

Earth of the Dead

by

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The sun slowly obliterated the horizon with its orange fiery glow as it descended into the Earth's bowels to let in the dark of night. Its last rays tried to scrape the black off of the cast iron houses that had been cast up against the mountain side above the soon to be shimmering in moonlight lake below.

I wouldn't call it a ghoulish town : it would upset its inhabitants. Not that they as of present could be upset, since they were vast asleep. They shied away from daylight, although they were originally quite frequently born to it. Out from the dark of their mother's wombs, into the light, getting to know the people and animals, they would travel to water and get to know the heavens and the skies after being submerged in it, only to reemerge clean moments later.

After all, we are all born God's creatures, aren't we? But do we choose to be?

A last ray of the descending sun narrowly escaped the horizon as it reflected off of a pine tree wet with rain. The raindrops refracted the light into a multitude of colors, the reds jumping down to the damp soil below only to find a freshly fallen pine needle that hadn't remotely begun to turn brown. Its

greens opposed the reds but immediately came to rest in the blacks of the onset of night.

The high squeak of a bat, impossible to hear with the human ear, caused an onslaught of shimmering wings cutting through the night skies in the pale moonlight that barely broke through the clouds. Mosquitos, parasites or hunters I dare not say, were soon caught up in the feeding frenzy they were now not the proprietors of, but the meal. Glistening fangs only barely exposed themselves as the bats' mouths snapped open and shut in a fraction of a second taking down the insects one by one.

A lock unlocked inside and shutters rolled up exposing slightly drooping glass windows, at least three centuries old, on all sides of one of the houses. Pale grey hands pushed aside moldy curtains and opened up the windows, letting in the night air. Rossbaum, his complexion as pale and grey as his hands, adjusted the glasses on his nose. A shard of glass had splintered from the left eyeglass, offering a minor crack through which you could get a clear undistorted glimpse of the blood red iris marking the otherwise yellowish brown eyeballs with a frightening and piercing stare.

Rossbaum looked around him at all of the other houses as their shutters retracted inside their house's walls. He breathed in the night air, raising his nose but a little, as a fairly large mosquito landed on it and tried to pierce his thick leathery skin. He immediately grabbed it with his hand. His cracked lips sucked it in and his split tongue gripped it, consuming it and the tiny drop of blood it offered.

Escalia appeared behind him in the window and he looked over his shoulder. "Did you draw up a roster?" Rossbaum asked. She reached inside her faded bosom that gave more room for storage than you would imagine it should, had she still been alive, and withdrew from her own skin a thick pack of filthy paper, tainted by the fluids of her own rotting flesh, and handed it to Rossbaum. "I hope 'tis to your liking, my once loved."

Her eyeball rolled out and she barely caught it with her hand. She quickly popped it back in. "We need to find more feeding grounds. We can't exhaust any of the ones we have, but we need more blood. Our numbers exceed what you would naturally expect in this world and we are more and more outweighing the numbers of our prey with our own."

She retreated slightly, bowing but a little to Rossbaum, as she suddenly turned and left the bedroom without a sound. Rossbaum looked at the papers she gave him, a table filled with names, addresses, dates, and approximate pints of blood consumed during the past fourteen days. He ran his thumb along the table's rows, turning page after page, halting only every once in a while.

"Five? We have but five prey that might suckle us and nurture us with their blood?" Escalia's voice only barely reached Rossbaum's ears from two doorways down the hallway. "They don't suckle us, Dear! You care for them too much. We suck their blood because their blood is ours to consume. Don't forget about our ways." Rossbaum looked at the papers once more before he folded them shut. "Our ways of old have very little place in tonight's living. We need to find a way to both exist and coexist."

"I'm calling a meeting..."

All the bloodsuckers in town had by now left their dens and their feet dug lightly into the mountain dirt, rocks tumbling down its slope toward the lake below, some of them breaking through its surface causing fish to startle awake and momentarily jump out of the water.

