



PROJECT Z

A ZOMBIE ATE MY HOMEWORK!



TOMMY GREENWALD



SCHOLASTIC INC.

Dedicated to
JONNY “PAL” GREENWALD
Father. Doctor. Mensch.





On TV shows today, there are lots of different reasons why zombies are created. Sometimes storytellers explain that people are turned into zombies through breathing in dangerous chemicals or through catching mysterious diseases. To make these TV zombies seem extra scary, storytellers often have zombies being violent and even eating human flesh.

–Marguerite Johnson, July 2017



Don't believe everything you think . . .

**–Anna Chancellor
(and a lot of other people, probably)**

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
PROCLAMATION 358249-A
JULY 19, 2024

TOP SECURITY CLEARANCE ONLY

WHEREBY OUR NATION CONTINUES IN ITS SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND;

WHEREBY THESE UNITED STATES HAVE NOT FELT TRULY UNITED FOR DECADES;

WHEREBY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS TRIED TO BRING THE PEOPLE TOGETHER THROUGH MULTIPLE INITIATIVES—BOTH CLASSIFIED AND PUBLIC—AND NOT SUCCEEDED;

WHEREBY IN ORDER TO BECOME ONE COMMON PEOPLE, IT IS SOMETIMES NECESSARY TO FIND ONE COMMON ADVERSARY;

WE HEREBY DECLARE AUTHORIZATION OF THE HUMAN REANIMATION PROGRAM,

HEREAFTER KNOWN AS PROJECT Z,

IN WHICH SUBJECTS WILL BE DEVELOPED ACCORDING TO STANDARDS OF PROTOCOL LAID OUT BY EXECUTIVE ORDER 127, WHICH WILL INCLUDE BUT NOT BE LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

HIGH IQ AND VOCABULARY
LIMITED SHORT-TERM MEMORY, NO LONG-TERM MEMORY
NO NEED FOR SLEEP
DIET OF JELLY BEANS AND WATER
AGGRESSION TOWARD HUMANS
FEAR OF LARGE ANIMALS
TRADITIONAL/EXPECTED PHYSICAL TRAITS, I.E., PALE SKIN,
LIMITED MUSCLE MASS, LOW BODY FAT

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EACH SUBJECT WILL BE MARKED WITH A RED STREAK ACROSS THE PUPILS OF THE EYES.

EACH SUBJECT WILL SECRETE A MALODOROUS LIQUID WHEN EXERTED OR STRESSED.

EACH SUBJECT WILL BE ABLE TO IMPART TEMPORARY PARALYSIS IN HUMANS THROUGH USE OF A NERVE-PINCHING TECHNIQUE KNOWN AS "THE ZOMBIE ZING"; IN TURN, EACH SUBJECT CAN THEMSELF BE TEMPORARILY PARALYZED THROUGH A THOROUGH DOUSING OF SALT KNOWN AS "THE SALT MELT."

IN ORDER FOR THE SUBJECTS TO FULLY REFLECT HUMAN SOCIETY, THERE WILL BE A SMALL SUBSAMPLE OF REANIMATED JUVENILES.

THIS PROGRAM WILL COMMENCE UNDER THE AUSPICES AND DIRECTION OF J. K. LABS, INCORPORATED. THE LAB WILL OPERATE IN COMPLETE TOP SECRECY AND ANONYMITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF ITS WORKERS.

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PROGRESS AND PROCESS WILL BE DISSEMINATED ON A **NEED-TO-KNOW BASIS** ONLY.

ANY EXTERNAL DISPERSAL OF INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROGRAM WILL BE CONSIDERED A TREASONOUS ACT.

TARGET DATE OF EXECUTION WILL BE JULY 1, 2028.

AND FINALLY—UPON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM, THE SUBJECTS WILL BECOME KNOWN BY THEIR PUBLIC NAME: ZOMBIES.

SIGNED ON THIS DATE,

CARTER SHOTWELL

CARTER SHOTWELL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
UNITED STATES SECURITY AGENCY

~~*CLASSIFIED*CLASSIFIED*CLASSIFIED*CLASSIFIED*~~

February 25, 2027
GT 278
PROJECT Z
THE OUTER BRANCH
ARIZONA



ATTENTION ALL UNITS: There was a breach at GT 278 today, circa 04:28 hours. An electric fence malfunctioned when a small animal, most likely a badger or a possum, gnawed through the wiring.

