear from you. What news do you have?”

“The release of the original zombies seemed to go exactly according to plan. We didn’t stick around for long – don’t want people to recognize us – but there was plenty of screaming and people scrambling out of the luncheon while we left.”

“That’s good news. This is exactly the type of experience we want to influence the mayor.”

“Will I see you at headquarters tonight?”

“Yes – I’m just arriving in town now.”

* * *

While I’m taking my time at Dad’s place, looking over a few more photos and books, I receive a call from Mac. He and Jake have been acting as special security for Maria Gonzales today.

“Rob – you will never believe who we met today.”

“Who Mac?”

“Remember those original zombies you rounded up? Them.”

“Where?”

“It was the craziest thing Rob. We were at some upper class luncheon in the U District. Maria was taking a break from staying with the Chief at the hospital, meeting with the mayor and a hundred other uppity ups.

“Right during dessert, all twelve of the original zombies come into the hall looking pretty – and they freak everyone out. There was screaming and mass commotion.”

“Wow – what did you do Mac?”

“I was about to kick some serious zombie ass, when Jake comes up to me and says, ‘Try to keep everyone calm Mac – I’ll take care of them.’ Then he walks over to where most of the zombies are, and he says in his polite voice, ‘do you mind if I borrow this table?’ He didn’t need to – nobody was left at the table.

“Then he starts rounding up zombies, sitting them in chairs, and zip tying them to their seats by the leg.”

“Amazing.”

“I was so proud of him Rob – you should have seen him. It took him less than three minutes to sit all the zombies down at two tables, while he puts down food in front of them.

“At first, people were screaming and stumbling over each other to get out, but once Jake got started, everyone was watching him. Some people even laughed a little at the zombie antics.

“When Jake finished securing the zombies, he called out to everyone, ‘apologies for the interruption – these zombies were just a little hungry’. And then he talks to some students, and gets them to come in closer to watch the zombies. He was feeding zombies and roughing up their hair. Some people even took pictures!”

“This is incredible Mac – any idea who brought the originals?”

“I was thinking the same thing once I realized that Jake had things under control. I stepped outside to look for anything suspicious. There was a grey van parked nearby – it was leaving just as I watched it.”

“Please tell me you got something.”

“Yup – sure did Rob. I took down the license plate and set up a watch order on it. If anyone in the PD notices it they will let us know, and won’t engage.”

“That’s great news Mac!”

“It was a sight to see – Jake was wonderful. He even went over to see the mayor and Maria afterwards, and commented to them, ‘someone must be trying to scare all you nice people with these original zombies. But once you feed ‘em, they aren’t scary to nobody. I’ve seen these zombies before ma’am – we’ll get them back to social services.’ And that’s just what we did. The luncheon ended without much fuss – relatively speaking – shortly after that.”

“That’s a remarkable story Mac. Thanks for calling.”

Its a few hours later and I’m back at my home relaxing on the sofa. I listen to some music while going over the list of addresses I picked up from my dad’s computer. I’m looking them up online, to determine what kind of building each one is.

Most of them are small warehouses or seem like abandoned buildings – no homes or apartments. One of them is a small office complex called Trey Landing. It has several units covering a whole block. From what I remember of it, it contains mostly high tech companies.

A short while later I’m watching the football game, when my phone buzzes with a new mail. Mac’s license plate watch on the grey van has resulted in a hit. Apparently the van is parked outside of Unit C in Trey Landing.

Bingo.

No time to waste! Rather than visiting tomorrow as I originally planned, I decide to visit tonight.

“Dana – are you still up?”

“Yeah Rob?”

“If you aren’t terribly busy, I could use some company. I’m headed out to Trey Landing Unit C, the high tech offices by Greenwood. Do you know where it is?”

“Yes, I’ve been through there before. I think I can find it. Unit C?”

“Yes. Thanks Dana – I’m headed there right now,” and I hung up.

It isn’t a very long drive for me – I’m already close to North Seattle.

I’m excited – this find could connect my dad to the original zombies and the church. I grab my flashlight and head towards Unit C.

Dana isn’t here yet, but she can call me when she arrives. Hopefully she will notice my car here. Just in case, I set my phone to vibrate.

I wander up to the grey van – yup, this is the plate. I look around inside. Perhaps a little messy, but it seems like a regular van.

I walk up the stairs to the front of Unit C. There is no security guard inside, and the lights are dimmed. The front door is open however, so I invite myself in.

I keep my gun holstered, but unclipped. I don’t want to accidentally shoot an employee or security guard just doing their job.

I poke around, looking for anything interesting, or the sounds of people.

The unit is shaped like a large circle – bringing in lots of natural light during the day I’m sure. The core of the circle is locked – perhaps containing computer rooms or meeting rooms.

I navigate around the entire unit once, and arrive back at the front. I don’t see anything suspicious so far. No evidence of people. It’s time for me to check the second floor. These units only have two floors. With the first floor empty – at least the parts I can see – hopefully the owner of the grey van is upstairs.

As I approach the stairwell, I can hear footsteps. I open the door silently and slowly to peek inside. Climbing down the stairs whistling is the man in the suit – the man who killed Steve.

He hasn’t noticed me yet, so I slip back out. There are only two places for him to go at the bottom of the stairway – and one of them is right into my lap. I un-holster my gun and get ready nearby.

Right that moment, Dana joins me. I motion for her to be silent, and urge her to join me.

“Dana – you’re just in time.” I plant my eyes back on the staircase, gun ready. “The guy that killed Steve is coming down those stairs right now. You’ve got to help me g...”

I’m completely taken by surprise. Dana covers my mouth with a cloth or napkin while lowering my weapon. That’s the last thing I can remember.

Chapter Ten – Regret

I awake in a large comfortable chair in a daze. I look around slowly to get my bearings. I think I'm in the same building, on the second floor. The layout is similar and the wrap-around windows look the same. Except this floor has a really comfy chair.

I can't quite get up yet; I stay seated and think.

“Hello son.”

It's my dad, Dan Stack, the retired Deputy Chief of Police for the IAB.

“Hi Dad.”

I scan the room for more people, including the man who killed my partner.

“Ted and Dana have left us alone to talk.”

“I see.”

“It's quite the situation we have here. Complicated.”

“I don't think it's that complicated Dad. I want in.”

He looks surprised, and then smiles thinly. “I'm not sure that's a good idea.”

“C'mon Dad! Drugs, zombie turning churches, going national. You need people on the inside. You need someone you can trust. You can't just trust a zombie. You need family.”

The breadth of my knowledge surprises him again.

Before he can say anything else, I jump in. “How about we discuss this over drinks at my bar?”

“You have a bar?”

* * *

Maria Gonzales was at home to sleep for the evening. Mac and Jake were with her for protection. They were about to be relieved by the evening crew.

“Goodnight boys. I have a few things to take care of and then I'm going to bed.”

“Goodnight Ms. Gonzales,” they said together.

She wandered upstairs, with Mac in front and Jake behind.

Mac peeked in each room ahead of them. He went to investigate her bedroom and adjoining bathroom for any potential intruders.

Maria saw the crime scene tape around her husband's office and walked towards it.

Jake spoke from behind her. "Uh, I don't think it's a good idea to go in there Ms. Gonzales."