Some of them carried heavy tables on their rotten shoulders, to a cave, angling their way around the mountain side, their feet digging in way deeper than any of the others'. It was never really clear whether they were able to carry them because of superior strength or simply because they didn't feel any pain... Or anything else for that matter. They knew they had to feed because they could see themselves rot away, but hunger itself never appeared to them to still really exist.

Farud, who had travelled to town more than three-hundred years ago to join the ranks of then still high reigning vampires, cast down the table on the damp cave floor. It toppled and rolled on its side. "Careful with that," Rossbaum said. Farud looked at him in dismay, "When I joined you, we were able to buy a thousand tables to replace this one table without anyone even blinking." Rossbaum checked the table's leg, "The leg is only mildly chipped at the bottom. It isn't broken. We don't need a thousand new tables, let's just cherish what we still have."

"It was never supposed to end," Farud said, grabbed a chair, and sat himself down at the table, slumping down, his bony ass nearly sliding off of it. He sat wide-legged, hitting a soft ruffle with his fingers on the table.

Rossbaum looked at him. Farud only glanced back for a second and turned his gaze straight ahead at the cave's wall, completely disregarding everything and everyone else.

His hand jumped up and he grabbed a bat out of the air as it made its way to the cave's exit. He bit down on it and the bat screamed before it died. He let the blood-ridden bat drop from his fingers on the ground behind his chair and cast Rossbaum a stare.

Rossbaum knew where they were at, what position they now found themselves in, what disgrace he had brought them, and Farud wouldn't let any opportunity pass by to make him feel that. Farud, like all the others, every now and then forgot about the fact that none of them were human anymore and none of them could feel anything.

It was the irony of immortality : the dead's lack of feeling, with the mind of a human being, and the conscience of a rat. Only now they started to realize it, that that was what they were : rats. They couldn't hide their conscience behind the facade of high society anymore, since society on this continent had largely ceased to exist.

Overconsumption had turned out to be the whore their mother was.

The last of town drooped in with the last bottles of blood to fill the led-stained glasses Escalia placed everywhere on the tables. Led : what wouldn't kill you would only make you rot. More irony.

Farud picked up the glass in front of him and held it up to the pale moonlight seeping in through the cave's entrance, then to the candle's flame that his wife, Mia, had lit before him. "Let's first listen to what they have to say," she said. "I always listen, but I shouldn't, I should speak... No, not speak. I should hunt! Sink my teeth into the softest of flesh, the freshest of bowels, in the handmaid's arse, as I hold onto her soon no longer heaving chest!" He firmly planted his glass on the table.

"Real eloquent." Escalia sat herself down with an intended sigh, but the fact that she didn't breathe anymore, being the undead lady she was, that and the giant gaping hole in her chest, didn't work in her favor.

"What? I'm not good enough? I'm not good enough to be one of you?" asked Farud.

"We're the princess and princesses of the night. We embrace the darkness and reign over lands vast beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Immortality has granted us vision and feast beyond our wildest dreams," said Rossbaum.

"So it may be," said Farud, "but anyone requesting to join your ranks, daring enough to stand up and say they want to die to live forever should be granted access to your immortal reign. As have I and you have accepted me. It is our law : so reads the unwritten codex."

"Blast you and your codex!" remarked a scrawny figure at the end of the furthest table. What was his name again? No matter how long Rossbaum chose to think, he never did remember. Or he really didn't care

to, although a noticeable shimmer of a smile betrayed his stark superior pose, showing that he recollected who the scrawny figure was, but preferred to make pretend he didn't, simply to agonize him.

"You made me!" exclaimed the poor remains of a man, "You gutted me and threw me into the deepest bowels of hell only to reascend as this empty shell of a man. I used to be somebody. I used to be Cogi-Násál, weaver of the finest tapestries. Not a single house in the kingdom I was born to, knew not of my tapestries. They kept the people both warm and entertained!"

"Didn't you - beg me, Co-ga, Co-gu... Co-gay... What did you say your name was again?" Rossbaum eagerly taunted the scrawny sack of bones at the end of the table.

"You yourself, Großmeister Rossbaum, keeper of the sword and the cloth... Pah!" Cogi spat on the ground, "You yourself said 't was against your code, laid down in your unwritten codex, to immortalize those that only asked in fear of their lives being taken from them."

