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How to Start an Apocalypse: Chapter 1

At first, it seemed like being shot in the head was the best thing that ever happened to Blaze.

Success. When he was alive, Blaze had never been good at psychology compared to other CMU students. Now, thanks to the Overcompensation Effect, Blaze was getting straight A's in all of his classes and working on cutting-edge brain research.

Love. This spilled into other aspects of his life. When Melissa recognized the person on the front cover of *Psychology Today*, she was interested in learning more about him. Blaze had finally begun to feel good about himself, and she liked his newfound confidence. She found his short, brown hair, grey eyes, and muscular physique attractive. They became more than friends.

Friends. For the first time in his life, Blaze finally felt like he had somewhere he belonged. Among people who die at a young enough age, there are only so many who die with their body in-tact enough to become zombies. And among these, there are only so many with a friend or family member who is able and willing to illegally obtain a sample of the pozarovirus within 24 hours of their death. And among these, there are only so many whose death never became publicly known and aren't too deformed by the pozarovirus's Overcompensation Effect to be inconspicuous zombies--able to pass themselves off as humans. So when Blaze, John, and Samantha found out that they were all zombies, they instantly became friends.

However, they soon decided to stop hanging out in public.

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

zombies.”

“Dude, you’re being paranoid again.” said Samantha.

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

“You can’t be serious.” said Samantha.

“To be honest, you guys are the best friends I’ve ever had. My life has been really terrible ever since...” John paused to look around. “...ever since becoming a zombie, and you guys are the only people I talk to about being one. But to be honest, it’s just too risky for us to keep hanging out in the open like this. I don’t want to be quarantined. The government is afraid of us because of how much better than humans the Overcompensation Effect makes us. Michael Jones had this article yesterday about what goes on in the quarantines, and...”

“DUDE,” Samantha began. “Don’t bring up that stupid conspiracy website again.”

“Actually,” Blaze interrupted their conversation. “I somewhat agree with John. We should start being more discreet when we hang out.”

“We shouldn’t have to change the way we live because of the fucked up views people have of us,” Samantha said.

“We shouldn’t have to,” Blaze said, “But we do.”

Blaze thought Samantha was going to interject, but instead she just sighed. “This sucks, but okay. I actually know of a good place.” And that’s how they started hanging out at the deserted warehouse.

It never ceased to amaze Blaze that he knew a single other inconspicuous zombie, let alone as many as he did. Eventually, John met Serenity. And then Samantha brought Jim along one day, and then there were five of them. For as long as he could remember, while he had been alive, Blaze had been depressed. However as a zombie, Blaze now had success, love, and friends, and for the first time, he was happy.

Then, he encountered Mr. Tarentino.

“I love you,” Melissa had told Blaze the day before. Blaze didn’t know what to say. Whenever he was around Melissa, he would feel warm on the inside. And whenever they decided to hang out, regardless of how bad his day had been, just seeing her face would make his break out in a beaming smile. Still despite recognizing that most people found Melissa’s long, red hair, hazel-colored eyes, and slim physique attractive, Blaze never really felt much sexual desire toward her. Or anyone, recently, for that matter.

“I must not care about her that much,” Blaze thought to himself, so he decided to say nothing in return. Melissa ran back to her dorm room crying.

In contrast to his relationship with Melissa, Blaze had never felt more desire toward something than he did right now, while examining the brain of his research subject in CMU’s psychology laboratory. For something that was dead, the brain was so beautifully pink. It was a near perfect specimen. The cerebellum was so round. And the way the temporal lobe connected to the midbrain... Blaze couldn’t take it anymore.

Blaze looked around to make sure no one else was in the lab. Then, he leaned down and put his mouth around Mr. Tarentino’s brain. It was creamy and had a smooth texture, like yoghurt. He took a bite. Mr. Tarentino’s blood flowed into his mouth. It tasted...disgusting. Yet, it was still incredibly satisfying. He chewed and swallowed. Then, he leaned back down for another bite.

