

Halloween Saga III

By **Scott Lockwood**

A celebration for the 2017 Halloween season



This is one for Don, Gregg & James

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Maybe, Sandy Swift thought to herself, this wasn't such a hot idea.

Sandy and the Fan Factors Five had been having a great Halloween so far. They'd gone trick-or-treating around the various Shopton neighborhoods, then over to Phyllis and Tom's house for the big Halloween party. They danced to all of the hits, got drunk on Phyllis's patented Pumpkin Patch Punch-Packin' Peppermint Pop drink (which utilized Phyllis's own homebrew whisky, which she learned at the knees of her mother), and devoured their Halloween candy. Then Scott L got an idea...

(Never a good sign!)

"Why don't we go on a ghost tour?" he asked the group. "I saw one advertised the other day on Channel 58. It takes you to a lot of creepy old houses that date back to Barton Swift's era, plus some really spooky cemeteries, like the Levesque Cemetery where all of those scary happenings have taken place!"

In a more sober state, they would have avoided the idea like the plague. But, as all of them were pleasantly buzzed (some more so than others), they all agreed it was a splendid

idea and the perfect way to top off the night.

Soon they were in the back of an old horse-drawn wagon which plodded steadily through a fog-shrouded forest. The driver, whose features were hidden behind a huge coat and a large hat, had only charged them \$50 a person for the ride. He didn't say much, just pointed out a cemetery here and there, speaking with a deep, mortician's monotone voice. "Sample Cemetery," he'd say. Or: "Keeline Cemetery, it's older than these hills." (Which puzzled the others – they were still deep in a forest with no hills to be seen).

Then, after a while, the driver pointed toward some cemetery gates which could barely be seen through the fog. "Leveque Cemetery, founded in 1670." The driver plodded on, but Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five jumped off and made their way over to the gates.

The gates had a padlocked chain wrapped around the old iron bars, but the chain looked so old and rusted that it might fall off if you looked at it too hard. Michael did so and wasn't all that surprised when it proceeded to do just that. The others glared at him again, but he just shrugged, "It's like having a superpower!"

Leo L went up and opened the gates and they went on in.

Through the fog, they could make out tombstones and crosses here and there. All

were careful not to walk over any graves. It didn't matter – moments later, a wind came up out of nowhere and the cemetery gates suddenly swung shut with a loud *CLANG!* All around them, graves suddenly opened and corpses began rising out of them. The group backed away until they reached a crypt. With a yell of fear they hurried inside.

Inside the crypt, however, two marble-covered coffins fell open with a crash! Two corpses arose out of them. Covered with rotting flesh, crawling bugs, poorly-chosen off-the-rack clothes, the two corpses pointed menacing fingers at Sandy and the Fan Factors. That ticked Sandy off. "OK!" she suddenly shouted, "Enough! What is this, the much-ballyhooed Zombie Apocalypse?!"

The two corpses stopped. "Uh, no," one of them admitted. "We're not that kind of a zombie."

"Yeah," agreed the other one. "We're old-school zombies! You know, raised from the grave by our voodoo masters and sent forth to do their bidding."

"Oh," Leo L said. "Kind of like robots, but rattier-looking and not very high-tech."

The first zombie nodded. "Yeah, that's pretty much it."

"Aren't your mouths supposed to be sewn shut or something?" Scott D asked.

The zombies shrugged. "Yeah, but not all voodoo masters do that. Some can't even thread a needle."

"They've taken to using duct tape in recent years, but that stuff falls off after a bit," one of them added.

"OK, so what do you want of us?" Sandy asked.

"We're here to take you to our masters," the first zombie said.

"What for?" Michael asked.

"Why, to kill you, then bring you back as zombies," the second zombie answered, slightly puzzled. "What else?"

"They always need more zombies," the first zombie put in. "We, um, kind of wear out pretty fast."

"Something about being rather bedraggled corpses with skin falling off and organs hanging out kind of does that," another zombie said. "You'd think our masters would have learned that after half a dozen centuries of bringing the dead back to life, but oh no! They always gotta do it the old-fashioned way!"

"Bunch of morons," one of them muttered.

The first zombie motioned to Sandy and the others. "Well, come on. No point in standing around here jawing about it! And don't even

think about running: we outnumber you at least six to one."

So Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five were lead to the back of the crypt. There, a secret door opened onto a long, narrow stairway that went down to an underground cavern lit by flickering 40 watt bulbs and a few buzzing fluorescent tubes. Before their eyes was a huge laboratory complete with glassware, circa 1940s and 50s electronics, a bank of computer tapes spinning on their reels, and lots of low operating tables spread out before them. Nearby, three men, wearing white lab coats, square-rim glasses and smoking pipes, stared at the newcomers with glee.

"Ah!" One of them said, rubbing his hands together. "More victims from the ghost tour, no?"

"And about time!" the other put in.

"Let's get them strapped down!" the third one said. "Time to make more zombies!"

Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five tried to resist, but, as one of the zombies pointed out, they were outnumbered, so escaping was pretty much a moot point. After they were strapped to the operating tables, the mad scientists/voodoo masters dismissed the zombies. "Go off and wander around mindlessly," they were ordered. "Do zombie stuff!" Then they turned back to Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five.

