



WELCOME
TO THE
ZOMBIE
MALL

THE SILVERCREST EXPERIMENT: BOOK TWO

ALBERT AYKLER

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ZOMBIE MILL

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THE QUESTION

“Who are the people in orange?”

“What?”

“The people in orange hazmat suits. Who are they?”

“The orange people are the last best hope for humanity.”

Silence.

“Also, I think they are my ride out of here.”

“WELCOME TO THE ZOMBIE MILL.”

I could swear the zombie in the dark green golf shirt yelled those exact words at me through the driver’s side window of the beat-up Subaru wagon I had stolen to flee last night’s zombie massacre.

Splat. His head exploded in two. Someone played through him and they did not use a nine iron.

Blood. Brains. Skull shards. A hefty fire ax split Golf Shirt Zombie’s skull, but he did not fall. Jaw, ear, cheek, skull bloomed into a Y, but the reptilian base of the skull remained intact. His hands scratched and screeched against the roof of the car.

Pieces of his infected brain stuck to the ax on its way out of the skull, slipping off and flipping against the car. A thick gray lump of cerebral snot failed to drip off my side mirror. Around it, I saw a dozen or more of these fast-moving fiends coming at the car.

In front of me, a chain-link fence struggled to keep the dense undergrowth of the neighboring pine forest from encroaching on the convenience store parking lot.

Zombies. Zombies crowded the back and sides of my car,

thanking against it. The large pine cone, which had fallen and *thunked* against the hood of the car and drawn the infected to me, rocked and shook as the fiends swarmed.

Only one way to go. Away. In reverse. With great intention and speed. I adjusted my seat back to vertical. I had slept in the lot, too exhausted to know or worry over the zombie situation in what I thought was a peaceful old mill town. The loud noise of the falling pine cone had nearly roused me a few minutes before, but the zombies jumpstarted my heart and triggered a powerful adrenaline rush. I fumbled for the keys in the cup holder in the console. Seeing the large, unsheathed hunting knife there provided a slim shining fragment of reassurance. I could defend myself. But it was no ax.

Another splatter and crunch to my left. The ax blade hit the Golf Shirt Zombie straight down the Y in its skull, falling a few inches lower this time. The hit severed the spinal cord at the base of the skull. As the gruesome old duffer fell, each branch of his Y-split head fell onto his slack shoulders.

I jammed the key in the ignition and fired up the Subaru. Joe Strummer and The Clash screamed “Should I Stay or Should I Go” from the radio. The zombie horde jumped and danced against the car excited by the engine and stereo sounds. *It is Zombie Slam Dance Mania here at The Busy Beaver Mart parking lot, folks. Come for the noise, stay for the flesh.*

Before I shifted into reverse, something knocked against my window. An intentional, human communication type of knock. Different from the shambling zombie-*thanking*-zombie everywhere else on the car. I looked over and saw the lumberjack zombie exterminator. Zombiejack?

No face. A shiny orange, plastic, heavy duty hazardous materials suit. A dark, tinted window where eyes belonged. Two ventilators and a speaker for a mouth. Whoever it was must have screamed like hell for me to have heard that

welcome greeting a moment earlier. I refused to accept that the golf shirt sporting zombie had uttered anything other than *arrrggghhh*.

The Orange Hazmat waved a pale green gloved hand at me, then raised a forefinger to say *One second, be right with you. But first, back to swinging the ax*. Another smash hit for Orange Hazmat. Brains, skin, and bone splattered the side of the car. An infected older lady in a blood-stained foam green housecoat went down with one swing.

Moving with surprising grace for someone in one of those ungainly suits, the hazmat lumberjack side-stepped away from an oncoming zombie sprinter wearing a button-down uniform shirt from a prominent national parcel delivery service but no pants or shoes. The ax hit the back of the pantsless delivery zombie's head. Nice placement. It went ass over dangling, mostly severed, teakettle into the chain-link fence.