She ignored him, stepped beneath the tape, and entered the room.

Jake nervously rushed in after her. He noticed that the large picture window was still wide open. He closed the drapes to eliminate the view from outside. Maria turned on the lights.

She stared at the blood on the floor. Then she wandered to the desk. "Your cops sure made a mess of things here Jake."

"Ma'am, I'm reasonably certain they left things pretty much as they were. Anything that wasn't directly involved in the crime, like these documents here, would have been photographed and put back in place."

She looked intently at the documents spread about. She read.

Mac noticed that he hadn't been joined in the bedroom, and rushed to the door by the Chief's office. "Okay you two, you need to leave that area immediately."

"This is my home Mac. You can't tell me what to do."

"Well ma'am, you're partly right. This area here is a crime scene, and I don't think the guys are quite done with it yet. We should do what we can to keep it secured."

She reached back into her Latin heritage and considered several excellent insults she might use. After a moment, she changed her mind. Insults won't make anything better with Jake and Mac, and she wanted to be on their good side.

"Of course you're right Mac. I'm sorry. I just can't believe that this is where it happened." She wandered back out of the room.

* * *

My dad and I arrive at Chuck's bar. "Two beers Chuck."

"It's a nice place son, but isn't it a little small?"

"Evening Rob. Who's your acquaintance?" Chuck places two drafts on the bar.

This exchange is part of our security protocol. I reply with the safe response. "He's a friend Chuck."

Then I realize just how silly our safe response sounds in these circumstances. “Actually, this is my dad, Dan.”

Chuck replies, “Nice to meet you Dan.”

Dad nods in Chuck’s direction.

“Come with me Dad.” He grabs his beer and follows me toward the back.

“Evening guys – this is my friend.” Again, starting with the security phrase sounds strange tonight. “Actually guys, this is my dad, Dan Stack.”

They both relax and introduce themselves enthusiastically.

“Evening Mr. Stack.”

“Welcome to the club Mr. Stack.”

The sound of the door unlocking invites us in, and I push the door open. We both enter.

My dad stops part way into the room, looking around. I examine the astonishment and pride in his eyes, and smile. “You were saying?”

“Quite the place you have here, quite the place.” He is still taking it all in.

I wander towards some of the tables, and Dad follows.

Jim and Dave are here tonight. I walk up to their table. They are closely following the game, and don’t notice us until we arrive.

“Evening guys.”

“Evening Rob.” Dave recognizes who I’m with. “I mean, evening sir!”

Jim sits up straight. “Nice to meet you sir!”

“Cut it out guys, I’m retired. You can call me Dan.” He reaches out to shake hands. “I recognize you two. You’re both with the force, right?”

Jim starts, “Yes sir – I mean Dan. We’re both retired too.”

My dad asks them, “What brings you here tonight?”

“Your son runs the best gambling club in town Dan. We’re here practically every night. Good food and drink, maybe a little sports gambling. We each have a few bucks on the game now.”

“Runs the best club, does he?” Dad claps his hand on my shoulder. “We’re both full of surprises tonight.”

“We should grab a table and talk Dad.”

“Good idea. Really nice to meet you gentlemen. Enjoy the game.”

Dad raises his glass to them. We all raise our glasses, clink, and have a drink. I bring Dad over to my managers table in the corner, with a reserved sign on it. It is quieter over here, and out of earshot.

“Damned fine place here Rob. What do people bet on?”

“Just about anything. Sports, horses, events like poker – anything they’ll play on ESPN. Elite membership, phone betting. I’m happy to give you the full tour, but that’s not what we’re here to talk about.”

He smiles, looks around again, and has a drink. “Why don’t you tell me what you know?”

“Okay. Leveraging the psychological power of the zombie ‘inspiration model’ you created with Dr. Zachman, you have created what I believe is the world’s largest zombie crime organization.”

He nods with a serious look, I continue.

“You’re pulling in funding from elderly, dissatisfied zombies to create churches that accept them. Using these as bases, you identify youth that are frustrated with their lives, and agree to turn them into zombies using potassium chloride, or KCl, to temporarily stop their heart. You are doing this legally – including signed contracts – likely with the help of a medical professional. These young, strong zombies, who now have reduced ethical concerns, are then put to work in distributing or selling drugs. They sell to anyone, including powerful speedballs to other zombies.

“Thanks to a paramilitary security firm called Fundamental Defense Services, which is also staffed by zombies, you’ve recovered enough of your drugs from the police to keep all of the new zombies in North America high and happy. I suspect that you personally were involved in sourcing drug deals with both Mexico and China. You shipped the drugs by taking advantage of legal shipments between countries, having a shipping company add and remove drugs at the points of departure and arrival.”

Dad takes another drink from his beer, musing what I’ve said thoughtfully. I do the same.

“You’ve got people on the inside,” I continue. “Dana is with the FBI and working undercover in the Seattle PD. This gives you information nationally and special assistance in Seattle where you are headquartered. How am I doing so far?”

“Not bad – do you know any more?”

“You’re doing this in over thirty cities. Cities in the US with large populations, plus at least three cities in Canada.”

I have another drink.

“Let’s say you became a temporary partner in the organization – on probation until the others trust you. How does this help us?”

“Well for one, I can help to keep the evidence of this massive undertaking hidden for as long as possible. You don’t want the Seattle PD to know that an operation of this significance is happening right here. I’m qualified in zombie psychology which will be helpful directing zombie criminals on the ground. I’m an expert at securing illegal organizations that hide in plain sight. I built this club four years ago. You didn’t recognize our security protocols, but if I wanted to – you would have been incapacitated by the front guards.”

“I see. Go on.”

“And I can keep an eye on your zombie partners like Dana. There’s only so far you can trust a zombie with this type of information.” I consider what I’ve just said. “Speaking of, what does Dana do in your operation?”

“Oh, she’s been very helpful. I can’t tell her everything – we keep things compartmentalized – and she wouldn’t like some sides of the business. Not many people in the organization know even as much as you’ve figured out.”

He takes another drink, and continues. “She’s your partner, how about you talk to her about it?”

* * *

Monday June 28

My dad and I had a couple more beers together last night. It was the best night I’ve ever had with him. We were joking and laughing, and shared more about each other’s businesses.

I could see that he didn’t tell me everything, but we definitely warmed up to each other. I never would have guessed that crime could bring our cop family closer together.

“Morning Dana, shall we hit the road?”

We are both in the office bright and early. I believe my dad called her last night to let her know I was in the group. But we can’t talk about our secrets here.

Once we are on road, I initiate our conversation again.

“Do I have you to thank for carrying me upstairs last night Dana?”

She smiles. “Sorry about knocking you out last night Rob. Your dad insisted I do something before you messed things up.”

“Hey – chloroform was far better than being hit in the head with a gun. Much appreciated.”

She and I both smile. I try to get the conversation back on track. “Last week was quite interesting, hey? We both had our secrets.”

“You have secrets Rob?”

Perhaps she doesn’t know about my gambling club. I guess Dad didn’t tell her everything about me, either.

“Well, I’ve known for a while that you are working for the FBI.”

“I thought you may have figured that out.”

“But I can’t figure out what you do for the FBI Dana, or why you are here.”

“I’m investigating you and your father.”

