Santa Claus Versus The Zombies

T'was the night before Christmas, and all through the house, nothing was stirring, not even a mouse. The same could not be said, however, for the graveyard next door. Every year, Tommy stayed up for as long as he could, excitedly peeking out of his bedroom window, hoping to catch a glimpse of Santa Claus as he travelled the world delivering presents, and every year, Tommy fell asleep before Santa arrived. Tommy would wake next morning, his head freezing cold where it had drooped against the window pane as he dozed, to find a bulging stocking hanging from the end of his bed, but not a hide nor hair of Santa Claus himself.

This year, Tommy was determined to stay awake long enough for Santa to arrive. He was a year older now, and he was sure that this year he'd finally be able to do it. Yet, despite his best efforts, as the clock struck midnight, Tommy could feel himself starting to nod off. Trying to hold the inevitable sleep back for as long as possible, Tommy stretched and yawned. Then a movement outside caught his eye, and instantly he was wide awake. At first, Tommy wasn't quite sure what the movement was, but one thing was for sure: it wasn't Santa Claus. The ground outside was covered in snow, turning the usually scary looking cemetery behind Tommy's house into a winter wonderland: frost coated the trees, and the grass, and the grave stones, making them glimmer in the moonlight, yet underneath the snow, something was stirring.

Suddenly, a long thin object thrust itself upwards through the snow. At first, Tommy watched the object curiously as it moved back and forth, then, to his horror, he realised it was a bony, wrinkled hand. The hand reach skywards, opening and closing as it grasped at the cold night air. A moment later, it was joined by another, and together the two hands pulled, first a skull-like head, then a decaying body from the ground. Tommy stared, both terrified and mesmerised by what was happening just beyond the end of his garden. As Tommy looked on, the bloated, rotting body finally pulled itself free of the frozen ground and staggered to its feet. It shuffled through the snow, dragging one foot behind it. Tommy watched it for a minute: it didn't seem to be going anywhere in particular, just wandering aimlessly between the grave stones, touching each one as it passed. Then Tommy noticed the snow lying on another grave began to tremble, and a head started to emerge. Then another. And another. So shocked was he, that it took

Tommy a few seconds to notice the pattern: every time the first zombie (and what else could it possibly be, but a zombie?) touched a head stone, the body buried in that grave clawed its way from the ground and started to follow it.

After ten minutes, Tommy found he was no longer frightened. Instead, he could feel laughter building inside him. When it had just been one stumbling re-animated corpse, it had been scary, but now there were so many of them, all playing follow-the-leader as they trailed after the first zombie, shuffling and staggering, bumping into each other, slipping on the ice and the snow, and falling over when they bounced off each other. It was hilarious and Tommy couldn't help but think that if this was all that zombies were capable of, they weren't really anything to be afraid of after all.

Then, off in the distance, high in the night's sky, Tommy saw something else. At first, it seemed like it was just another twinkling star, but slowly it grew bigger and bigger, and Tommy knew that stars didn't do that. Tommy wasn't the only one to have notice the rapidly approaching object: the zombies were looking up, too, letting out mournful moans as they reached towards it.

As Tommy watched, the object came closer and closer until it was near enough for him to see what it was, and his heart leapt: it was a sleigh being pulled by eight powerful reindeer. With the night being clear, there was no need for Rudolph to be leading the way, and Tommy tried to remember the names of the other reindeer: there was Dasher and Dancer, Prancer and Vixen, Comet and Cupid, Donner, and … what was the last one again? Tommy always had trouble remembering that last name. His brow furrowed for a moment and then it came to him: Blitzen! Yes, that was it. By then, the sleigh was close enough that Tommy could make out the plump man with the long, white beard and red suit who was holding the reins and shouting orders to the reindeer. Slowly the sleigh turned and started to descend, and Tommy realised to his delight that it was coming into land on the soft, fresh snow that covered his back yard.

A second later, and Tommy's delight turned to terror: the zombies had seen Santa Claus too, and they were now racing towards the wall that divided Tommy's yard from the cemetery. Hang on, thought Tommy, racing? That couldn't be right. He closed his eyes tight shut and shook his head before opening them again: sure enough the zombies which had, until then, been bumbling around aimlessly, were now moving fast and efficiently across the frozen ground. What on Earth, Tommy wondered, was going on?

As Santa's sleigh touched down, the first of the zombies made it over the wall and rushed across the snow towards where the sleigh had come to a stop. By this time, Santa's head was buried in his big black sack, searching for something, and that was when Tommy went cold: Santa hadn't seen the zombies. More and more of them were pouring over the wall with every passing second, and still Santa Claus was

rummaging through his sack, unaware of the danger that was descending upon him.

