

Red-Eye Fashion

by Andy Zach

The Taser hit me in the back. I convulsed uncontrollably, shocked out of sleep.

"Okay, wakey, wakey. Time to go model for your mistress," squeaked a high tenor.

The bearded hulk who guarded us held his Taser ready, in case Lulu and I weren't fast enough. He was so hairy, I couldn't tell where his beard ended and his chest began. We donned the haute couture apparel set before us. He nodded his approval and gestured toward the door. He always followed us with his Taser.

"We've been here weeks and we don't know your name. What shall we call you?" I ventured. I had some vague hope of putting him at his ease so we could escape.

He laughed. "Call me Gronk." He wheezed when he laughed.

So I got him to laugh. Maybe that was progress. Maybe not. He also laughed when he tortured us with the Taser.

"Let me check you, Sharon," Lulu whispered. She examined my back, where the Taser had hit my sleeping form. My muscles still ached. "No marks."

"Good." We were responsible to keep our bodies perfect, even when tased. If we came to a photo session with marks, then we *really* suffered.

"Contacts," Gronk said.

We each inserted the red-tinted contact lenses that made us look like zombies. Zombie models were the latest craze in fashion. Zombies had an especially high metabolism and quickly acquired a lean, ripped, muscular build. Combined with their exotic glowing red eyes, they'd taken the fashion world by storm.

That was how we got trapped into zombie supermodel slavery. Lulu and I had been zombies for a year already. We were lean and ripped before we voluntarily took zombie blood. We were professional bodyguards for eccentric billionaire Sid Boffin, when his superyacht was conquered by US Marines and zombies.

Sid, as we had suspected, was not merely a megalomaniacal billionaire but also a supervillain. Lulu and I barely survived, thanks to the undead mother-in-law, Diane Newby.

A month ago we were looking for work and running out of money, when Lulu called to me. "Hey, Sharon, look at this ad: 'Zombie Supermodels Wanted.' Top salaries paid for zombie-next-door appeal."

"We're certainly zombies. I modeled before I quit to pursue my CrossFit career rather than a starvation diet. Do you think I have zombie-next-door appeal, Lulu?"

"Sure! With your blond hair and blue eyes, you're a stereotypical American."

"Although I'm British. And six feet tall. And forty pounds too muscular to model."

"You're a shoo-in. But not me. I'm too short and dark and Mexican, and I've never modeled."

"You're completely mad, girl. You're absolutely gorgeous. They need Hispanic models. You look as good as Salma Hayek."

"Thanks. But will my MMA career count against me?"

"Don't mention it on your résumé. Just cover your cliff-diving and rock-climbing career in Acapulco. Oh, and add you're a kickboxing instructor."

"That's true. I sure educated my MMA opponents." Lulu laughed.

"We'll go together, and they'll hire us together or not at all."

"Deal." We shook on it.

The owner of Red-Eye Fashion enthusiastically hired us the next day.

"You're ideal!" Sally Bellows gushed. She was tall, thin, and perfectly dressed with sunglasses that would pay for our food for a month. "Sharon can model for the US, British, and Scandinavian markets, and Lulu can model for our Hispanic clientele. When can you start?"

"Today," I said. "When do we get paid?"

"We can give you an advance on your salary right after you fill out this paperwork." She handed us each a folder of forms. "Please go to our orientation room." Sally pointed to a red door in the back of the room.

We entered a bare room. No chairs, furniture, or rugs—just a glowing ceiling.

"What's this?"

"Sharon, I've got a bad—" The floor opened under us, and we fell twenty feet into water. Stabbing pain ripped along my right leg and left foot as spikes pierced us.

I started to scream and then tasted the water. "Salt water! Lulu, they're trying to de-zombify us!" Injecting salt water was a quick and painful way to kill the zombie bacteria.

"Quick! Let's get out of here before we lose our strength." Lulu unimpaled herself and broke the spikes with her zombie strength and tore them out of my leg and foot. We went to the wall of the tank and beat it. Solid concrete.