"Yet I granted you your immortality anyway. Aren't you thankful?" he asked.

"Not until after you tore away at my flesh, simply to see what it would do to my demeanor and my views of the afterlife. You said I'd be your experiment, your pet mouse without intestines, you filthy flying dog."

Escalia finished pouring the glasses of blood and put the empty bottle aside. The villagers that had gathered looked on in amusement as they drank the few drops of communal blood that were left for this special occasion.

Cogi looked at them - "Filthy bastards!" - and looked away. Escalia sat herself down and smiled as she shut her dead red in black eyes to maintain composure. Rossbaum couldn't help but hear the soft grinding of remaining tissue in her largely hollow chest : it had a remarkable likeness to that of two pieces of sandpaper ground together.

Rossbaum tried to scrape his throat, but with the unravelling of all of the tissues in his body, he ended up sounding more like a squealing pig being gutted. It caught him by surprise a bit, causing him to stay quiet almost immediately. He looked around him.

Had his face not been so blood-ridden he would've surely looked more flustered, but then again, he really had no emotion and as such no feelings of shame or guilt left to trespass anywhere inside the darkness of his mind. He feigned amusement, let out a short staccato laugh, and beat his fist on the table twice.

Rossbaum's throat seemed to have come undone due to his scraping of it and he held on to its flapping remains in order to speak. "Esteemed citizens of the township of Dreadsville... And Co-gu, Co-gay, Co-ger... Ugh..."

Cogi attempted spitting on the ground once more in response to Rossbaum's mocking gestures, but instead of spit, one of his two rotting fangs fell to it. Feinting annoyance, he picked it up and stuck it back in.

"Cogi," he corrected Rossbaum. Rossbaum looked away lowering his gaze with a mild frown.

"We have fallen on a shortage of human flesh to harvest for the night," Rossbaum lectured. "If we drink as much as we need, we will kill half of Human Town." He raised his finger, "I'm intent on introducing rations and a new class system that will identify who will benefit first ~"

A soft scuffling of feet outside of the cave caught his attention just as all the others jumped up and raised their throats more than their voices, often long lost, to protest Rossbaum's plans. "Waiiii~" exclaimed Rossbaum as he raised his other hand to signal silence, at the same time letting go of his throat that he barely kept together. The sound of his voice swiftly replaced by a faint whistle, he grabbed his throat again, pushing it shut.

"Wait!" he said. "I hear something!" He pointed to the entrance of the cave with his free hand and they all turned to look. "Wottissit?" Lady Esmeralda, Countess of Countessetness, asked...

A slightly hunched, slightly bouncy fat little man entered, eyes brown in bright white : in no way a vampire - in every way on sneakers, with baggy pants, a strange hat drawn a little too far over his forehead, what looked like an electric guitar on his back, a skateboard under his arm, and last but not

least, a T-shirt that read, "Bite Me!" drawing tight around his fat little tummy.

Blood-red irises set in blackish brown all around the cave turned from hard as brick to dumb, dull, and lacking any kind of intelligence or comprehension. In short, they were all dumbfounded.

"Uh, hi," said the fat little man as he waved a short hello with his free hand. He looked at his skateboard, tossed it aside, and looked all around the room, only to find Rossbaum's chair to be the only one vacant, since he was standing.

All of the dull red in brownish black gazes followed him as he almost hopped from foot to foot, his tread marked by a clear bounce, and he pushed aside Rossbaum a little bit. "Excuse me," he said and Rossbaum replied, "By all means. Sorry," and stepped aside turning his gaze down a bit, lost and not understanding.

The little fat man hopped on his chair, sat himself down setting his guitar against the table next to him, folding his hands in front of him on the table, and waited, just for a moment. He motioned Rossbaum to continue with his hand, "I can wait until the meeting is over," the little fat man said as his voice skipped tone a little.

