

Totally Epic

I was just sitting there, playing videogames with Eddie, when the thought occurred to me.

“You know what I hate?”

“What?” he asked, hitting the A Button and peppering the oncoming space-werewolves from Planet Darx with laserfire.

“Vampires.”

He sighed. “Yeah, no kidding.”

“I mean, it was tolerable at first—when they got popular again—but now they're everywhere!”

“I know! What's so appealing about them, anyway? I guess the female ones can be sexy, but they're usually dudes.”

“Tell me about it.”

Eddie casually swerved his ship to the other side of the screen. “You know what's even worse, though, don't you?”

“What?”

“*Zombies.*”

I slapped my forehead. “Augh, geez, don't remind me. I blame the internet for that one. You start *one* ironic obsession, and soon everyone's in on it.”

“But either one, vampires or zombies: You've got the books, television shows, movies, women's apparel...”

“Exactly, it's getting ridiculous! It's bad enough they actually *exist*—do I need to see them every time I turn on the TV or walk into Barnes & Noble?”

“True dat.”

“And what message is that sending people, encouraging that sort of lifestyle? I've heard there's some kids going out, getting bit because they actually *want* to be one! Some sort of rebellious thing.”

“My last girlfriend left me for a vampire,” Eddie grumbled. “He was one of them sparkly ones.”

“The worst kind,” I agreed. “What with their six-pack abs and emotional sensitivity... it's a dangerous combination.” He nodded grimly.

“And zombies ate my neighbor's dog,” I continued. “I mean, I wasn't *that* attached to him, but that was still totally uncalled for. There's a French deli right up the street—you're telling me they can't walk a few blocks and get some sweetbread?”

Eddie sighed again as the high score screen came up. “If only there was some way to make it all stop.” He reached to turn off the game...

“Wait...” I raised my hand. “That's it!”

“What?” He paused.

I threw my controller to the couch and stood up. “I've got an idea!”

“What, what is it?”

“If we get rid of enough vampires and zombies, maybe they'll stop making so many stories about them!”

Eddie raised an eyebrow. “You think?”

“It's worth a shot, isn't it?”

“Well, I guess I didn't really have any other plans for this weekend.” He shrugged. “Sure, let's do it!”

“*That's* what I like to hear!” We bumped fists, then Eddie hopped out of his seat. “I'll be right back,” he called, running out of the room.

“I knew this stuff would come in handy someday,” he proclaimed when he returned, opening pockets and twisting his torso as he showed off his supplies. “Got several sizes of stakes and crosses, a sack's worth of garlic, flamethrower, dual sawed-off shotguns, knives, and of course, my lucky trenchcoat. I'm fresh out of holy water, but the church has a drinking fountain if you want to grab a

bottle on the way out..."

I studied him, chin in hand, and shook my head. "On second thought, this isn't going to work. There's no way we could take on many of either of them, even with all that stuff."

Eddie appeared distraught. "Then what do we do?"

I thought some more. Then, I snapped my fingers. "I've got it!" And I told him *exactly* what we were going to do.

"I'm not sure how comfortable I am with this," Eddie said, tonguing the tips of his sharp incisors as he walked down the street alongside me.

"Trust me," I said, "they'll let us in." I tapped the side of my face lightly to make sure the makeup was dry.

"This is really where the bar is set for vampirism? I wonder how many albinos with dental issues they've tried to recruit."

"Hey, quit worrying about it! We already owned the long-sleeve shirts; the only thing this is going to cost you is the \$3.75 to cover your half of the fake teeth and... oh, hey, we're here."

The local chapter of the Vampire's Charter loomed to our left, right between the florist and used electronics store. You wouldn't know it from the outside, but that building represents all the blood-suckers in the tri-county area—and, by extension, the world.

"After you, Dracula," Eddie said when we reached the stoop.

"Very *vell*." I stepped up and knocked.

A few moments passed, and a slat in the door opened to a pair of fiery, glazed eyes. "What do you want?" their owner hissed. "It's the dead of day!"

"We have some information you need to hear," I said, keeping my speech monotone. "It may very well concern the safety of all our brethren."

The eyes narrowed, then pulled back as the slat closed. I heard locks opening, and the door swung inward to a business-suited vampire, shielding himself from the light. "Is that so? What are your names?"

"Vlad," I said. "And this is, uh..."

"Edward." He took a step forward. "Vlad and Edward Chocula."

The vampire pulled a large book off a nearby shelf and leafed through it—I guess he was a clerk. "I don't believe we have you young ones in our registry."

"Just flew into town," I said. "We caught wind of some unnerving news and thought you should be told."

The clerk looked us over. "Very well." He beckoned and we followed.

As we passed through the dark building, I saw a handful of other vampires, organizing files or working on computers in branching rooms. At the end of the hall, we reached a door; the clerk knocked twice. "*Enter*," boomed a voice from inside.

