

Love for the Undead

Student Name

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## Introduction

Imagine a world overrun with undead creatures roaming everywhere, patiently waiting to pounce on human flesh. Although it may seem like a farfetched idea, it very well may happen in the future. With each year, the zombie genre is increasing in popularity (Birlew, 2012). Books, comics, movies, and television shows about zombies such as the American horror drama, *The Walking Dead*, are booming with success. College students all over are expressing their love for zombies by creating athletic live action role-playing games involving two alliances, humans and zombies. Eastern Michigan University is one of those colleges, and they named their organization Outbreak: Eastern. Outbreak: Eastern provides students with preparation and practice in fighting zombies so that if one day the world wakes up to a zombie infestation they will know exactly what to do.

Zombies and the apocalypse intrigue me, which is why when I found out there is an organization on campus all about zombies and preparing for an attack, I wanted to learn everything about it. I chose to study the community of Outbreak: Eastern mainly for my love of zombies and zombie movies. Another reason I chose Outbreak is because they use nerf guns for their live action role-play game. Nerf guns are toy guns that require foam darts as ammunition so as not to be too painful. However, when shot in the face from less than a foot away they can still hurt. I know all about nerf guns because my little brother loved them and played with them all of the time. Also, the community was easy to observe since they meet on campus so I did not have to go out of my way to observe them. I wanted to learn all about how the community works and what takes place each time the group meets. I wanted to understand why people joined the group, find out who founded it, and see if people prefer being a human or a zombie. Observing the

community and interviewing the president of Outbreak gave me a better understanding of every aspect there is to the organization.

I expected the games to be dull and boring because to me, live action role-play does not seem like much fun. What could be fun about a bunch of people running around pretending to be zombies and shooting each other with foam darts? I was in for a surprise and a change of mind when I went and experienced Outbreak first hand for myself.

### **Getting a Closer View**

Outbreak is a very informal organization and is open for anyone to join and take part in at any point in time. People can be considered a member by just showing up to one of the missions. When I first went to one of Outbreak's meetings I was an outsider. I sat on a ledge observing everything that was happening around me from a distance. People came up to me throughout the occasion questioning why I was just sitting on the ledge, what was I writing about in my notebook, and why I was not playing along with everyone else there. Being an outsider just observing did not give me very much information about Outbreak because I did not understand everything that was going on. I thought I could gain a lot more knowledge by taking part in the game, so next time I went to observe I joined in. Nobody questioned me when I came to play the next time because different people come all of the time. I saw new faces as well as old during each of the four times I observed Outbreak. I was right in thinking I would gain more knowledge by participating. Once I was an insider, I learned so much more about the missions and how everything worked. As I played I asked questions to others taking part in the mission. Because I seemed to be a true member of Outbreak, people were not hesitant in answering my questions, and were comfortable with me being there.

### Supplies for the Attack

It is recommended that members bring their own nerf guns and ammunition to the missions, but Outbreak can supply people with one of the many guns that they have, along with some nerf darts to go with it. Before the first mission of the day starts, all of the nerf darts need to be loaded into cartridges that get put into the nerf guns. There are many different sizes of

cartridges so some may hold six darts while others hold thirty darts. There are several different kinds of nerf guns that are out there. Some guns may be automatic and can hold bigger cartridges, while

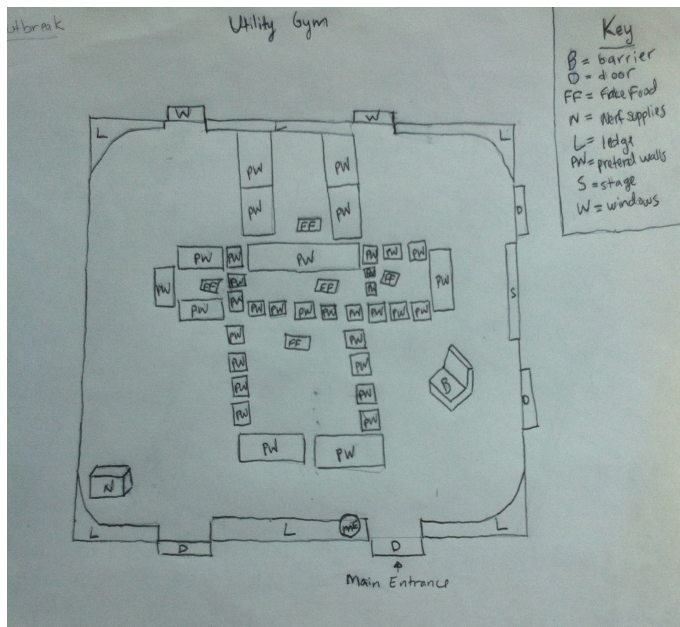


others may only hold one or two darts and require reloading very often. Everyone has their own preferences to guns, and I personally like the automatic ones better because they fire more shots at once. Humans can use as many nerf guns and darts as they can hold to try and prevent zombies from coming near them. Some players have vests and/or belts that help them carry more guns on their person. During each mission the humans fire hundreds of nerf darts at the zombies coming at them so at the end of each mission everyone is asked to pick up nerf darts that are scattered all

over the gym floor. After the darts are all picked up they need to be reloaded into the cartridges that are then put into nerf guns. Once the guns are loaded the humans can go into the hallway to prepare for their mission.