This is the first reported incident of a security breach at any government territory. Extra precautions have been put in place to make sure it is not repeated.

There were six confirmed escapees. Five have been accounted for, secured, and immediately returned to their pods.

One escapee is still at large. Description: small in stature, typical pale complexion, standard issue clothing, and orange identification tag.

Please be aware: He is a juvenile.

HORACE BRANTLEY

Regional Commander, National Martial Services

~~*CLASSIFIED*CLASSIFIED*CLASSIFIED*CLASSIFIED*~~

PROLOGUE

Have you ever seen a zombie run?

It's not pretty.

First of all, we're not the most coordinated species in the world, if you know what I mean. Our legs don't work very well. They're rubbery and elastic, and it kind of feels like trying to run in glue.

Also, we're not in very good shape. We have a lousy diet and almost never exercise.

But the main problem is, running is not a zombie activity. Running is a *human* activity. And we stink at human activities. Humans are bigger than us, and stronger than us, and believe it or not? *Meaner* than us.

So the bottom line is, we're not very good at running. Which is why, on that day when I found myself running for my life, I was pretty sure it wasn't going to end well.



My memories from that day are a blur. I remember being out in the yard for Morning Routine, and then there was a lot of noise and commotion, and I was pulled through a hole in the fence. I remember crawling, with dirt, and mud, and grass getting in my eyes. I remember jumping into a river and the water being very cold. I remember hearing the voices of the others and then human voices behind us. I remember trying to yell. I remember the humans catching up to us. I remember confusion and fear. I remember a man with a reddish-gray beard, chasing me with a big bag of salt in his hand.

And the last thing I remember is that all of a sudden, from one second to the next, I was falling, falling, falling, into a deep, dark hole. And then my head hit something hard, and I closed my eyes, and all the noise around me got softer and softer until it disappeared altogether.

And then everything went dark.

PART I

FOUND



RESCUE

I opened my eyes, which is something I almost never do, because I almost never close them in the first place.

I looked around, but it was too dark to really see anything.

I had no idea where I was or what had happened to me.

So I closed my eyes again, just to see what it felt like.

It felt strange.



After a few more minutes, I opened my eyes again. The sun had started coming up in the sky, and it was light enough for me to see that I was laying in a deep ditch in the middle of nowhere. My head felt like a popped balloon, and my ears were full of dirt.

It didn't look like any place I'd ever been before.

But that's probably because I'd never been anywhere.

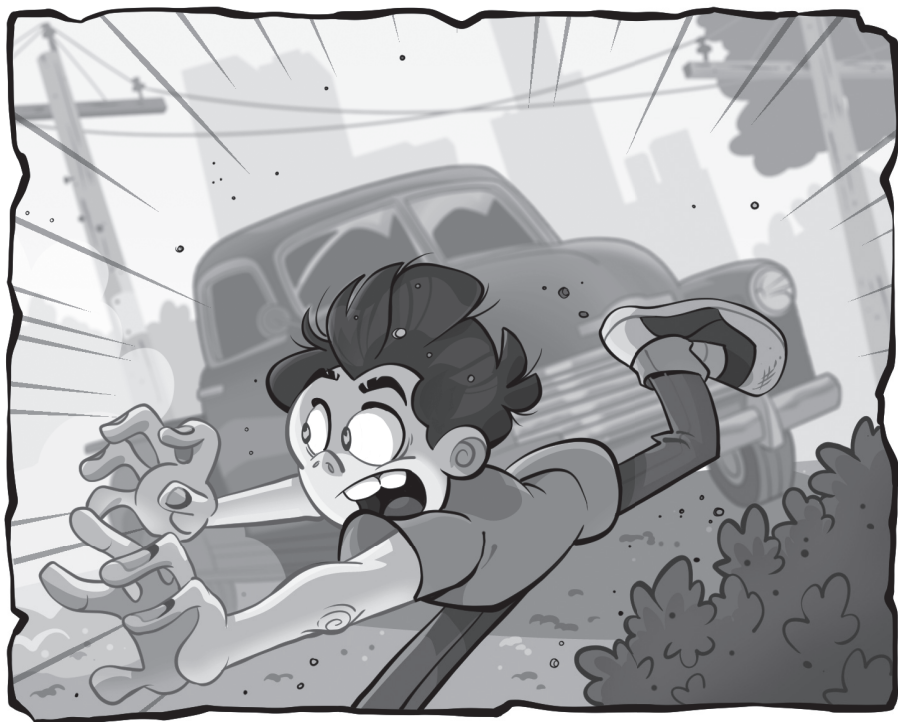
I tried to figure out what to do next, and all I could come

up with was: *Get up*. I remembered I had been running from something, so as soon as I climbed out of the ditch, I started running again—badly, of course.