* * *

A few of the young, ex-military zombies from FDS had the day off. They were headed into town to visit Ada’s brothel. Ada has several young zombie prostitutes – the best kind.

“Jack, what did you talk to that guy about?”

“Just picking up something to make our afternoon a little more interesting.” He showed the other zombies what he had. A half-dozen speedballs wrapped in zombie proportions.

“Oh yeah – this is going to be a party!”

They arrived, checked-in, and settled into the common room at Ada’s.

“How are you doing boys?” Ada welcomed them warmly.

“We are doing great!” Several of them had already started inhaling the drugs. “We could use some shots – the usual!”

“Coming right up boys,” Ada walked over to the bar to ask for a half-dozen zombie shots – including 151 Bacardi, black rum, apple brandy, and just a little juice for flavor.

“Ada – we need to see some ladies!”

Ada called for the girls with a bell, and several zombie women walked into the room. While the rest of the guys were still paying attention to their drugs, Jack stepped up as the match-maker.

“You over there, you there, you’re with him, you cutie should go see him, you’re nice and exotic – you should see him. And you darling with the beautiful eyes, you should stay with me.”

Jennifer, the newly turned zombie, sat down with Jack while the other girls each joined their zombie matches.

* * *

I’m sure I have a shocked look on my face. Dana laughs.

“Don’t worry silly, I’m not actually investigating you. I’m an agent for the FBI working for anti-corruption.”

“Anti-corruption?”

“Yes. My position in the FBI has made it easy to find out who in public office could be ‘trusted’ to have some criminal tendencies, or could be bribed. Your father Dan and I have been working together with a mission of full zombie integration across society.”

“This explains your shooting skills.”

Dana laughs. “Yeah, I’ve been with the FBI for twelve years – an undercover agent for the last eight.”

“And your family?”

“Doesn’t exist. That was the story my FBI handler put together. We felt it would make you trust me more.”

“Didn’t the FBI get rid of their zombie employees like everyone else?”

“As far as I know, I’m the only one. There’s a special exception for me because of my great work and knowledge in this field.”

“I’m confused. Perhaps you could take it from the top?”

“Sure.” Dana takes a breath and thinks. “After years with the FBI, I became a zombie. Not much differently than I explained before – although how I was infected was different.

“When I turned, I was sent to the zombie research lab up in Canada.”

“I know – that’s where I saw your picture.”

“So that’s how you know I’m FBI. Anyway, while I was working with Dr. Zachman, I met your father. He is a warm, funny, and inspirational man. He and I came up with our vision for establishing zombies as equals in society. To make the world a better place.

“He created the IAB here in Seattle, and helped many other police departments do the same – giving hard working zombies important, meaningful jobs in society. While he did that, we found people in many cities that helped establish the zombie church – giving zombies more places to feel welcome.”

“What about the zombie turning Dana – what do you think about that?”

“People that choose to become zombies are doing it of their own free will. Most of them aren’t happy with being human, and becoming a zombie makes them happy. What could be wrong with that?”

From her voice, I can tell that Dana is invested in this particular line of thinking. I decide not to challenge her too much while I’m still learning from her.

“And the drugs?”

“Hard drugs are like alcohol to a zombie. You can get drunk – why can’t zombies have the same freedom?”

“Have you taken these drugs Dana?”

“No.”

“How do you know it’s the same as alcohol to a human?”

“That’s what Dan told me.”

I can see signs of zombie brainwashing going on here. I decide to change the conversation a little.

“Dana – if you are the only zombie with the FBI, do you have any zombie inspiration meetings there?”

“Nope – they don’t know anything about that. They don’t seem to care about that side of me. The first time I attended a zombie inspiration meeting was last week with IAB. It was wonderful.”

Okay – this is making sense now. It would have been easy for my dad, an expert at zombie psychology, to get Dana to see his organization the way she wants to see it. As long as the actions of the organization are still seen as good by her diminished zombie ethics – or as supporting a greater good like zombie equality – and she is getting regular inspiration to that effect, she will continue to support my dad’s enterprise.

As a member of the FBI’s anti-corruption department, she is an incredible asset for an international crime organization. She’s a double-agent. Or is that a triple-agent? I’m not certain – it’s too confusing for me.

She might not have had any inspiration meetings while working with my dad, but I bet he was using the same zombie programming concepts on her. Let's test how far this goes.

"Dana, what are your thoughts on the original zombies we found?"

"Apparently, some level one zombies were created while the doctors were getting the kinks out of the turning process. Those level ones were being cared for."

"Why were they so hungry?"

"That pastor Peter – I don't think he knows what he's doing. I've met him before – he seems incompetent. There's no reason to let those zombies go hungry."

Apparently she didn't know the plan for the original zombies to scare our city's politicians and business leaders. I can see her rage coming through; I better not mess with her right now. It's time to change the subject again.

"How did you end up working as an undercover agent partnered with me?"

"That was fairly easy. Once evidence of Dan's plans started showing up on the FBI's radar, some of which seemed to indicate corruption within the police, I helped them come up with the idea of putting an undercover agent inside. Once they thought it was their idea, I suggested myself for the job.

"When your partner died – I had nothing to do with the Rob – my handler got me into the Detectives exams, which would qualify me to become your partner. We got a little lucky there."

Timing is everything. Plus, not many new zombies are qualified and lined up to join the IAB.

Dana continues. "It was the perfect way for us to control information making it back to the FBI while we continued growing the organization, and making the world a better place for zombies everywhere."

"That was brilliant work Dana – nicely done."

Dana smiles and flushes a little.

Now that she is regularly attending zombie school with other zombies in the Seattle PD – I wonder how long her commitment to my father will last?

* * *

Jack, Jennifer, and the other zombies practically finished all of the drugs while drinking for at least an hour.

The noise level in the room was crazy. All of the other patrons left. Ada sat in a nearby room worrying a little, while the bartender kept making fancy, hard-core beverages.

Two of the couples were having sex right in the common room. Two of the male zombies were in a heated argument about how they each reacted during a recent military operation. One of the couples started fighting over who would get to do the last line of drugs.

The three arguments converged and started to get physical. Jack slapped the girl in the face as she went to do the last line.

“Take a break bitch, those are for my boys.”

She got up and put her face right next to Jack and screamed at him. Jennifer went to her side to back her up. They started pushing Jack.

“You can’t tell us what to do you fucking john. This is our place.”

In his stimulated state Jack had no time for either of them, and he punched the first girl in the face, almost knocking her out. Jennifer became furious and jumped on Jack from the side, clawing at his body and face. Another girl, alone while her man was in an argument, joined Jennifer in assaulting Jack.

Jack raised his voice. “Team – need your help here.”

The men all stopped what they were doing, stood up – zipping up where necessary – and went to help Jack. All of the women jumped at them – punching and kicking.

One man remained without a girl on him – she was on Jack. He went to pull her off.

The scuffle escalated even further – with screaming, yelling, and fists flying everywhere.

Blood showed up on people’s knuckles and ran from their noses. A few teeth were broken. One girl bit one of the guy’s ears off.

The zombie men know how to handle themselves in life and death situations – and it was starting to look bleak. Two of the women grabbed nearby bottles and knocked out two of their team. There were just four of them left to fight.