## Set-up

Each mission consists of a different set up in the small, heated gymnasium where they



meet. The gym is a noisy atmosphere with a slight smell of body odor because of the temperature of the room and everyone running around. They use mats and boxes to act as walls so that people cannot walk through them. The mats and boxes turn into pretend rooms because otherwise the gym is just a wide-open space. Since the gym is just an open

space, it makes it easy to set up the mats and boxes differently every week. They use around fifty mats and boxes, which can be turned in to countless different set up formations. The map that I drew and included is how the room was set up during one particular mission.

## Zombies Galore

Each week a new type of zombie is introduced to the group. The president, Malik, decides which zombies will be at each mission. All of the zombies require a different amount of shots to the head or body to be killed. While I was there I learned of several different kinds of

zombies. For example, a clicker is a zombie that is blind and wanders aimlessly until someone shouts, “loud noises over here!” Once they hear the call, they can attack the humans in that area, but with one shot to the head they die. If a zombie is shot on the body they are stunned for three seconds. Being hugged for at least three seconds by a zombie kills a human. Screamers are another type of zombie that makes every clicker zombie turn into a runner. This means that clickers can now see the humans and run towards them when they hear the screams. Running zombies do not stop chasing humans until they are shot dead by humans, or once all of the humans have been turned into zombies. Another way to stop the zombies from running is to kill the screamer zombie. This requires humans to unlock the imaginary shield that is covering the screamer and then shooting it three times in the head. Humans unlock the imaginary shield by standing in front of the screamer for thirty seconds. One of the last zombies I learned about is the zombie lord. Zombie lord is the most powerful zombie in the mission. To kill one it must be shot five times just to make it drop down to its knees, then it must be shot three more times until it dies. The way humans can tell zombies apart is by the way each zombie acts during the mission.

### **The Missions**

Every Wednesday at 7:30 pm, Outbreak gathers for their weekly missions in the utility gym of the rec at Eastern Michigan University. Missions are games where members act as zombies or humans and try to achieve a certain



goal. Every week there is a new mission with a different goal that Malik and the moderators, Max, David, and Alan come up with. Moderators are the people who make sure the rules are being followed and keep the game flowing smoothly without problems. There are zombie moderators who keep track of zombies that may be shot and killed, and there are human moderators who pay attention to whether humans are killed or not to make everything fair.

A mini game, or mission, is complete when the humans have accomplished a certain goal. For instance, one mission goal for the humans was to, without dying, get food packs from behind each of the walls that were set up throughout the gym. If the humans recovered all of the food packs and survived, then that mission was over. A mission can also end if all of the humans are turned into zombies, making it a victory for the zombies. Mini games tend to last about fifteen minutes depending on the difficulty of the course. Once a game is finished a new group of humans gets to face the same mission.

### **The Big Games**

The missions on Wednesdays are just smaller games that prepare the group for their big games they hold once a month on a Saturday night. The Saturday games are much more intense and exhilarating than the mini games, and last about two hours. Outbreak gets the entire five floors of the rec at Eastern to themselves during their games on Saturdays, compared to the small utility gym they have to use on Wednesdays. The rec is closed on Saturday's during big games to all others that are not participating in the game. The rec consists of many different rooms, big and small, with a few different gymnasiums and a pool. This opens up a whole multitude of things they can do differently from the mini games on each floor and each mission. Missions can be more developed and in depth when they have more room to work with. When the missions are

in the gyms, zombies swarm humans from all directions because they can come from anywhere. However, when they are in hallways or staircases, humans know where zombies might be because there are only a couple directions they can come from.

Another reason why the big games are more fun is that many more people come to them. During the mini games on Wednesdays the amount of people that show up range from ten to twenty. However, Saturday games tend to have about forty to fifty people give or take a few, and are pretty split in the amount of males and females that show up. There can be more zombies and groups of humans with the more people that show up. All groups of humans face the same missions, and humans are not against other humans. There can also be a greater variety of zombies with more people. The mini games usually only have one or two types of zombies present, but in the big games every zombie that members have been introduced to can be found wandering around. People also tend to dress up or paint their face to look like a zombie for the big games to be more life like. During the mini games on Wednesday, people just show up in what they are wearing for the day. No dress code is required for missions of any kind. Dressing up is just for fun.

One down side to the big games is that some people show up who have not been to all of the mini games, which are not mandatory, but then they do not always know all of the different types of zombies to look for. Lack of knowledge can slow their own group down because they would have to be informed on how to kill the different kinds of zombies they come across. As the humans pass each mission and move on to the next floor, the missions get harder which can cause problems with inexperienced players. A down side for humans in the big games is that they face a challenge of not knowing where the zombies are at all times because the rec is so



large. Whereas in the mini games, the humans can clearly see where the zombies are so it is a little bit easier to kill the zombies.