And as I waited for someone to inevitably catch me and bring me back to my pod, I started thinking.



I thought about the fact that I was alone. I thought about the fact that I didn't know where I was or what I should do. And



I guess I was thinking so much, I didn't notice that I'd run out into the middle of the road and was about to get run over by a yellow pickup truck heading straight for me.

HOOOOOONNNNKKK!!!!

I dove out of the way just in time. The truck screeched to a halt, spraying gravel from the road into my face. I think a few pieces even got in my mouth.

They didn't taste very good.

A human man and a human woman got out of the truck. I could tell they were real humans by their coloring. The man had a brown mustache, and the woman was wearing a blue dress. The man held the woman's hand. That must have meant they were attached to each other in some way. Or perhaps they were scared. Or both.

They leaned over me.

"There you are," said the man.

"We've been looking for you," said the woman.

Words started ringing in my ears:

Humans are the enemy. Humans Will hurt you.

I didn't know where these words came from. But I heard them again:

**If you see a human, attack. Humans are the enemy.
Humans Will hurt you. If you see a human, attack.**

I remembered these words from somewhere. They were orders. They were orders I was supposed to follow.

But I didn't.

I couldn't.

"Are there others?" the man asked the woman. "There were supposed to be others."

She shook her head. "I can't be sure."

So they knew who I was.

I was too afraid to move. *They're taking me back*, I thought. And then I thought, *I don't want to go back*.

"Are you hurt?" said the man. "You have a big bruise on your head, like you've taken a real fall. But you're okay?"

I nodded.

"You're so pale," said the man, looking me up and down. "And so skinny."

"I think you may be making him nervous, Bill," the woman said, looking at the man.

"Oh dear," said the man named Bill. "I'm so sorry. We're here to help you. You need to know that."

I stood up, took a deep non-breath, and tried to be

brave. It wasn't easy. People scare me. Way more than I scare them, I bet.

The man squatted down and looked into my eyes, then looked up at the woman. "Yup, there it is, honey. The red streak across the pupils. Just like you said." He smiled and shook his head. "Well, we sure are glad to have found you, young man."

The woman touched my orange ID tag lightly with her fingers. "Norbus Clacknozzle, is it? I think I remember you. Well, Norbus, my name's Jenny, and this is my husband, Bill."

The man called Bill stuck out his hand. I looked at it.

**If a human acts friendly, Do not believe them.
They are just trying to lure you in before attacking.**

"You're supposed to shake," he said to me. He turned and shook Jenny's hand. "Like this, you see?"

I slowly brought my hand up, and Bill grabbed it with his. It was the first human hand I'd ever felt. It was softer than I'd imagined. And warm. Really warm.

"Nice to meet you," said Bill.

The woman called Jenny held out her hand, and I shook it. "My goodness, we need to get you a blanket," she said.

Bill chuckled. "I'm not so sure a blanket is going to warm him up, dear. Don't forget, he's a zombie."

So *that's* what I was.

"Do you remember where you come from?" Bill asked me. "Do you remember home?"

"The poor thing has no memory," Jenny said. "And no home."

I wasn't sure what they were talking about, but at least I knew why I felt so alone. Because I *was* alone.

I got into their truck, and Bill placed a long strap across my chest and buckled it.

"How old are you, young fella?" he asked. "Do you folks even have an age?"

I stared at him, partly because I was still too scared to speak and partly because I had no idea.

Jenny shook her head. "They don't officially have ages, Bill. He's a juvenile, that's what we call them."

Bill looked back at me while he started the truck. "You've got nothing to be afraid of, son," he said. "Not anymore."

As we drove away, a wave of confusion and exhaustion washed over me, but also a new feeling I'd never felt before. At first I didn't recognize what it was. Then I slowly figured it out.

It was hope.