"Boost me up, Sharon." We swam to the bottom. Lulu got on my shoulders, and I kicked off the bottom. I had been an Olympic swimmer, and as a zombie, I was twice as strong. We both cleared the water like a whale breaching. Then I pushed Lulu's feet up with my hands while she kicked. I shot down and she rocketed upward and grasped the lip of the tank.

I fell flat on my back to avoid the spikes, so I had a good view of the blinding spark of the Taser as it hit Lulu. She fell toward me, paralyzed. I caught her and saw a hulk peer over the edge.

"Nighty-night!" he said cheerily as he tased me.

* * *

We awoke, healed but no longer zombies. I quickly checked for my spare zombie blood pens and ampules, but they were gone, as was my clothing. Instead, Lulu and I wore simple nightgowns. We lay on cots in a small, bare dorm room.

The door opened. "Mornin', beauties!" said the hair hulk with a big grin. "Here's the boss. Don't try anything." He pointed his Taser at us.

"Welcome to Red-Eye Fashion," Sally said as she entered carrying hangers of clothing. "You've gotten your first payment—dezombification. We love the zombie look but can't take any chances with zombie models escaping or going to our competitors. You'll wear red zombie contacts for the duration of your stay."

"How long will that be?" Lulu asked.

"As long as we need you. Just remember to do everything we ask. Our guards tase first and ask questions later. Here are your clothes for our first modeling session. If you do well, you'll get fed." She walked out.

We settled into a routine of twice-daily modeling and daily feeding. We discussed escape each night, as long as we could stay awake. Twice we tried to take the Taser from Gronk. I was not as fast and strong as I had been, but I still knew martial arts. He backhanded me and tased me into unconsciousness.

Lulu did better. She clung to the wall above the door before he came in, and dropped on him, wrapping around his neck and choking him. Before I could kick him, he banged Lulu against the doorframe hard enough to knock her out. This time I got a fist in the jaw before being tased.

Since then we'd been careful to be good "zombies" and models. We studied the path to and from our room to the modeling area.

We quickly ruled out an escape from our room. Built with concrete construction, with just a bathroom and cots, a prison cell couldn't be more secure. Our solid-steel door had no handle. It opened electronically from outside.

Other cell doors lined the concrete hall. The bare modeling room contained only props brought in for each modeling session and a green screen behind us to add various CGI backgrounds. Our sole hope was a single door next to the screen. It too was steel with no handle.

"Do you think we can take the Taser from Gronk?" Lulu asked at night as we lay on our cots in the dark.

"We tried and failed."

"How about if we both jump him together?"

"I don't have your climbing skills. I can't hang between the doorjamb and the ceiling."

"How about if you attack when he opens the door and I follow you and catch him off guard? If I get one kick in, I'll break his knee or jaw."

"We can try that. Maybe he's relaxed his guard."

"Tomorrow morning?"

"Why not? Wake me when you get up." Lulu was a light sleeper and always awoke before Gronk entered.

We showered the next morning and took our places beside the door. We made our pillows into rolls under our covers so our beds looked occupied.

The door opened outward. We waited for Gronk's "Wakey, wakey" call. It didn't come "Wake up!" a deep, strange voice hollered.

Zap! The Taser hit my pillow.

Instantly I attacked. The strange guard was defenseless with his Taser out. I barreled into a lanky, sinewy guy with hollow cheeks. He hit me with a cattle prod in his left hand, while his right held his empty Taser.

Spasming, I fell to the ground. Lulu vaulted over me and kicked at his hand holding the prod. He flicked his wrist, and her barefoot connected with the business end of the prod. Writhing in pain, she fell atop me.

"Bad girls. You have ten seconds to get to your feet, or I'll hit you again." He spoke as if talking to dogs.

"One. Two. Three..."

We rolled to our hands and feet, muscles quivering.