Jack took Jennifer’s head in his two massive arms, and twisted her head to the right in the blink of an eye. The rapid movement was accompanied by the sound of bone snapping and cartilage tearing. Jennifer dropped to the floor, dead.

Upon witnessing this, the remaining five women increased their assault on the four men.

One of the women called for help. “Ada – we need the gun in here!”

The smallest male zombie in the room grabbed her, threw her over his shoulder and to the ground, and then stepped on her throat with a crunching sound. Blood bubbled from her mouth.

The bartender, who witnessed some of the violence before ducking down, rose up from behind the bar with a shotgun. She aimed it at Jack's chest and pulled the trigger. Jack went down, dead. A woman near him was hit by a few pellets and collapsed, wounded.

There were three men left standing, and three women standing – plus the bartender – in the room.

At this point, Ada entered the room from the other side with a pistol and shot two of the men right in the head. The last man standing screamed and rushed toward her. She shot at him three times, two of the shots hitting him in the arm and leg.

He launched himself in the air at Ada, and grabbed for her throat. He tackled her while holding her neck, slamming her head into a small stage. He then picked her head up two more times, slamming it down hard each time. He took a moment to step up over Ada's lifeless body, breathing heavily. He turned around to see the bartender right next to him. She fired the shotgun right into his belly, upon which he was thrown back and collapsed in a heap in the corner. He died slowly.

The bartender loaded two more rounds into the shotgun and surveyed the damage. There are four dead customers and two unconscious customers. Her boss Ada was dead, two of her working acquaintances were dead – including the new girl Jennifer – and the girl she shot accidentally was wounded.

She took a deep breath and sighed. "I hate this fucking job."

* * *

An anchor with the local press was invited inside police HQ to meet and talk with the hero zombie cop, Jake.

Jake smiles and looks right into the camera. "Just remember to keep your zombies fed, and they won't be any trouble."

The interview is just concluding. The anchor thanks Jake for his time and congratulates him on an excellent job.

Dana and I arrive just at that moment. We've been out the entire day, learning more about each other and our new business together.

Several cops are patting Jake on the back and commending him for his work yesterday. We can see him show up on the TV. One of the other news stations is talking about his work.

“Hey, turn it up!” One of the cops asks, and another raises the volume.

Dana and I stop to watch. It looks like this is the first time Dana has seen the news of the original zombies. She is riveted to the television.

I listen only a little to the show – I had heard the news myself. “Original zombies... saved by hero zombie cop Jake... zombies were just hungry... saved the mayor, several businessmen, and students.”

I can see Dana thinking about this news, and reacting. At first she is confused, but then she has a grim look.

At this point Eric Gunner, the zombie interviewer for the Seattle IAB comes into the room.

“Jake, are you and I still on for our interview tomorrow? Police around the world will want to know how you saved humans and zombies all at once.”

They talk for a while about their plans, all smiles.

As Eric turns to leave, he walks by where Dana and I are sitting. She hasn’t taken her eye off him the entire time.

Just as he opens the door to leave, Dana waves at him and smiles. “Hi Eric!”

There’s that school girl again – my partner. Sheesh.

* * *

Later that evening, I meet Dad again – back in the second floor of unit C in Trey Landing.

“What have you learned today son?”

“Well, I’ve learned that you’re not running this business with the same principles that make the IAB work.”

“Such as?”

“Most of the progress the police made has been due to how you assemble your teams. You’re putting zombies with zombies, and the IAB takes advantage of that. Heck, I took advantage of that. If you want the strength of zombies and clear thinking, you should have humans in the mix too.”

“I think you’re right Rob. We’ve been thinking we can control the zombies more easily and therefore trust them, but their nature makes them less trustworthy against a prepared opponent.”

“Exactly. This is going to hurt us unless we change it. We need a zombie/human balance to succeed. Look at how successful it’s made the IAB.”

“Great idea. I’ll get the team working on this right away. Speaking of the IAB…”

I walk over to two large center doors and attempt to open them.

“What’s back here?” I ask.

“That’s our vault, security room, and base of operations. Everything about the business is stored back there, including information and money. In the case of a serious intrusion, we can also lock in for safety. My partners aren’t ready to let you see the inside son. Not just yet.”

“Oh.” It’s time to change the subject. “You mentioned the IAB?” I’m not sure where Dad is going with this.

“We need to think about how to get rid of the IAB.”

“What? But the IAB is doing really well!”

“Exactly. Our organization will be stronger – in all the cities we do business – without zombie relations to hunt us down.” The expression on Dad is severe.

I’m finally getting it. “Of course – catching zombie criminals is exactly what the IAB is great at. If you want to run a zombie crime organization, get rid of the zombie catching cops!”

“Even our plan to use the original zombies to scare the mayor was ruined by the IAB.” He slams his fist on the table. “If the mayor doesn’t trust zombies, she can’t support the IAB.”

“This is funny in a twisted kind of way. Jake, the hero zombie cop, actually made the IAB look better yesterday, thanks to the original zombies you sent in.”

My dad is mad at this realization. “Damn it. We need to give the politicians a reason to pull the plug on the IAB, and zombie relations units everywhere that police have them.”

“Is this what you and the Chief disagreed about? Were you actually trying to get him to shut down the IAB?”

“Yes. And he wouldn’t go for it. I tried to find every misstep and bad choice in the IAB, and turn it into a case for dismantling the bureau I originally helped create. I tried reasoning directly with the mayor too – but she trusts the Chief and wouldn’t listen to me.”

“We need to figure out a way to give zombie cops a bad name. Perhaps we could set one of them up?”

“Perhaps. It would have to be a really compelling reason to have an impact on the whole department and beyond.”

“Okay, I’ll think about this some more. Boy, it will sure upset Dana if the IAB goes out of business – especially if she knew we had something to do with it.”

“You are correct. She absolutely can’t know about this – she thinks I’m doing this to ‘bring humans and zombies together for the benefit of all’.” He rolls his eyes. Clearly, he is not as committed to this unification mission as Dana thinks he is.

He continues. “But we have more pressing concerns about Dana. Did you have a chance to talk to her about our business today?”

“Yes. I can see what you mean about compartmentalizing. It seems that Dana only knows enough to stay committed to your organization and to you, quite frankly. But…” I stop to think.

“Go on.”

“But I’m not sure you’ll be able to trust Dana for much longer. She is starting to piece together the parts of your business you’ve been keeping from her. She just started to figure out your plans for the original zombies today. She did not like it that they were kept hungry to put on a better show.

“With her in zombie school,” my father winces at the term as I say it, “she is going to see things more and more from the perspective of the police.”

“Agreed.”

“And she is going to see the destruction caused by drugs to other zombies. Did you hear about the big drug-related multiple homicide that was called in tonight?”

“No.”

“Well, if she hears more of that, or learns that we’re trying to discredit the IAB, or learns what was done to those original zombies and why – she won’t remain committed anymore.”

“I agree. And?”

I can’t bring myself to say it. I just shrug. “How much does Dana know anyway?”

“She has contact information for each and every city we’re established in. Son, you know that Dana needs to be eliminated – or she will bring everything down.”

“Yes, she does.” I’m sad at this realization, although to be fair, I recognized the need before now.

I look my dad in the eyes and commit, “I’ll handle it.”

