

“Zombie-Pound”

by Raine Bloom for Consumer Brands

First rule of Zombie-Pound: Don’t stick your hand through the fence. Second rule of Zombie-Pou —My hand! Oh, F*@%! My hand!

Those were the last words of our fearless, then handless, and finally headless, leader. He really didn’t have to show us what *not* to do. We coulda figured it out. We really just needed him to show us how to reload a crossbow, or run a generator or, you know, SURVIVE, but it’s probably best he didn’t get around to it.

He couldn’t have been all that smart to begin with. I’m thinking we woulda all ended up figuratively sticking our hands through fences by the end of his tutorials. So probably a good thing the weakest link got taken out first.

There’s seven of us. No, wait— six, now that Ronnie got ate. There’s a farming couple, Moon and Robin; Steve, a former web developer and amateur carpenter; Damien, a cosplay and furry enthusiast; Fran, the dark goddess of tats and DJ’ing; and, well, me.

Who am I? Just some schmuck who does odd jobs when he’s not playing videogames. I was also intrigued enough to answer Ronnie’s unhinged craigslist ad looking for fellow survivors.

Fran, thank whatever counts as a god these days, found a bunch of Ronnie’s survival books after “the incident”. Some of ‘em are pretty bleak. I’m sorry, but I’m not drinking my own urine. I know where I’ve been and what I’ve eaten and I sure don’t want to experience it twice. Anyway, we’ve got plenty of water for now.

Other than the survivalist handbooks written by loners and weirdoes who posed on the back covers wielding ridiculously large weapons, there’s not much reading material. No gaming consoles, either.

I have my laptop, and we take turns playing around on it, but I tell people I don't want them wearing it out, so give it back. But hey, with an arsenal to rival Call of Duty, and plenty of targets just stumbling around, we got the next best thing to videogames.

Fran hasn't been all that impressed with Ronnie's setup. They used to date back in high school, and I doubt he impressed her much back then, either. Sure, it's secure and probably *nothing* will ever get past that looming concrete wall, but there're other dangers besides zombies. Boredom will kill ya'. How many times can you sit up in a watchtower and pick off zombies? It was awesome the first thirty times, then boring, then sad.

You see these zombies coming for you and you can't help but make up stories for 'em. Like this guy, the one with brown hair and broken glasses hanging by an ear thread.

He just wants to make a living, or unliving, whatever. Put some brains on the table, ya know? He's got like twenty thousand mouths to feed. Who am I to fault him for that? Oh, yeah, I'm the guy with the crossbow. Twang!

Learning the crossbow took some time. It's not like in Elden Ring. I totally ruled in that game. I totally suck at the real thing. At first. The how-to manuals don't prepare you for the experience of shooting at something that used to be human. No, sirree. You get used to it, though, and the zombies are coming here less frequently these past four months since it all began.

We've tried playing fetch with the attack dogs — those poor mutts Ronnie had an out-of-work dentist soup up with friggin' titanium teeth. Every time we throw a ball or stick, the pooches immediately reduce it to something unrecognizable.

Then they whine and look at us all, "What the ... ? Did you do that?" How do you explain to a Rottweiler that his weenie of an ex-owner thought it'd be bad-ass to surgically implant metal teeth into their already bad-ass vice-grip mouths? You don't. You pet 'em and find a rock for them to play with.

Like I mentioned before, Fran used to be a DJ before the dead started rising and eating the living. She's pretty good, too. Her handle was DJ Hyasynth and she reigned over the club scene in Chicago for like five years. Now, she's the best crack shot in the Zombie-Pound. When I asked her which she likes better, shooting zombies or mixing Lady Gaga for coked-out twenty-somethings, she tells me there isn't much of a difference between zombies and the club scene.

So I surprised her one day by getting online (we still have the internet, go figure) and downloading a ton of music and a mixing program. Fran gave me that creepy but kinda cute smile of hers and climbed up the watchtower for her watch shift. She had my laptop tucked under one arm and her favorite Red Jacket ZK-22 under the other.

That night we were treated to a DJ set most folks never got a chance to hear. She managed to work the gunshots into the mix. It was all kinds of epic. The handful of zombies that made it past what's left of the mines seemed to love it too. They keened along with the beat. It was the most fun we've had in ages.

We all find ways to amuse ourselves. The furry, Damien, found a needle and some thread in one of the survival kits. He hand-stitched together a simple furry suit for himself from a fleece blanket. The dogs aren't fond of it. When Damien wears it, the mutts dash into the basement and refuse to come out. It makes Damien happy though, and whatever floats your boat works for me.

The six of us have a routine going, and when the farming couple got their hands on the garden, we started eating really well. And vegan. We ran out of jerky a month ago, six months after the zombie-pocalypse started. No worries, though. Moon is a killer cook and Robin can make beans taste sublime. Life is good.

I mean it. Life is really good. We have a family unit of sorts, a garden, and even a litter of puppies. The web developer, Steve, has a knack for animal husbandry (who knew?) and is talking about maybe going out and getting some goats when the zombies thin out more.

I hate to say it, but the zombie-pocalypse has been good for us. Well, not so good for Ronnie, but if it weren't for him, we wouldn't be here in our cozy little Zombie-Pound, living the good life. Here's to you, Ronnie!