Rossbaum looked at him in what you might perceive as frustration. Or was it amusement? No, it was definitely frustr-. I don't know. He had no feelings. He didn't get it. He just looked at the little fat man that was really

only barely out of his childhood, entering adolescence. One of his freckles actually popped up a little with the growing zit beneath its skin.

Rossbaum tried to speak, but his throat had come undone a little and he looked around for the reason he didn't produce any sound just for a second before he found it, pushed his throat shut, and said, "Who are you and what on Earth are you doing here?"

"We-ell, I'm Geoffrey," stated the young man gesturing that it was actually self-explanatory and folded his hands again. Judging by his gesture, he really shouldn't have to explain the rest of it either, even though he did. "I'm here to become a vampire...? Hence the T-shirt? You know? 'Bite Me?' cos that's what it actually says, you know? Can't you" ~ air-quotes ~ "bloodsuckers, like, uh, read?"

Minor flickering of Rossbaum's eyeballs betrayed he followed the bobbing of Geoffrey's head as Geoffrey sought to explain himself through what he just said.

"Well, forgive me, I'd sit myself down, but I must confess I witnessed you seize my seat," Rossbaum equally eagerly gestured with all of his might, only being able to use one hand, but many, many bops of his head. Lacking the boy's response, Rossbaum continued to gesture the boy to continue with his free hand while nodding his head.

"You...? Care to join us?" Rossbaum rasped.

"I figured it'd be pretty gnarly, you know?" Geoffrey replied.

"Gnarly?" Rossbaum asked and he asked again, but not menacingly, but once again dumbfounded, "Gnarly?"

"Uh-huh!" Geoffrey said. "I thought it over for fourteen and one days. That's fifteen days! That's more than two weeks!" he enthusiastically replied.

"Well, the boy can count. That explains it all!" Rossbaum stated while looking around the table at all of the vampires who kept looking from Rossbaum to Geoffrey, trying to figure out where this was going to go next.

Cogi raised his finger and said, "More than two weeks! That's more than sufficient according to your codex and the boy's clearly not afraid."

Rossbaum raised his free hand up to shut him up, "Shut it, Cogi-Násál!"

Cogi folded his hands once more and said, "Hmm. So you do know my name?"

Rossbaum plucked his ear for a second, removing dirt from its canal, letting his throat skin flap, sticking the dirt into his mouth, and nibbling it off his finger.

"Is that where you collect your spare blood?" Geoffrey asked, "In your ear-canal?"

Rossbaum leaned toward him a bit, cocking his head like a walking bird, and repeated, "Is that where I collect my spare blood? In my ear-

canals...? What a preposterously lucid question! Where else would I store my spare blood?"

Farud said, "In your - " but was cut short by Mia slapping him over the head for pointing at his very own arse. "What?" he exclaimed. Mia kissed him on the cheek to avoid any kind of discussion. "I loved you," she said and Farud answered, "I loved you too."

It was one of those inside jokes to those that had lost their souls.

"When are you going to grant me my immortality? I want to join in on the hunt! I want to enjoy the feast of everlasting darkness drenched in the fluids the gutted bowels of our victims will bring forth," Geoffrey said.

He seemed to think for a second and surprised all of the onlookers by taking out a piece of paper from his pocket with a couple of sentences scribbled onto it. He read it, seemingly checking what it said, and Rossbaum snatched it from his fingers, unfolding it with both hands, holding it in his right, while now once again shutting his throat with his left hand.

Geoffrey shrunk a little bit as Rossbaum read matter of factly, "When - are you going to grant me my - immortality? I want to join... This is literally what you just said!" he accused Geoffrey.

Geoffrey, barely audible, replied, "I had help from my literature professor. I told him it was fiction, but it ain't. I mean, isn't. Or wasn't... Is it?"

Cogi raised his finger with a mocking smile and pleaded, "As the codex is not written but assumed as a part of the assumption I would have to render

the boy's request valid as it is not written but said that he should be allowed to join our ranks. "

Rossbaum shouted, "As you are not a counselor but a mere weaver of tapestries, Cogu - "

Cogi beat his fist on the table, "No! We've all heard you know my name!"