Chapter Eleven – Extinction

Tuesday June 29

Ah, Tuesdays. Meeting day in the Seattle PD, and it seems even worse in IAB. I guess the fact that Tuesday's are a low day for crime activity makes it best for cop meetings.

Last night I convinced Dad that we didn't want Dana to die too close to a Seattle PD case, or we'd have FBI guys all over the place. He agreed.

I also said I'd try to think up a plan to discredit the IAB - with international implications. This should be no problem, right?

I'm at my desk planning when Dana arrives after zombie school - bouncy as usual.

I don't ask about it, as usual.

She is just about to tell me all about it, when the captain rescues me.

Captain McDowell looks grim. "Dana, Rob – we need you in downtown Seattle. I want you two to check out this zombie massacre at a downtown brothel. The regular cops bagged and tagged everything last night - but they don't know how to question zombies for a full and complete story."

I stand up, anxious to get started on this without delay. "Got it Captain, we're on our way."

As Dana and I head to the stairway with Dana in the lead, I turn back around to face the captain. His expression is still even and focused. He winks at me.

I let Dana drive while I catch up on the case on route.

"Looks like we need to chat with some hookers and a bartender – mostly zombies. The perps that are still alive are in lockup."

Dana stays focused on driving. Her zombie police training has taught her well – pay attention to driving, not other stuff. Zombies in particular need to stay 100% focused on the road – no texting! Regardless, she looks more and more serious as I continue to describe the case.

We arrive and meet with a couple of CSIs on the scene. They take us through the blood splatter directions, weapons used, and body counts. They suggest a few theories on how it may have gone down, based on evidence and witness accounts.

There are remnants of drug use all over. A lot of drugs. How many people were in this party anyway?

We talk to some of the girls that were around or heard what happened from their rooms.

The best information we receive is from the bartender. She was allowed to go home to sleep, but asked to return this morning to speak with us. She arrives as we are talking with some of the hookers.

“You’re Jan – is that right? The bartender working here yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“This is Detective Light, and I’m Detective Stack.” We show our IDs. “We’re from the Infected Affairs Bureau of the Seattle Police. I’m sure you spent a lot of time talking with police yesterday, but if you don’t mind we have some questions about the zombies that were involved.”

“Zombie Relations? Sure, go ahead.” She sits down in one of the chairs. We join her around a table.

“First off, are you a zombie yourself?”

“Yup. I’ve been a zombie for almost two years – working here the whole time.”

“Do you know your level?” Knowing this can be helpful in asking the right questions, in the right way.

“I tested at a level six. I couldn’t bring myself to hook, that’s why Ada has me working the bar.”

Wow. I haven’t met many sixes. I will have to be careful here – you can’t treat a six the same way you can a three. A six has more dignity, more empathy.

“Jan, I’m sure this has been a horrible experience for you. No doubt you lost some good friends yesterday. Can you tell us about them?”

Jan proceeds to explain what she knows about the girls. She gets more emotional as she mentions the last girl, Jennifer.

“Jennifer was just a new zombie. Her and I were already becoming such good friends. Ada asked me to take her out and explain how things work here.”

She sniffles a little as she pulls some papers from her purse.

“These are some photos we took together down on the pier.”

I recognize the girl. “This girl, Jennifer you say? I think I’ve seen her at the zombie church.”

“Really? She hasn’t been there that often. Maybe two times. She just turned.”

“What do you mean she just turned Jan?”

“She just became a zombie at the church. They sent her to Ada for a job, the same way I ended up here.”

Bingo. The church isn't just staffing drug crime, but prostitution as well. Interesting that Dad didn't share this with me.

Dana shakes her head and joins the conversation. “I'm sorry, but did you just say that the church sent this girl here for a job as a prostitute?”

“Yes – that's right. I'm not supposed to tell anyone that, but I'm fucking done with this place.”

We ask Jan a few more questions about her involvement in the shooting and what she knows about the men, which isn't much. They had been here before, but not too often. This was the first time they partied here with drugs.

“Dana, I'd like to visit the morgue next. Is that ok with you?”

“Sure.”

As we are driving in the car, I receive a call from my dad.

“Morning son. Tonight, the usual place. I'd like to introduce you to my partners.”

* * *

The critical ward of the hospital was no busier than usual. One room in particular contained one patient and one sleeping visitor, with two armed police guards outside.

Lights on the machines started acting up. The beeping increased with urgent effect. The visitor awoke, alarmed.

Outside the room, a nurse called over the PA – making an urgent request for a doctor.

Maria held her husband's hand, tears flowing from her eyes. “Ben – you can fight this. Come back to me.”

A nurse entered first, followed by a doctor.

They politely but urgently moved Maria aside so they could work.

They injected the Chief with several drugs, pumped his chest, forced air into his lungs with a manual respirator, and finally used the defibrillator three times and attempted to restart his heart.

The attached machines continued to show flat lines. No heart rate, no oxygen. The doctor turned off the beeps emanating from the two machines.

“Nurse, please make a note. Patient Ben Hernández has been declared dead due to bullet wound complications at 11:36am on Tuesday June 29.”

He turned to talk to Maria.

“Maria, I’m terribly sorry that we couldn’t save your husband. You can stay with him for a few minutes to say goodbye.”

Maria was too stunned to reply. She just stared at her husband.

The doctor departed, leaving Maria to grieve, and the nurse to remove needles and equipment from the room.

* * *

After lunch, Ted was looking over several papers in despair. Dan had given him a challenging task to do. *Now that his stupid kid is involved, I’m practically taking orders from him.*

“Where am I going to find enough humans to pair up with all of our zombies?” Ted said aloud, and lightly pounded his fists on the table in frustration.

Ted had almost thirty male zombies paired up in distribution centers around the city. He had less than five human “employees”.

He continued talking to himself. *Okay, what if I start by stack ranking these zombies by level. I’ll take my level twos out of operation for now – and put them on vacation, or non-critical jobs.*

Then I’ll take our worst threes and pair as many of them as I can with our human employees. I’m not sure all the guys will like this; I’ll have to sell it to them as a supervisory role or something.

The remaining threes and fours I’ll pair up with the fives and sixes we have. Except one three and five pair I had were easily outwitted by this kid and Dana. Why the fuck did she have to shoot them? She should know better.

Ted continued to try different combinations and permutations of each zombie partnership, looking for the best possible combinations with the resources available. It seemed hopeless.

His cell phone rang. It was one of the other partners.

The voice was female. “Ted – I need to meet with you and Dana tonight, in person. We have something of critical importance to discuss – we can’t talk about it on the phone.”

“Okay. I’ll contact Dana.”

They discussed the time and place details, and then Ted hung up.

* * *

Dana and I decide to eat an early lunch before we visit the morgue. Dana might have a stomach of steel, but I always get a little queasy meeting the coroner.

Just after lunch, I get a call from my captain. “Rob, the Chief has just died. We won’t be able to sit on the incriminating evidence for much longer – have you figured it all out?”

“Almost boss. Appreciate the update.” I hang up.

Dana and I arrive at the morgue and make our way inside, signing in at the front desk.

The coroner was more upbeat than usual. “Let me take you through the men and women of our latest zombies’ gone wild party.”

“How many zombies Doc?” I ask.

“All of them. All of the prostitutes and all of the johns here are zombies. I hear the ones that made it through alive are also zombies.”