"The Grand Vampire. He's all yours," the clerk said, edging back past us.

"Seeing as we can't use a mirror," Eddie whispered, "how's my hair?"

"Greasy."

"Oh, good."

I opened to door to see a dim office, the shades drawn. Behind a desk sat another vampire, larger than the clerk but dressed similarly. "And who are you?" he asked casually, fingers interlaced as he reclined in his chair.

We introduced ourselves again. "We bear serious information, your Grandness," I said. "A moment?"

"Certainly, take a seat." He gestured to a pair of chairs facing the desk. As we obliged him, the Grand V sat forward. "So, what is the matter?"

"I'll cut right to the chase," said Eddie. "I trust you're familiar with zombies?"

The vampire looked like we'd asked the color of his underwear. "As much as anyone," he said distastefully. "What of them?"

"Forgive my ignorance, but do we keep regular, shall we say, 'tabs' on these creatures?"

"Not to my knowledge. The zombies' business is their own, and ours, ours."

I faked a smug smile. "Well, then you might be interested to see just how their *business* has been going lately. Edward?"

Eddie reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a handful of photos. He held out the first.

"Transylvania, two weeks ago." A shot of a zombie in a graveyard at dusk, delivering an uppercut to a well-dressed vampire.

Eddie tossed the photo on the desk. "New York City, last Monday," he said, holding up another: Two zombies in an alley lunged at vampire cornered against a dumpster, while a third in the background disinterestedly peed on a brick wall.

"And," he continued, tossing the second photo, "Paris: Yesterday." An out-of-focus image of three beret-wearing zombies beating a family of vampires with moldy baguettes.

"...Among others." Eddie threw the rest of the pictures at the Grand V's hands. The whole set took me about half an hour, tops, on Photoshop (I just Googled "Vampires Zombies Chuck Norris Fighting" and went from there), but he sifted through them with growing alarm.

"Who took these?"

"Our sources are highly confidential," I said, "but I assure you they're equally reputable. "

The Grand V narrowed his brow. "This... this is outrageous! Why haven't I heard about this?"

"The mainstream media has a subtle pro-zombie bias. While I wouldn't *quite* go so far as to suggest a vast conspiracy—as some do—anything's possible. At the very least, I can assure you these are not isolated incidents."

"But... what do they want?"

"Domination, plain and simple. Our informants have met with international zombie leaders, and they've made it clear in no uncertain terms that they are tired of competing to survive. They want war."

"Those filthy... *things*. I should've known!" The Grand V balled his hands into fists. "What course of action do you suggest?"

"Retaliation," Eddie said. "If we wait, they'll attack anyway, and go for our women and children first—to a zombie, their brains are the most flavorful."

"How much time do we have?"

"They plan to attack tomorrow, at sundown," I said. "On the streets of every city with a vampire presence."

The Grand V seemed to give the matter some thought. Then, he pounded his fists on the desk and stood. "Alright! If they want a war, we'll give them one! These pictures will be sent out, and I'll see to it that the High Council has every vampire on the earth prepared to fight by tomorrow!" With that, he sat down again and turned to his computer to begin typing out a mass e-mail.

"Excellent, your Grandness," I said, rising from my seat along with Eddie. "Unfortunately, we must be going. Certain circumstances require our attention."

"Understood. I look forward to seeing you on the front lines!"

"And we, you," Eddie replied, closing the door behind us.

"Wow, you were right, it *worked*," Eddie said as we left the Vampire's Charter. "So what's Step Two?"

"The opposite side of the equation. But first, we need a couple of things: Raw meat, blue and green face paint, some dirt..."

"That's more than a couple."

"Well, it's less than a lot."

"Fine. As long as I don't have to wear this turtleneck anymore, I'm game."

We went back to Eddie's place and did a little beautification—you know, off-color skin, ripped and filthy clothes, plenty of bloodstains. Then, it was only a matter of swabbing ourselves with raw meat and practicing our lurches, and we were good to go.

Comparatively speaking, the local Zombie Coalition lodge was easy to track down—also within walking distance, and the smell led you right there. It was actually more of a beaten-up shack in the middle of nowhere than a lodge, but hey.

“Remember,” I whispered, “think like a zombie.”

“That's like saying 'eat like a rock'. Now, you're *positive* uncooked beef mixed with body paint won't give me chronic acne?”

“I'm sorry, what did you say?”

Eddie sighed. “*Gurrr...*”

I smiled. “That's more like it.”

As we approached, I noticed there was a doorman, wearing what looked like a moth-eaten bellhop's uniform. “*Eurrrgh,*” he muttered as we dragged ourselves up to the entryway. My Zombese is rusty at best, but it seemed like he just wanted some identification. I conveyed our situation as best I could through grunts and gestures and he eventually relented, waving us through with a rotten hand.

Inside the lodge, a dozen or so zombies sat around a long table, the far end of which was occupied by a zombie wearing important-looking medals. As they groaned and moaned about who-knows-what, Eddie and I proceeded out-groan and out-moan them enough to attract attention.