"And now, it's time to – " one of them began.

"Wait!" Sandy said. "We want some answers!"

"Yeah," Scott D agreed. "Just who are you?"

"Why do you want to turn us into zombies?" asked Tom H.

"What do you plan to do with us after we become zombies?" asked Scott L.

"Do you really have to kill us?" asked Michael.

"If you're putting us to work, how much do we get paid?" Leo asked. The others all looked at him. He just shrugged and added: "And for that matter, does being a zombie come with a 401(K)?"

"Um, no, not really," the mad scientist in the middle answered. "At least, the laws on that aren't very clear..."

"And as for killing you," the one on the left end replied, "that's old-school voodoo stuff!"

"Yes," the one of the right put in. "Admittedly, we had to do some experimenting on those other guys – " he hooked a thumb in the direction of the departing zombies " – but we've refined our techniques since then!"

"In what way?" Sandy asked.

"Well, like we said, we don't need kill people any more in order to turn them into zombies!"

said the one on the right again. Squinting, Sandy noticed a name tag on the white lab coat. It read "Dr. D Sample".

"Heavens, no!" said the one in the middle. His name tag read "Dr. G Levine".

"These days," the mad scientist on the left – his name tag read Dr. C Campbell – explained, "what we do is actually a great deal worse! You see, we found it a lot more effective if, instead of killing you, we subjected you to mindless reality shows, political campaign speeches, high school trigonometry lessons and, worst of all, call center pep talks!"

"You mean *motivational speeches!*" Dr. Sample corrected.

As one, Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five's collective eyeballs bulged, their faces contorted in horror, then they fainted dead away...

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Coming back to life as a zombie isn't considered one of life's more pleasant moments, and such was the case for Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five. They stared in horror at their tattered clothes, ghastly skin lesions, grayish pallor ("It's the call center motivational speeches that do that!" Dr. Sample explained to them) and the never-ending hunger for truly awful reality shows.

"Can't. Stop. Watching. America's. Best. Cat. Groomers." they all mumbled in zombie guttural, their faces practically glued to the TV screen.

"Um, shouldn't we have them go do something?" Dr. Levine asked Dr. Campbell.

"Like what?" the evil doctor replied.

"Um, well, you know, they're zombies now. Shouldn't they go out and do zombie stuff?"

"Hmmm, well, that's true," Dr. Campbell admitted. "It does seem a bit of a waste to have changed them into zombies and just have them sit around all day staring at the tube." He turned to the newly-minted zombies. "Here, you six!" They all turned to the evil doctor. "I want you all to go out, and, ummmm..." He floundered around for an idea. "Uhhh, rob a bank or something." He turned back to his colleague. "We are a bit low on funds these days."

Dr. Levine shrugged. "Works for me!"

Dr. Sample nodded. "Being an evil scientist doesn't come cheap! Just ask that Black Cobra dude! Still can't figure out how he got his hands on all of that equipment for his lair, to say nothing of all that anti-matter..."

"Say, we should have them steal some of that as well!" Dr. Campbell said. He turned back to the zombie fan factors. "Oh, and if you should

happen to run across some anti-matter, be sure to bring us some of it too!"

"Will. Do." They answered as one. Then they turned and shuffled out of the underground lab, up the stairs, and out of the crypt.

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The cemetery gate swung shut as the six zombies continued their slow shuffle down the road. A short time later, they ran across a small girl with very pale skin and long, dark hair hanging over her face. She walked up to them and began to move her hair away from her face when she stopped and said, "Oh, you're zombies. Forget it. A complete waste of effort". Then she went on her way.

Further up the road, they ran across a woman with very pale skin and dark, stringy hair covering most of her face, except for one evil yellow eye. She made a strange croaking sound as she walked along the road. She was about to grab one of them when she stopped and said, "Oh, you're zombies. Forget it. Got better things to do with my time." Then she went on her way.

Not long after that they encountered a man with a very evil face, the kind that simply screamed *bogeyman!* At the sight of the six, he let out a hiss and started to approach them.

Then he stopped and said, "Oh, you're zombies. Forget it. Nothing there to scare." Then he went on his way.

Zombie Sandy turned to the others and said, "I. Like. Being. A. Zombie!"

"Like. Being. A. Member. Of. A. Local. Union." Zombie Scott D agreed.

The Zombie Fan Fictors Five (and Zombie Sandy) shambled on their way downtown. They ran across the occasional group of trick-or-treaters, none of whom were impressed with what they saw. "What dumb-looking makeup!" one of them said. "My sister looks scarier than you when dresses up for a date!" cried another. "Where you get those stupid clothes from? 'Zombies R Us'?" yelled a third. Then they went away laughing.

The Zombie Fan Fictors Five (and Zombie Sandy) all gave each other sad looks. "No. One. Appreciates. The. Classic. Zombie. Look. Anymore," Zombie Michael said mournfully.

"It's. All. Of. These. Modern. Day. Zombies," Zombie Leo L put in. "It's. Ruined. It. For. The. Rest. Of. Us." The others shook their heads in agreement and shambled on.

