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Opening extract from

Zom-B Fugitive

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THEN . . .

Becky Smith's journey into darkness and pain began when a zombie ripped her heart from her chest and she became one of the walking, brain-eating undead.

Months later she recovered consciousness. As a child, she had been injected with a vaccine by someone working for a century-old scientist called Dr Oystein, and that had bestowed her with the ability to regain her senses.

After a spell of captivity in an underground complex, B was set free by the nightmarish Mr Dowling, a mad, vicious clown who was backed by an army of mutants. He killed gleefully wherever he went, but for some reason he let B walk away unharmed.

B found her way to Dr Oystein's base in County

Hall, where she became one of his Angels, a team of revitalised, teenage zombies. The doctor had been forced by the Nazis to create the zombie virus, and he believed he was on a mission from God to make amends and help mankind overcome this most hideous of threats.

The doctor told B that he had subsequently created another pair of viruses which were the key to the outcome of the war between the living and the undead. One was a dark red liquid called Clements-13, which would wipe out every zombie on the face of the planet within a couple of weeks if released. The other was Schlesinger-10, a milky-white substance which would have an equally fast, fatal impact on humans if it was uncorked.

Dr Oystein couldn't use Clements-13 to eliminate the undead forces because Mr Dowling had stolen a vial of Schlesinger-10 from his laboratory, with the help of his ally, the mysterious Owl Man. The clown could unleash the virus on humanity if the doctor forced his hand, just as Dr Oystein could crack open his vial of Clements-13 if Mr Dowling ever attacked

him. The pair were locked in a stalemate and the world looked like it would suffer indefinitely because of it.

The Angels did whatever they could to help the survivors of the zombie apocalypse, but their ultimate goal was to track down Mr Dowling's supply of Schlesinger-10. If they retrieved the vial from the killer clown, Dr Oystein could bring his sample of Clements-13 into play and deliver the world from its undead menace in one fell swoop.

When B was captured by a hunter called Barnes, an ex-soldier from America who was an expert when it came to killing or capturing zombies, destiny set her on course for a showdown with Mr Dowling. Barnes was working for the Board, a group of rich and powerful humans who had granted his son a place on an island where zombies couldn't attack him. In return for this favour, Barnes was obliged to hand B over to the Board, whose members gleefully passed the time by watching her duel to the death with other zombies.

A repentant Barnes later helped B escape, before

setting off to rescue his son, whose safety was no longer guaranteed now that his father had betrayed his foul employers. But B wasn't finished with the Board, and again ended up in their clutches months later. The most twisted of their party was the fiendish Dan-Dan, who strapped her down in his quarters in Battersea Power Station, and proceeded to pick her body apart as painfully as he could.

It looked as if B's time was up, but, to her shock, Mr Dowling charged to her rescue. Aided by his mutants and a team of lethal, genderless babies, he swarmed the Power Station and freed her.

The clown's babies carried B deep underground to Mr Dowling's lair, where he patched her fragile carcass back together. She found out that the babies had been cloned from her DNA, making her their virtual mother. The clown wanted her to marry him and rule by his side, so that they could eventually replace humanity with their eerie offspring.

B wasn't interested in playing happy families with Mr Dowling, but, as he shared his memories with

her, she began to feel sorry for him. He had been a decent man once, until something dreadful happened and cast him into a state of insane chaos.

When Mr Dowling promised to stop killing if B married him, she bowed to his wishes, hoping it might signal the start of his recovery. After a warped but oddly sweet ceremony, the pair retired to their wedding chamber, where the clown granted her access to his innermost thoughts.

It should have been a peaceful, loving time, but B found herself instinctively smashing through Mr Dowling's mental defences. Without having planned it, she pinpointed the location of his vial of Schlesinger-10. The betrayed clown tried to kill her and the pair fought fiercely. B got the better of her husband, but, before she could finish him off, the enraged babies stormed the room and ripped into her. They would have killed her, but one of their own – Holy Moly, a baby with a hole in its head – reminded them that B was their mummy. Confused, they let her go, and she set off through the underground lair, wounded and alone, in search of the vial