She walks us by several gurneys of women.

“Quite a lot of heroin and cocaine in each one. Generally speaking, the men have quite a bit more in their system than the women. Two of the men also have levels of alcohol that would be considered deadly toxic to a regular human.”

Dana stops by the men and looks at them carefully.

“What is it Dana?”

“I’ve seen these men before Rob. They all worked for that security firm I investigated. We were playing games together just this weekend. These were good men.”

“I’m sorry Dana.”

She stands and stares at the dead zombies around her.

* * *

“Chief, its Ted.”

“Hi Ted.”

“First, I thought you’d want to know that I haven’t been able to handle Maria yet. She’s spent most of her time at the hospital, and when she does leave she always has two cops with her.”

“I understand.”

“I hear that Ben died today.”

“About time. Hopefully the police will finally reveal some of the evidence they found.”

“Agreed. And Dan – I’ve been going over the resourcing challenge you gave me. I can improve some of our teams, but we don’t have enough humans on the payroll to solve the problem completely.”

“I understand. We’ll talk about that more tonight.”

“Okay – see you then.”

* * *

Later that evening, I arrive upstairs at unit C to see my dad seated in the comfy chair.

“Hey Dad.”

“Hi son.”

I take a chair nearby. “When will the others get here?”

“Soon.”

“Shall we go inside?” I motion to the central vault.

“Perhaps later.” Darn it.

“I’ve been giving our problem with the IAB a lot of thought today. I think I HAVE A PLAN.” I speak loudly and clearly.

“Really?”

Right at that moment, a siren sounds and some lights appear outside by the front door. Dad steps up and over to the window to have a look. “It seems the police are here. Did they follow you?”

“Why the hell would they follow me?”

We can hear people entering noisily, and coming up the stairs.

“Shit – what do we do Dad?”

“Nothing. We’re just a couple of guys talking to each other. The police won’t do anything.”

We wait. I’m nervous as all hell.

Jake and Mac step through the door to the stairs.

“What the fuck are you doing here Mac?” I ask in a surprised voice.

“I’m sorry Rob. The captain has asked us to take you in. Something about hiding evidence to protect your father. More police are on the way.”

“What? What the hell?” I look at my dad in shock. His eyes glance meaningfully at my holster.

I turn around. Neither of the guys has their gun out. They trust me. They expect us to talk this through.

As I reach for my gun, my father dives behind some chairs and a desk for cover. I draw faster than Jake – I take aim at his chest and fire. Jake goes down.

Mac has managed to pull his gun out almost as quickly as me. He takes a shot and I can feel a sting on my side. I fight to stay standing, while I aim for him. I pull the trigger and hit him in the right side of his chest, right near the heart. Mac goes down.

Dad has been watching this through the chairs. I fall backwards a little and stumble towards him.

“I think I’ve been shot. Fuck.” I sit down in a chair and put my gun away so I can put both my hands over the blood seeping out.

Dad rushes over to check on me.

I stand up weakly. “Did he say there were more cops on the way? Shit. I need to get out of here Dad. I’m fucked up.”

“Okay son, let’s get you inside.”

He walks over to the double security doors leading to the vault. He types in a four digit code to let us in. I notice the number – it’s Mom’s birthday. How touching.

He opens the door and helps me limp inside. The door closes securely behind us.

As I stumble forward, I notice that there are three people already within – Dana, Ted, and Maria Gonzales.

Maria looks harshly at both of us, and motions to Dana and Ted. They pull out their weapons and aim them at me and my dad. I keep my hands holding my wound.

My dad looks furious. “What the fuck is this all about Maria?”

Maria walks as she talks. “Isn’t it convenient that the police found evidence of my investments where Ben was shot. Evidence that I never keep at home.”

Dad responds. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“It has become exceedingly clear to me Dan that you intend to set me up for our earlier drug operation, and take me out like you did Ben to prevent me from talking.” She pauses. “What is the term? You're trying to ‘throw me under the bus’.”

Dad is flabbergasted. He doesn't know what to say. He glances angrily at Ted. Ted smiles wryly and grips his gun more firmly.

Maria continues. "It's time to retire the Stack family from the zombie crime business."

Chapter Twelve – Salvation

I raise one of my hands in the air while wincing, clutching my side a little harder.

I hunch over a little and talk to the group – particularly Maria. "Wait! Hold on a minute. I just started working here – don't condemn me with him."

I look into Maria's eyes and weakly attempt to smile. I hope we have a distraction soon.

Perhaps I should bring you up to speed. I haven't been telling you everything.

On the weekend – once I knew Dad was involved – I knew that confronting him would put him in a difficult position. As soon as he knew I was on to him, things could get very unpredictable. I didn't like that.

I could have gone in 'guns a blazing' with very little information, or I could play along, get on the inside, and learn more about what we have to deal with here.

* * *

Monday June 28, evening

After agreeing to neutralize Dana for my father, I called the Captain.

"McDowell here."

"Hey boss."

"Rob – this better be important – you're cutting in on my beauty sleep."

"Tomorrow at zombie school, we need to really glamour Dana. Can you set it up with Captain O'Neill?"

"She needs some help staying on the rails, is that it?"

"No Captain, it's worse than that. She's been off the rails for a while, and we need to get her on to our team."

"This sounds serious Rob."

"It is. Everything we have been working on is all tied together in one large criminal enterprise, and Dana has been a part of it. My dad too. Can we meet tomorrow at 9am? I'll bring you completely up to speed."

"Sure thing Rob. Don't do anything crazy before then."

“Sorry boss, I can’t make that promise,” I said with only a bit of sarcasm in my voice.

I hung up, and dialed the FBI.

"This is Detective Rob Stack with the Seattle PD. I'd like to talk with Agent Dana Light's handler."

“Sir, we don’t have a Dana Light in the directory.”

"Look, we don't have time for bullshit here - Dana's life is in jeopardy. I need to speak with someone right now."

“Please hold.”

I listened to music for a short while.

A voice came on. “Who is this?”

I repeated my name and credentials and asked for his. It was Dana’s handler.

“Listen, I’m sure you know there is something big going on in Seattle. Dana and I are in the middle of it, and her life is presently in danger. I need you to get here tomorrow morning – I will explain what’s going on and what we need to do about it.”

“When should we be there?”

I gave him a time and place.

* * *

Tuesday June 29, early morning

I waited with Jill Simpson at the District Attorney’s office. We had some time to talk. I brought her partially up to speed.

“Rob, if you are going to be confessing to something here I can’t act as your lawyer.”

“I know.”

“So why am I here for this?”

“I trust you to do the right thing. Your experience with zombies and the law may be helpful here.”

Two FBI guys arrived and were shown in. We all introduced ourselves. They introduced themselves as Dana’s handler and the Seattle Office Director.

I started the conversation. “Let me be up-front gentlemen, I need to begin this meeting by asking for immunity for Dana and myself.”

“Dana, what has she done?” Dana’s handler inquired. He was shocked.

The director spoke to him, “We’ll get to that in due time.” Then he looked at me, “And in return for immunity?”