Tommy knew he had to do something. He couldn't, after all, be the kid who'd let Santa get eaten by zombies, he'd never live it down, but what could he do? The house was locked and he couldn't reach the key to open the back door. Even if he could, what hope did Tommy have against all those zombies? Then it struck him: all he needed to do was warn Santa that the zombies were coming. Santa, after all, had flying reindeer, he could easily escape from the yard before the zombies got to him. Tommy banged on the window, but Santa didn't look up. He banged again, still nothing. Finally, in desperation, Tommy pulled the window open and yelled at the top of his voice. 'Santa, there's zombies coming! They're right behind you!'

Santa suddenly shot upright, and looked round. He saw Tommy and waved, a jolly smile on his rosy-cheeked face, still unaware of the rapidly approaching danger. Tommy shouted again and gesticulated wildly at the zombies, which, by then, were only a few feet from the back of Santa's sleigh. Santa frowned for a second and then slowly turned. When he saw the zombies, he froze, but only for a moment, then he sprung into action, grabbing the reins and yelling to his reindeer, urging them on, but nothing happened. That was when Tommy realised his warning had been too late, the zombies had already got a hold of the sleigh and no matter how hard the reindeer strained, they couldn't manage to pull the heavily laden sleigh and all the zombies that were now clinging onto it.

Tommy watched in horror as Santa looked round desperately for something he could use to defend himself, but he found nothing. This was unsurprising; after all, the worst thing Santa Claus usually had to deal with was when the elves drank too much eggnog as they were loading the sleigh and started fighting with each other, and drunken elves weren't exactly difficult to deal with. As Santa started frantically digging through his sack of presents, searching for anything he could use to fight off the zombies, Tommy could see the fear in his eyes. Santa glanced up and seeing the zombies just a few feet from him, he gave up searching for a weapon and, deciding to hide rather than fight, he dived out of sight. The zombies weren't fooled and they started clambering on to the sleigh as they hunted for their intended prey. Tommy was aghast: surely there was no way Santa could possibly survive? This, Tommy thought, wasn't how Christmas was meant to end, for without Santa Claus to hand out presents to the children who'd spent all year being nice rather than naughty, what was the point of Christmas?

Then, out of the corner of his eye, Tommy saw a red blur streaking across the heavens and towards the ground. A moment later, it landed with a heavy thud behind the zombies and Tommy instantly realised who it was: it was Rudolf. The lone reindeer pawed the ground and snorted loudly, causing some of the zombies to turn and run towards

him. Despite the undead that were rapidly closing on him, Rudolph bravely held his ground. Then, when the zombies were only a few feet away, Rudolf lowered his head and charged, running the closest zombie through with the tips of his razor-sharp antlers. Once he was sure it was dead, Rudolf threw the once-more deceased zombie to the ground, but he didn't stop there. Rudolf charged again and again, throwing zombies this way and that, breaking arms and cracking skulls.

After what seemed like an age, but couldn't have been more than a minute, the zombies realised they were beaten. Those that could still run, tried to retreat towards the safety of the graveyard, but Rudolph wasn't about to let them get away so easily. He chased after them, slashing at them with his antlers and trampling the last of them under foot. Soon, nothing was moving that shouldn't really be moving in the first place, and the lone reindeer, with his bright red nose glowing in the darkness, trotted across to the sleigh and let out a gentle whinny.

Tommy held his breath, wondering if somehow Santa could have survived, then he emerged, crawling out from under the seat where he'd been curled up in a desperate attempt to remain beyond the grasping hands of the attacking zombies. Santa straightened up, adjusting his clothes and brushing stray flecks of glitter from his beard. He patted Rudolph's nose, before leaning forward and removing a withered arm that had become wedged in Rudolf's antlers. Santa smiled, knowing his old friend had just saved his life, and tossed the arm into the snow. He looked up at Tommy, and tipped his fur-lined hat in thanks towards the young boy, before pulling on the reins and taking off once more, Rudolph following closely after.

Tommy watched until Santa, his sleigh and all the reindeer, including Rudolf, had disappeared into the night's sky before turning his attention to the devastation which had been left in his back yard: there were bodies, or what was left of them, everywhere. That, Tommy thought to himself, would take a lot of explaining when his parents woke up and saw the mess, and he really wasn't sure they'd believe him if he told them what had just happened. Maybe he'd be better off not telling them anything about what he'd seen, and instead left them to try to work out what happened when they got up the following the morning. Satisfied that this was the right thing to do, Tommy decided he'd better go to bed before anyone discovered he was still up and started asking awkward questions.

That was when Tommy realised that in his rush to get away after Rudolf had saved him, Santa had forgotten to leave him his presents. At first Tommy was upset, but after giving it some thought, he realised that one small boy missing out on his presents this one year was a small price to pay for saving Santa's life from the zombies. Tommy sighed, and turned away from the window; that was when he saw the over-stuffed stocking hanging at the foot of his bed. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief: how on Earth had Santa managed that? Then it dawned on

Tommy and he smiled happily to himself: while Santa might be just as scared of zombies as the rest of us, he's still magic.