Before they reached the bank, however, their attention was diverted by the sight of a bookstore across the street. As one, the group shambled over towards it. Their eyes grew wide and they all but drooled at the sight of so many

books.

"So. Many. Books!" Zombie Scott L said.

"Must. Read. Them!" Zombie Tom H stated.

"Must. Read. Them. All!" Zombie Sandy declared.

Ordinarily, Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five wouldn't have dreamed of breaking into a bookstore late at night. But, being zombies, the finer points of the law escaped them – and probably didn't apply to them anyway...

So they approached the door and their combined weight smashed it open. They flicked on the lights and hungrily began to speed-read through every book they could lay their hands on.

(Speed reading is a little-known trait of old-school zombies. So if you're changed into a zombie due to one of those-cause unknown, completely incurable zombie apocalypse viruses, I'm afraid you're plumb out of luck...)

But, as they read, a strange thing began to happen: their IQs began to increase once more, their skin tone returned to normal, their hair became lustrous, and even their clothes mended themselves. Before a half-hour had gone by, Sandy and the Fan Fictors Five was restored to normal!

"And now that we're back to normal," Tom H said, smacking his fist into his palm, "I think

we know what we need to do!"

The other four perked up.

"Go trick-or-treating!" Michael said.

"Watch the Charlie Brown and Garfield Halloween specials!" Scott L said.

"Go find a Halloween party we can crash!" said Scott D.

"Go home and get a good night's rest," Leo L said. The others just looked at him. He shrugged. "Hey, some of us have to get up early in the morning!"

Sandy just put her hands on her hips and glared at them. "I think I know what Tom H means: time for some payback on three evil scientists!"

"That's what I'm talking about!" Tom H declared.

The other four exchanged looks, shrugs, and head-scratches. "Uh, I guess we can do that," Scott L muttered.

Tom H glared at the group as well. "Have you already forgotten what they did to us? What they put us through? Have you forgotten that they made us listen to call center motivational speeches not once, not twice, but *three times in a row!!*"

"Hey, he's right!" Michael said. "There are many things in this world that can be forgiven,

but being made to listen to call center pep talks sure isn't one of them!"

"Yeah!" the others agreed. "Michael's right! We'll teach those evil scientists to make us do our jobs in a cheerful, upbeat manner!"

With that, former zombie Sandy and the no-longer-zombie Fan Fictors Five began their march back to the graveyard for some long-overdue revenge.

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Meanwhile, back at the evil scientist's lab, Don, Gregg & James were lounging around, stuffing themselves with candy corn, Reece's peanut butter cups and other Halloween delights. Don was currently reading a book entitled "Putting Dead People Together For Fun and Profit" while Gregg was reading "Cosimo's Raven".

"Do you suppose they've already looted the bank?" Don S asked, looking up from his book.

James shrugged. "Maybe. Sure hope they can get into the vault OK."

Gregg L nodded. "Yeah, one drawback for using zombies is their rather low IQ."

"And you didn't think of this before we started using zombies because...?" Don S asked sardonically.

Gregg L shrugged in turn. "Hey, if it had been up to me, we would have used robots! But you were the one who insisted that zombies were the way to go! Have you forgotten how much you harped on how cost-efficient they were, compared to building robots from scratch?"

James nodded. "Gregg is correct! I distinctly remember you saying that all we had to do was experiment with already-dead corpses, perfecting our technique, then wait until one of the ghost tours drops off some unsuspecting tourists we can use!"

Don S looked chagrined. "Uh, I guess I did say that. And yeah, they definitely are the cheaper alternative! Still, when you consider that they are not exactly imbued with safe-cracking skills, there's a definite chance this whole plan might go astray!"

Gregg L shrugged again. "You create your zombies and you take your chances!"

The other two just gave him a sour look. Don S threw a wadded-up piece of candy wrapper at him.

Gregg L caught it and looked at it. "Remind me to invent a robot that eats garbage," he muttered to himself. Before he could make a note of his idea, the stairway door leading up to the crypt flew open with a suitably dramatic crash.

"What was that?" Don S asked with a gasp.

"Oh, just the door to the crypt opening in a suitably dramatic way," James K answered nonchalantly.

"Oh." They resumed eating their Halloween candy.

Gregg L was about to take a bite out of a candy bar when a thought occurred to him: "Say, why *did* the door to the crypt open in a suitably dramatic way anyway?"

Before anyone could answer, a voice rang out: "Because *WE* have returned!" It was Sandy, her arms raised above her in a victory stance.

James K looked at her and the Fan Fictors Five. "Well, it took you long enough! Did you bring us plenty of loot?"

Sandy rolled her eyes, then stuck her hands on her hips. "In case you three haven't noticed, *we're not zombies anymore!*"

All three mad scientists squinted in their direction. "Oh," Don S said a moment later, "so you aren't." He turned back to his colleagues. "I told you the process still has a few kinks to be worked out!"

"Not my fault," James S protested. "I just do the research!"

"Don't look at me," Gregg L protested. "I just

put in the videotapes for them to watch. Theoretical work is *your* department, I believe!" he said to Don S.

Once again, Don S looked chagrined.