All bloodshot eyes were now on us. Gradually, Eddie slumped over to a blank space of floor and set up the easel he was carrying. I followed with an armful of posterboard slides and an instructional pointer.

The zombies watched with rapt attention as we set up our presentation.

“*Aurguh!*” I cried, waving at the audience. I slapped my pointer at the first panel on the easel:

VAMPIRES = BAD!

The zombies looked around and murmured amongst themselves. Eddie grumbled in agreement and tossed the slide to the floor. The next panel featured a series of crude drawings of stereotypical vampires biting zombies' necks, kicking zombies in the crotch, punching out piles worth of zombies.

Mumbles and hisses of disapproval began to pop up in the crowd. “*Bleaugh!*” I wailed, and revealed panel three: An even cruder drawing of planet Earth, with a massively disproportionate vampire standing on top of it like a victorious warrior.

The zombies' fervor was growing. Eddie unveiled another slide: A drawing of the month's calendar, tomorrow prominently circled in red. A large sketch of hordes of zombies and vampires fighting in front of a setting sun accompanied the date, with an arrow connecting the two.

The crowd had reached a fever pitch; zombies were standing up in anger.

The final panel:

WAR!!!

“*Rueaaagh!*” Eddie and I screamed in unison, and the zombies—even the apparent Grand Zombie—readily joined in, moaning fiercely as they clambered onto their chairs and tables. As they waved their arms and gnashed their teeth, we took advantage of the frenzy to exit the lodge, leaving our educational supplies behind in case they forgot.

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“Is it time yet?” Eddie asked.

I peeked at my watch, though it showed nothing looking out the window couldn't tell me. “Almost.” It had been a day since we'd contacted the vampires and zombies, and now was the moment of truth.

Eddie grabbed the binoculars around his neck and gazed out the open window of his third-story apartment. “Yeah... heck of a sunset, though.”

I pulled up my own binoculars and squinted down at the town below. The streets were vacant, with few cars and even fewer people.

Suddenly, a black figure came into view. Then another, and another.

“Hey, Eddie!”

“Huh?” He swiveled his binoculars around, to where the street ran out of sight past buildings by the intersection. “Oh... here we go.”

An enormous crowd of vampires strode down the empty street—there had to be a hundred, at least. “Over there!” Eddie pointed. An equal number of zombies were shambling into view from the opposite direction, their moans audible even from our distance. Slowly, the two groups met in the middle of the intersection, mere yards apart.

The lead vampire—the Grand V—walked forward and spoke. Then, the Grand Z did the same. Whatever they said, it was short, sweet, and to the point, because then all hell broke loose.

With a flurry of screeches and screams, the two crowds charged at each-other.

“All *right!*” Eddie exclaimed.

“Yes!” I pumped my fist.

The black-and-white of the vampires and the grayish-blue of the zombies quickly meshed as the fight spread across the streets. I heard glass smash, and looked up to see two vampires heaving a zombie at a parked car. Two zombies tackled an older vampire and began gnawing at his head. Bloodstains began to dot the pavement as vampires sunk their teeth into their foe's necks, and there were already a few mottled limbs dotting the ground from the less pliable zombies. Wherever other humans were, they were wise to stay put.

I abandoned the binoculars, wanting to see the spectacle in full. “Eddie, turn on the TV,” I commanded.

“Got it.” He hit “POWER” and began flipping. Every channel showed a different place in the world, and yet they all showed the same thing: Vampires swooping down on hordes of zombies armed with rocks in England, zombies fending off vampires with sharp sticks in Finland, zombies and vampires in woolen coats hurling Molotov cocktails in Moscow. From Canada to Mexico, Africa to Australia, it was Vampires vs. Zombies. Due to the differences in time zones, some of the brawls had been going on for some time, and some were yet to come.

“Well, we've done it,” I said, hands on my hips. “We've helped eliminate the greatest scourges of pop culture in our world today.”

“Totally *epic.*”

“Congratulations, Eddie.” I proudly stuck out my palm, and we shook hands.

“Of course,” he said, “we didn't get *all* the threats.”

I froze. “You don't mean...?”

“...Nah, nevermind.”

“Oh, okay. Hey, you want some popcorn? I'm about ready to pull up a chair and relax, myself.”

“No way—there's some hot vampress-on-zombabe catfighting going on at the corner of Sixth and King; I don't want to miss a second of this.”

“Suit yourself.” I headed for the kitchen.

Just then, a slicing whistle cut through the air. I spun around to see a metal star fly through the air and strike Eddie in the chest. With a quick cry, he flew across the room and slammed into the wall.

I dropped my binoculars as a swarm of black-suited men silently raced into the apartment. The leader of the group reached behind his back and pulled out a long sword. All I could do was stand there, mouth agape.

That was the one thing I hadn't counted on. The ninjas.