"Five. Six. Seven..."

We slowly stood, shaking.

He stared into our eyes with his dark gray eyes. "You're still defiant." Like lightning, he whipped the cattle prod between us, hitting us both.

We squatted, trying to keep control of our muscles.

"Stand up."

Again he stared into our eyes. "Less defiance. I want none. I can't take time to train you now. Go to the modeling room."

We went. I heard his steps behind us, and I asked, "What happened to Gronk?"

"No talking."

We modeled as usual. As we finished, I asked, Sally, "What happened to Gronk?"

"Oh, he's at the doctor. I'll be sure to tell him you missed him. How did you like Lurch?

He's a new hire."

"Where'd you get him? A concentration camp guard?"

"Funny girl! He has a lot of experience as a prison guard. But he was fired for cruelty.

Can you tell?" Sally smiled impishly, showing her perfect teeth between her perfect lips.

That night as we lay down in the dark, I said to Lulu, "Now what?"

"Sorry about that. I was sure we could overcome the guard. I never thought they had a cattle prod *and* a Taser."

"Yeah, I've never seen that before. When the Taser hit the pillow, I was sure we had him."

"I'm out of ideas." Lulu sounded defeated.

"I got one."

"What?"

"It may work no better than yours. How about we attack Sally and the guard during the modeling session?"

"One of us will get tased, and the other will get Sally. I like that!"

"Me too. Do you want to play rock paper scissors to decide who does what?"

"It should be me. You took point last time."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Good night."

The next morning we both were completely humble and obedient to Lurch. Yet after staring into our eyes, he said, "You're still defiant. I promise I'll tase you for that. But not now."

Sally posed us in risqué swimming suits around deck chairs. I watched Lulu out of the corner of my eye. As Sally posed me and told me to look seductive, I heard the deck chair go flying. I watched Lulu as she landed on the Taser and take it in her belly.

Meanwhile, I grabbed Sally's hands and bent them both behind her. "Drop the Taser!"

Expressionless, Lurch held his Taser up for me to see the setting. "Let go of Ms. Bellows, or your friend will die. I've turned the power to zombie mode. That will kill her."

Lulu, jerking in pain on the floor yelled, "No!"

"Sally, get your goon to drop the Taser, or you lose two arms." I pulled her wrists up between her shoulder blades.

"Arghh! Drop it!"

"No." Drawing another Taser, Lurch shot me, and I fell to the floor. All I remembered was pain.

The door opened the next morning, awakening both of us. After hours of electrical torture, we'd fallen unconscious and were dragged and dumped in our rooms.

"Wakey, wakey!" squeaked a familiar high voice.

Every muscle in my body ached as I groaned, rolled over, and fell on the floor.

"Rough night? You've got ten seconds to stand. One. Two..."

I arose, shaking like a Parkinson's patient. Lulu quivered beside me.

"Gronk, you won't believe this," I said.

"Try me."

"I'm happy to see you."

"You're in bad odor now. You've got a day of torture ahead of you." He grinned.

We moaned.

"Here's your first surprise." Pointing the Taser at us, he reached to his eye and pulled off a brown contact. One red eye gleamed at us.

"What happened?" I asked, bewildered.

"Got zombified. It was the best way to treat my cancer. I have to hide it from Sally. You know she's got a phobia about zombies." He spoke conversationally, like he was a friend. He popped his contact back in.

"Get showered. You've got ten minutes for both of you."

Clean, awake, we felt better.

In the hall, Gronk said, "Turn to the right. We're going to the torture room."

We turned, then he said, "Stop. I think we should improve the odds a little."

"Ow!" I said as I felt a needle jab my buttock.

"Ay caramba!" Lulu said.

"Go to the end of the hall." As we slowly marched, Gronk said, "All the guards are in the torture room. There are nine, plus me. The guards will take turns until you're both groveling. The first one to get you to submit gets a bonus. I want that to be me, so when we get there, both fall to your knees and beg me to save you."