“Blaze?” Melissa had decided to stop by the lab between her classes. Blaze had been so mesmerized by Mr. Tarentino’s brain that he didn’t hear the door open. Melissa started laughing. “Why are you eating...?”

And then it clicked.

“You’re...you’re...you’re a zombie!?” she exclaimed in horror.

Once again, Blaze didn’t know what to say. Melissa looked terrified. There was a long pause. Finally, Melissa said “I need to go get tested.”

“No you don’t,” Blaze said. “There has never been a human-to-human transmission of the pozarovirus.”

“That we know of!” Melissa said, raising her voice. She took a deep breath. “I’m going to the Medical Clinic.”

After Melissa left, and Blaze put his head in knees. He was glad no one entered the lab because he didn’t know how he was going to explain this to his research advisor. A couple hours later, his phone rang.

“I’m clean,” Melissa said. Despite sniffing as if she had just finished crying, she also sounded relieved.

Blaze was about to say that he knew the tests would come back negative, but Melissa didn’t give him a chance. “Still, this whole thing is so typical of you. Apart from just being generally crazy, you don’t care about other people, and you always think you know everything.”

“I do care about people,” Blaze said.

“Even if it turns out that pozarovirus isn’t in any way contagious,” Melissa continued, “It’s morally wrong to play with life and death and become a zombie. Even if, at some point, you’re able to tell me you love me back, I don’t think I can date a zombie. We should stop seeing each other.”

Blaze felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Also,” Melissa said, “My parents are going to notify the CMU administration. I can’t stop them.”

Blaze knew what that meant. A wave of fear and anxiety came over his body.

He grabbed his backpack and began walking as fast as he could while not looking too out-of-place. Once he got off-campus, he headed to the nearest bus stop. The only place Blaze knew of anywhere near Pittsburg was the warehouse. He decided to get off an hour from it, and walk the rest of the way. When Blaze finally got to the warehouse, he lay with his head face-down on his backpack and started crying.

Even when he was depressed, Blaze had never felt this devastated. How bad he felt answered his question: he did love Melissa. And now their relationship was completely destroyed.

Blaze began to realize Melissa wasn't his only problem. He was going to be arrested and quarantined if he ever went back to CMU or was recognized in public. His entire life was ruined. Blaze's life was even worse than it had been when he was alive. Blaze spent the rest of the night in deep thought. He slept, using his coat as a blanket and his backpack as a pillow, and then snacked on the bag of Pop Tarts in his backpack the next morning. Then, he began preparing his appeal.

That evening, John and Serenity arrived at 8pm, the time they agreed upon. They didn't normally hang out on Wednesday evenings, but Blaze made it sound really important. It was a long time since John had last seen Blaze this quiet and solemn. Still, Blaze refused to say what was wrong until they were all there. Finally, twenty minutes late--as always--Samantha and Jim arrived. Blaze began his appeal.

"I was found out," Blaze began. John and Samantha opened their mouths to say something, but Blaze continued. "However, don't worry; no one knows about the warehouse, and I'm not going to become depressed and kill myself again."

"Because instead, I'm angry. For the first time, I had a life that I was satisfied with. There is no reason why I shouldn't be allowed to continue living that life."

“We shouldn’t have to live in secrecy. There is nothing for people to be afraid of; there is absolutely no evidence indicating that human-to-human transmission of the pozarovirus is possible. And you know what, even if it could somehow happen, what’s the big deal? The brain that the pozarovirus regenerated for me is so much better than the one that was blown out when I was a human. In our own unique way, each of us is better than we were when we were human. We have put up with the hiding, the discrimination, and the social stigma long enough. Zombies are superior to humans, and the world would be a better place if *everyone* were a zombie.”

John began nodding his head in agreement. Serenity stared at Blaze as if he were crazy.

“Tonight will mark the beginning of the zombie apocalypse. Our first step: freeing the conspicuous zombies.”

Samantha and Jim looked at each other.

“Who’s with me?”

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