“In return, we provide you with the names of the people behind the largest zombie crime syndicate in North America, being operated out of Seattle with connections to Mexico and China. I also provide you with all of their drug locations in Seattle, and the people operating partner drug operations in over 30 major American cities, plus three more in Canada. This enterprise is also connected to prostitution and paramilitary zombie security forces under their influence. The organization is staffed by turning people into zombies within churches across North America.”

That got their attention.

The director responded. “Okay, we have an agreement in principle. As long as you don’t hide anything from us during these talks, you’ll have your immunity. However, we can’t give immunity to Dana without her being here in the room to tell her story.”

“Listen, we are done here if Dana doesn’t have immunity too. We’ll handle this without you.”

The two FBI guys discussed among themselves. “I still don’t understand what Dana could have possibly done.” They chattered a little longer.

The Director turned to me. “Ok Detective, you have a deal – for you and Dana.”

I looked at Jill. She nodded back at me.

Dana’s handler was anxious. “Exactly what has Dana done wrong?”

“Dana has been using her access within the FBI to find corrupt politicians and business owners that could be bribed or somehow influenced. These people have now become part of or enabled in some way the international zombie crime organization we’re here to talk about. Additionally, she has been using her position in anti-corruption to keep you from learning the truth about who is behind things in Seattle.”

Dana’s handler was outraged at this accusation. “That’s ridiculous! Dana is one of the most distinguished field operatives we have.”

I could tell he needed to be schooled on zombie psychology. “That may have been who Dana was before she turned into a zombie, but that all changed when she became a zombie.”

“Listen. We had that crack-pot cop, Deputy Chief what’s his name, come and talk to us about zombie inspiration. He was a flake. There was no real science there.”

I spoke very clearly. “He appeared like a flake to you, because that’s what he wanted you to think. He’s trained in psychology with a great working understanding of both human and zombie minds – and how to influence them.

“Retired Deputy Chief Dan Stack – my father incidentally – didn’t want you to use zombie inspiration techniques because he was already in control of Dana. She was effectively working for him! Dan Stack is the head of the zombie crime enterprise that Dana provides information to.”

The handler sputtered. He was still angry, but he couldn’t object to this new information. He was starting to look worried.

Jill, who had been silent until now – intervened. "Gentlemen, am I to understand that you have a zombie in your employ – with access to national secrets no less – that is not receiving regular inspiration sessions to keep her aligned with the rules and policies of the FBI? This is now considered standard operating procedure for every police organization in the world that employs zombies. Your behaviors here are tantamount to criminal negligence."

God bless you Jill! I knew I wanted her here for a reason.

The Director silenced Dana’s handler by putting his hand on his shoulder while nodding. “Thank you Rob and Jill – what you are saying makes sense with what I’ve been learning recently about zombies. We are indeed behind the times. With just one zombie working for the FBI we haven’t put enough resources into understanding how to manage Dana.”

The Director looked right at me. “Rob, if Dana has been manipulated to work for Dan Stack for all these years, then how can we know if you can trust her?”

“She has been convinced to participate by hiding the complete truth from her about the aims of the organization. She believes the organization exists to help society integrate zombies and humans, in effect giving her zombie brethren more equality. The reality behind zombie drug crimes and prostitution has been hidden from her.

“However, as she has been working with the police, she has been coming to understand more of the fallout of my father’s enterprise – some things that she has seen directly. Plus, she has been encouraged to comply with and enforce the law through our bureau’s own inspiration sessions.

“I’ve been trained by my father in zombie psychology, and I use it every day at work when dealing with zombies on both sides of the law. I believe I can have her completely on our side by the end of today.”

During the remainder of our time together, I took Jill and the FBI through the details of zombie turning, staffing illegal activities, and international locations. I explained my own indiscretions.

I also described my plan for today.

* * *

At 9am, while Dana was in zombie school, I met with Captain McDowell instead of the shrink. She could wait.

I explained the nature of the entire zombie crime organization, my father's role, Dana's role, and my attempt to get on the inside. I also described how the FBI was becoming involved, and that they would be calling him shortly after 10am to discuss.

"We need to turn Dana completely back onto the side of law and order. I'm pretty sure we can do this. She has been increasingly outraged by the fallout of my dad's criminal enterprise."

He took a moment to soak it all in.

I continued. "I'll bring her back in the afternoon around 4pm - can you and O'Neill put together something extra special?"

"Yes - we'll make it happen."

"Oh, and the zombie prostitution drug mess I heard about yesterday, can you put Dana and I on it? She needs to see what these drugs are doing to zombies up close."

"Will do."

* * *

After visiting the morgue, I took Dana outside to sit down for a long talk.

I asked her a question. "Since we've been working together, how many zombies have been killed because of drugs?"

There were the four zombies we shot while investigating, three prostitutes, and four military zombies.

She looked sad while adding them up. "Eleven people Rob."

"And that's just one week, in one city. I wonder how many zombies will be dead at the end of the year - in over 30 cities mind you - due to drug crime.

"Those girls, they were just earning a living. They didn't deserve to die. Same for your military friends - they were just out having fun."

Dana was silent.

“Does it still seem to you that zombie drugs are as safe as alcohol?”

Dana bent forward and put her head in her hands. She shook her head no.

“I have something you need to hear Dana.”

I pulled out my digital recorder and clicked to play back recording one, which I had prepared earlier.

My voice. “Speaking of, what does Dana do in your operation?”

Dad’s voice. “Oh, she’s been very helpful. I can’t tell her everything – we keep things compartmentalized – and she wouldn’t like some sides of the business.”

I click ahead to recording two.

My dad’s voice. “Even our plan to use the original zombies to scare the mayor was ruined by the IAB.” The sound of slamming fists. “If the mayor doesn’t trust zombies, she can’t support the IAB.”

My voice. “This is funny in a twisted kind of way. Jake, the hero zombie cop, actually made the IAB look better yesterday, thanks to the original zombies you sent in.”

Dad’s voice. “Damn it. We need to give the politicians a reason to pull the plug on the IAB, and zombie relations units everywhere that police have them.”

My voice. “Is this what you and the Chief disagreed about? Were you actually trying to get him to shut down the IAB?”

Dad’s voice. “Yes. And he wouldn’t go for it. I tried to find every misstep and bad choice in the IAB, and turn it into a case for dismantling the bureau I originally helped create. I tried reasoning directly with the mayor too – but she trusts the Chief and wouldn’t listen to me.”

And finally, I clicked ahead to my third prepared recording.

My voice. “How much does Dana know anyway?”

Dad’s voice. “She has contact information for each and every city we’re established in. Son, you know that Dana needs to be eliminated – or she will bring everything down.”

The recording stopped.

“Dana, you know in your heart that my dad needs to be stopped. Let’s work together and bring his criminal enterprise down. What he’s doing is not good for zombies – or anyone.”

Her eyes were as cold as steel.

* * *

We didn't speak much on the ride back to the office. I didn't tell her why we were headed back, and she didn't ask.

Shortly after we arrived, Captain O'Neill came by. "Dana, I need to see you."

I'm pretty sure that he had all of the zombies together for a special inspiration session dedicated to Dana.

I asked Mac to grab Jake and join me in Captain McDowell's office.

"Sure thing Rob."

Once the three of us were together, I explained my plan for gaining entry to the secured vault in my father's office building.

Once we were done, I wandered over to see how the zombies were treating Dana. It was a raucous occasion, and Dana was in the center of it.