"You've got to be kidding!" I said.

"No way!" Lulu said.

"I just gave you injections of zombie blood. Guards are watched as closely as you prisoners. If I'm going to bust out of here, I'll need your help. If we can stall until you're full zombies again, say twenty minutes, we should be able to defeat them all. Deal?"

"I don't know," I said.

"What have we got to lose, Sharon?"

"Uh, nothing. We've got no other plan. Okay, Gronk, we'll try it. By the way, what's your real name?"

"It's Elroy. I prefer Gronk."

"I understand."

"Sharon, I'm already feeling better."

"Yeah, me too." *Better* meant my whole body ached but I no longer felt shaky.

Gronk opened the door. Nine guards stood in a circle, each with a Taser and a cattle prod.

"Hi, fun lovers!" Gronk called. "Sorry to cut this play session short, but I persuaded these girls to submit to me. Right, girls?"

"Right." I fell to my knees and said, "I submit."

"I submit too," Lulu said next to me.

"Hey wait! That's not what the boss said," shouted a short black guard.

"We still want our fun," said another blond one who could be a model himself.

"I don't believe this," Lurch said. "Let me see their eyes."

"Look as long as you'd like, Lurch. I know how you love that," Gronk said. He folded his thick arms and smiled, looking like a furry frog.

Lurch peered into our eyes. They must not have turned red yet. I thought, *Submit, submit, surrender*. If we could just stall for ten more minutes.

"Something's weird about this. These are the two worst models." Lurch looked at Gronk.

"You're the softest guard."

"Hey! I resent that," Gronk protested.

"Just facts. These Tasers record each use. You've used yours the least of all guards."

"If you think I'm so soft, Lurch, you just come here and say that to my face."

"I'll do that." He planted himself in front of Gronk and said, "You're soft." His nose almost touched Gronk's.

Thunk! Gronk's uppercut hit Lurch's chin, and he collapsed in a heap. Gronk drew two Tasers and zapped the two closest guards. "It's time, girls!"

We went from kneeling to attacking with one snap of our legs and launched at the two closest guards. I head-butted mine and grabbed his Taser and cattle prod.

I heard the familiar CRACK of Lulu's flying kick and turned in time to see one guard slam into a wall, already unconscious. Lulu pivoted in air, twisted the nearest guard's cattle prod, and shocked him with it.

I jabbed the one next to me with a cattle prod and shot the one next to him with my Taser. Gronk rammed into the last guard opposite him with two cattle prods, and the battle was over.

"Whew. I wasn't sure we could pull this off," Gronk said.

"It went really fast," Lulu said. "I feel like my old zombie self again."

"You are. Your eyes are glowing," I said.

"So are yours."

"Let's visit Ms. Sally and get out of here," Gronk said. "Go in front of me and keep your heads down. Don't let anyone see your eyes."

As we walked toward the modeling room, Gronk said, "Only Ms. Sally has the key out of here. The modeling room door goes to the guard's rooms, and only her key lets us out."

"Did you learn you'd be a prisoner after you agreed to the job?" I asked.

"You got it in one. Ms. Sally shows us how much money we have in the bank, but we never see any of it. She gives us anything we want, except freedom."

"I'm surprised no guard tried to escape," Lulu said.

"Some did, I think, but they just disappeared."

We entered the modeling room, heads bowed.

"Hsst! Why are you interrupting, Gronk? These two should be tortured," Sally said, looking furious.

Two models in eighteenth-century attire lounged on a divan.

"They've been tortured. Down, girls."

We knelt, heads still lowered.

"Well, well. You surprise me, Gronk. I thought you were the softest guard I had."

"I've toughened up. Look at this." Gronk reached up and pulled his contacts off.

"Eeee! You're a zombie!"

"So are we." We jumped up and grabbed her arms.

"Eeee!"

Sally Bellows never stopped screaming until the police took her away to prison.