Most of the zombies wanted to get in on the noisy car with the smelly fleshy guy inside. This gave hazmat a chance to shout instructions and motion what they wanted me to do.

"Back up that way. Then come back and get me."

I shouted "Gotcha," in reply with a theatrical nod.

I looked around at my adoring zombie fans. I felt reasonably safe in the car as long as this orange wahoo with the ax didn't bash in any of the windows. I couldn't see out of the rear window. How many were back there? The *thunks* got louder. And some of them sounded more like bashes. Runners coming from across the lot to join the zombie mosh pit with the Subaru at its center. *Bash. Thonk. Thonk. Bash.*

I shifted into reverse and gave it some gas. The car did not move. More gas. I began to roll back. I hesitated. Go back hard and fast or slow and steady?

My orange friend continued to take out the brainless

infected who couldn't seem to get the idea that the horde party was around the Subaru.

Screw it. Hard and fast. I cranked the wheel hard to my right and slammed my foot down on the gas pedal. The Clash had switched into the full gear punk machine gun chorus of *Should I Stay or Should Go* and my heart rate matched them beat for rattling beat.

All wheel drive to the rescue. I heard and felt the rear wheels crunch over a few of the fiends. My big move had knocked the bulk of the scrum away and off balance. I backed away far enough to get a view of the scene. At least thirty zombies remained upright, ravenous, and ready to attack. I saw half a dozen laid out on the pavement. Two I had rolled over with the car and four my hazmat friend had taken out with the ax.

The vermilion zombiejack stood there ax up and ready for the next one, but the group had focused on the car. Beyond that ugly battle scene, the tired 80s era convenience store looked almost tranquil. One car, abandoned rather than parked, in the lot near the gas pumps. One of the front double doors propped open in ill-advised welcome.

I shifted into drive. I would have to navigate around the center of the zombie party to pick up the orange zombiejack. The Subaru could knock down a few, but not the whole group. I gave it some gas. The car rolled forward. Something pulled against it. Against the right rear wheel. Probably caught one of the bigger ones in there. I knew I could grind the body out of there if I drove far and fast enough, but with the zombie crowd, the gas pump, and the abandoned car, I didn't have the distance here in the lot. I owed that ax-wielding overgrown traffic cone a way out, but this would be tight.

I attempted a lame, slow station wagon donut before heading toward the horde. I avoided the bulk of them but

clipped one, shattering its left leg into the left headlight. Three staggering blood-stained, monsters dressed in green and bright orange hunting gear moved as a unit toward the hazmatter. Something deep in the hunting party's pre-zombie wiring had attracted them to that color I think, because all the other zombies remained focused on the car. Maybe the color of caution meant something different to them. It meant time to hunt. Killing time. Conditions looked grim for my new friend.

I punched it and drove at the trio. I hit them in profile. The first and biggest got the worst of it, and the Subaru got the worst of him. His right leg snapped as he flipped up on the hood and into the windshield, skull cracking the glass hard enough to leave his olive green cap behind as he bounced and rolled to my left. The other two collapsed into one another. I think the first one kicked the second as it flipped up onto the hood. However they got there, the other two were now under the car. The combined mass of their substantial torsos lifted the front wheels up off the ground a few inches as I came to a stop.

Orange Hazmat tried the door but couldn't get in. "The door. Unlock the door." Voice amplified and distorted by the speaker. That explained the eerie *Welcome to the Zombie Mill* earlier.

I reached across the seat, unlocked the door, and opened it. I heard the hunting party zombies grunting and chomping under the car.

My new friend climbed in, blood dripping from the ax across their orange plastic lap. The front end of the car dropped an inch under the added weight, but I could tell only one wheel made contact with the pavement. This might be tricky.

The dark eye shade looked at me. "Holy shit," screeched from the speaker in between the ventilators, making The Clash sound like a quiet folk revival act.

"Wow. That thing is loud."