As I stood by the entrance to the room, a handsome zombie walked by me.

Eric Gunner, our local zombie inspiration reporter, was carrying something into the room.

He paused in the middle of the area, until people started to notice his presence. Zombies poked each other and pointed. The room quickly grew silent in anticipation.

"Hi Dana! I've just heard we have a special operation today. I understand that an ex-cop needs to be brought to justice. My question is, are you the zombie for the job?"

Her face lit up with a huge smile. "Eric - you brought me cake?"

* * *

After watching Eric feed Dana and share a slice of cake together, I was pretty sure she was on board.

That brings us back to the vault in unit C and our predicament with Maria. I didn't realize that she was going to try to kill Dad. And me!

I proclaim my innocence again. "Seriously Maria – don't wrap me up with all his shit. I'm just the new guy."

She pauses to look closely at me, inquisitively. Then she is distracted by something on one of the screens.

"Rob, if you are being so honest with us, then why are the two cops you shot standing up?"

My dad is shocked. He turns to look at the screen. Ted turns to look at the security monitor as well.

Dana uses this opportunity to slam Ted's arms to the ground and knock him out with the butt of her gun. She kicks his gun away, and turns to aim at my dad.

I stop pretending to be wounded, and I grab my second gun. This one has actual bullets. I aim it at Maria, and walk up towards her.

"Maria, how about you make your way over next to your good friend Dan here. That's a girl."

Her eyes shoot daggers into me, but she complies.

While keeping her gun trained on the two of them, Dana walks over to the security door and opens it.

"Hey guys, everything is clear in here. Come on in and help us take these folks in."

Mac and Jake join us, weapons raised.

Jake lowers his weapon to cuff my dad and Maria. He checks them both for weapons. I nod Mac over to where Ted has fallen.

As we remove all three of them, our CSI guys and the FBI enter the room to learn as much information as they can from the papers and computers within. Captain McDowell joins us as well. He is grinning like a kid in a candy store.

Outside, I walk over to join my father. He is in cuffs and being put in the back of an FBI vehicle.

"I guess I was right about Dana being a risk." He smiles grimly.

"If there's one thing I've learned from you Dad, it is how to change a zombie's opinion when they are on the fence."

"I'm sorry we couldn't work together son. I'm disappointed."

"I'm not Dad. If I didn't get involved, you would have died tonight instead of going to prison. I feel pretty good about how things went."

His car door is closed, and the FBI guys take Ted, Maria, and my father away.

Chapter Thirteen – Redemption

Wednesday June 30

MASSIVE ZOMBIE CRIME RAID LED BY IAB

SEATTLE – Three alleged zombie crime-ring leaders were taken into custody yesterday following a joint investigation by the Seattle Police and the FBI.

Included in the arrest were retired Deputy Chief Dan Stack, Maria Gonzales, wife of recently deceased Chief of Police Benito Hernández, and Ted Madison, a former police sergeant.

The arrests were accompanied by drug seizures and captures of additional alleged zombie criminals in twelve locations throughout the city.

At press time the exact quantity of the drugs seized was unknown, however sources suggest these drugs are the same drugs that were taken from the Seattle Police narcotics unit last week.

Seattle is the center of a new international crime organization that is apparently employed by freshly turned zombies. The zombie-accepting Church of Progressive Faith has been creating zombies by using heart surgery drugs to simulate death.

Other raids are being led across the continent by the FBI, the DEA, and even the RCMP in Canada.

Continued on Page 2...

One Month Later

As Dana's mission was complete – and her cover blown – she returned to the FBI and no longer works for the Seattle PD.

We've been collaborating from time to time on the information collected, rounding up the last few zombie criminals as we can find them.

We managed to recover almost 50% of the stolen drugs in Seattle. The DEA and FBI have been attempting recovery of the rest across the US using information gained from the vault and the corruption contacts Dana is familiar with.

As the story evolved through intense questioning of everyone involved, several interesting facts came to light.

Maria and Dan had been sexually involved 2-3 years ago, when they originally came up with the idea of turning zombies into criminals, and people into zombies.

Chief of Police Ben Hernández wasn't involved in any of the criminal activities. It is unknown if he understood what was going on around him.

Dana and Dan had been sexually involved at the zombie research center in Canada, when they identified strategies for successfully integrating humans and zombies with Dr. Zachman.

Ok, so my dad is a dog. I'm sure that had something to do with his divorce.

Ted Madison, the man who killed my partner, worked with my father in narcotics. They stayed close friends when Dad became Deputy Chief of the IAB.

There was a fourth partner working with Maria, Ted, and Dad – a retired Microsoft millionaire. He provided initial funding for the operation and stayed out of the day-to-day operations.

And me? Well, I had to get clean and eliminate gambling at my club as part of my deal with the FBI. Chuck and I turned the bar into the first ever Zombie Comedy Club. We host zombie comedians from across the US, up-and-coming local comics, and host open mic nights on Tuesday and Sunday. So far, we have line ups almost every night.

Thanks to the free press and the internet, everyone in the world now knows how to create zombies, and how to attempt creation of original zombies through suffocation. There have been several cases of each reported in the last couple of weeks. Now instead of killing people, the mafia tries to turn their enemies into original zombies.

Congress is currently working on legislation to make the willful turning of zombies an illegal act. The legislation has been held up by medical and insurance lobbyists that want to ensure the wording doesn't include accidental death during surgery and other medical procedures. Other countries are starting to follow suit.

* * *

I am outside headquarters enjoying a street vendor's hot dog lunch in the summer sun.

As I'm wiping ketchup from my chin, Dana walks up to me.

“Hi Rob.”

“Hi Dana. How have you been?”

“Great. The FBI is hiring more zombies and they've put inspiration sessions in place. They aren't too bad. They aren't quite as good as Captain O'Neill's though.”

“Ha. That's good.”

“Rob, with your father in jail, the FBI believes you are the foremost expert on zombie psychology – for both cops and criminals.”

I'm shocked, and I'm sure it shows.

"Come on – you can't be too surprised. You've been with the IAB from the beginning, you've been in touch regularly with Dr. Zachman since you met him, and you've visited several other police units to see how they handle zombies. Plus, you are your father's son – I'm sure you picked up quite a bit about psychology just living together."

Okay, this is all true.

"But the foremost expert – surely there are others?"

"There are other people that could also be considered experts. After reviewing them all, the FBI believes you're the best."

"Alright, tell them thanks for the compliment." I take another bite of my hot dog.

"Ha ha ha, you're still funny Rob. Seriously though, I'm here for a reason."

I continue to chew as I look at her.

"The newly placed Director of Zombie Crime Division wants you on the team. She wants to create an elite human/zombie investigations unit that can tackle the biggest zombie crime issues in the nation."

"That sounds exciting Dana, but I'm sure there are several folks could handle that."

"She needs someone that can hit the ground running Rob. We've got information that organized crime syndicates around the country are leveraging zombie turning information to rapidly grow their numbers with zombie armies.

"We need your help Rob. We need you."

###

Thanks very much for reading my first work of fiction! Let me know what you thought of Zombies Evolved on Twitter [@DerickEvolved](https://twitter.com/DerickEvolved) or leave a review through <http://ZombiesEvolved.com>.