Rossbaum fervently crumpled the piece of paper and ate it only for it to drop out of the gaping hole that used to be his throat onto the damp soil, wetting the paper as it now lay there with Rossbaum looking at it in what once was desolation.

He looked up and shouted once more, "I shall not be lectured by the mouse, neigh, the louse I chose to play with, you filthy little scumrat-piece-of-tird!"

Farud giggled, "Quite eloquent, your excellence. "

Events not quite transpiring as expected, Geoffrey gently picked up his guitar and as he got off the chair, swung it once again onto his back.

"Poom-pee-doom..." he said looking wide-eyed at Rossbaum over his shoulder as he tiptoed to his skateboard and picked it up, all eyes in the cave following him.

Rossbaum sauntered up to him and Geoffrey looked up at his dead gaze as Rossbaum put his free hand on his shoulder, causing him to cringe a little. Geoffrey tried to shake loose.

“Poom-pee-doo-com, indeed, you sly little rascal. We now can all see you merely meant to comprehend our plans, infiltrating not our ranks, but in fact trying to make your way out before harm can come to you, but I fear not it is too late, I delight in it and will bathe my remains in yours and your blood.”

With a force he no longer could feel nor measure, he ripped Geoffrey off of the ground, uprooting the remains of his existence, as he thrashed his fangs down into his fat belly, sucking up his blood. The blood dripping down his throat as Geoffrey screamed, his loose skin flap reattached itself to his throat, with the blood restoring some life to his dead remains.

As he drank Geoffrey’s blood, Rossbaum glanced sideways to note all of the bloodsuckers behind him had risen to their feet. He looked at Geoffrey, caught between his jaws and hands, trample and scream as he sucked a bit more of his blood, than he yanked him off of his fangs, his split tongue licking both of them clean in one go, only to throw Geoffrey onto the table.

“Here, have at it!” Rossbaum said, “Suck him dry!”

Geoffrey quickly turned himself around, trying to get away on his hands and knees, but not quickly enough as the bloodsuckers each grabbed one of his limbs and sank their fangs down into what would soon be his remains. They sucked and sucked, devouring even all of the fat the boy had to offer, leaving nothing but a shriveled sack of skin, bones, and intestines.

Escalia picked out both eyes and tossed one to Mia. They both pierced the eye they held between thumb and index finger, as custom dictated, with but

one of their fangs. Tilting their heads backward, they pressed down on it, letting the eyeballs' juice drip into their mouths held slightly ajar. They tossed aside the now empty eyeballs.

Escalia, after she had licked her lips, murmured, "Thirty-two years and fifty-five odd days since I last devoured a man's eyeball." She stepped up to Mia and kissed her on the cheek as she put her hand around her shoulder. Mia looked at her and said, "I remember it well."

Escalia looked down as Rossbaum reached into her chest, grabbing the schedule. Her eyeball dropped out again and she meant to catch it, but as it seems, it had partially reattached itself hanging from the newly formed optic nerve.

Her now empty waiting hand found no eye dropping to the ground and she laughed briefly, "Ha!" She pushed the eye back into its socket.

Rossbaum flicked through the pages, tossing it aside. "But five we shall drink tonight? We shall ration? We shall not feast? Never!" shouted Rossbaum as he raised his fist.

"Tonight we go out and we feast like this night was our first! Not only do we go out and feast, we will devour all of mankind on this continent, drawing strength from their blood and their remains! Only when we have fully recuperated, shall we move on to the old continent and the southern hemisphere to reestablish ourselves as the rightful rulers and proprietors of this Earth!"

“The codex be damned, never more shall a mortal join our ranks! This world is ours! Their blood is ours! The night is ours! We shall never die!”

All of the bloodsuckers, already on their feet, raised their fists and cheered for as far as their throats would permit them to. Rossbaum turned and rushed out the cave to Human Town with all of them following him, their pale remains making their way along the mountain side reflected in the lake below as they set out to bathe in blood.

They descended onto Human Town and the guards rang the bell to warn its inhabitants. With the flick of a switch, fires were lit, lighting up all of Human Town, and the battle began...

~ The Beginning of the End ~