### **One on One**

Throughout my time observing the community of Outbreak I had the opportunity to meet and get to know many people. Among those people is the president, Malik Mathis, whom I interviewed after all was said and done. Malik shared with me his personal experience with Outbreak and his becoming president, as well as answering questions I still had about the community. He joined Outbreak in 2011 as a freshman, and in the second semester last year he became the president. Before taking presidency he was a zombie moderator. He became president because he wanted to make Outbreak thrive and continue to be fun for anyone who wanted to join. He informed me that Outbreak: Eastern was founded by Jesse Peck and Dustin Miller in 2008. Malik himself never had the pleasure of meeting them because he was still in high school at the time. An experience with Outbreak that stands out to him the most was his very first game. Malik says, “It set the standard for how the rest of the year was going to go. It seemed like there was a hundred people there because of how intense it was, but in reality there was only thirty to forty. It was the most fun I’d ever had.” As Malik shared his experience with me I could tell it genuinely was a fun time for him because of the happiness and excitement in his voice.

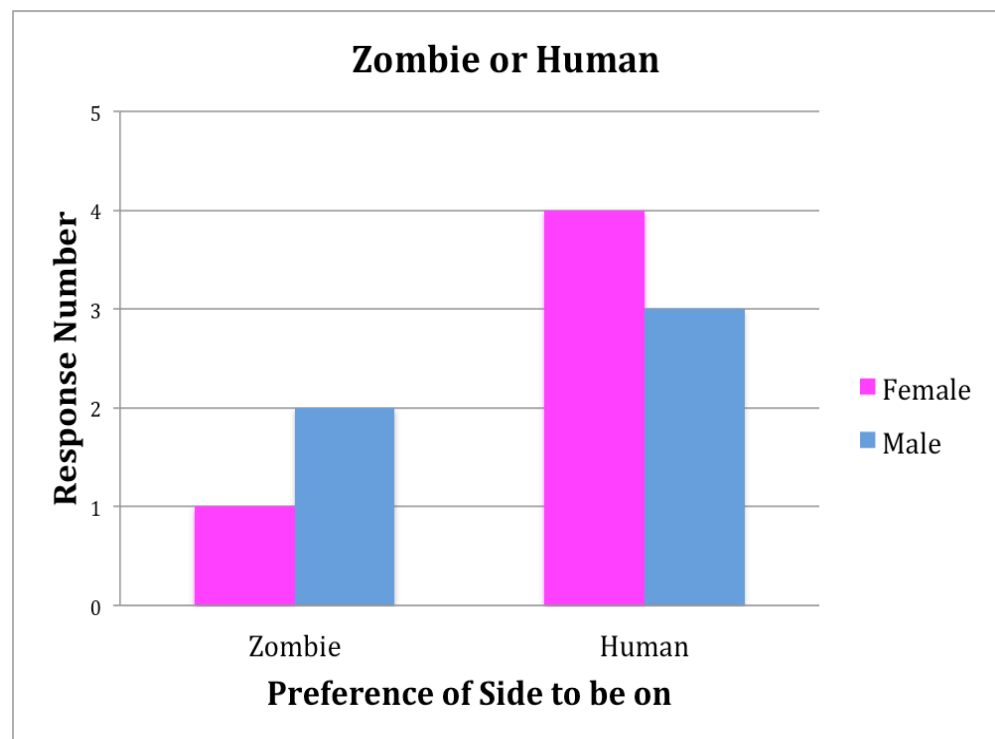
### **Human or Zombie**

Originally in my proposal I wondered how people were divided among the resistance side and undead side. I used the terms resistance and undead because the description of the

organization on the Outbreak website used those terms (Outbreak: Eastern, 2011). I realized that members just call the two different sides humans or zombies. Contrary to what I thought, members can choose which side they want to be on, and the roles change once a mission is completed. The amount of humans to zombie ratio in a mission depends on the amount of people that show up to the meetings. There are always more zombies than humans, and the amount of humans varies between two to six. Before each mission, a moderator simply asks who wants to be a human, and

the moderator picks a few people that are raising their hand. Usually everyone gets a turn at being human because there are multiple rounds and everyone

switches each time.



I wondered which side people prefer to be on, human or zombie. My curiosity led to a survey, which I conducted among the first ten people, five males and five females, in the group who showed up during one of the meetings. My question was simply, “Who do you prefer to be” with the options of zombie or human. I also asked the participants to state their gender as well so I could see if gender correlated with their choices. Almost all females that I asked said that they

prefer being human over being a zombie, while males were pretty much split between human and zombie. After participating in the missions myself, my personal preference is being a human because being a zombie takes a beating. Zombies have to get shot in the head in order to die, so humans are constantly shooting zombies in the eyes, mouth, nose, and face. For their protection zombies wear goggles if they do not already wear glasses. I did not find being a zombie fun, and I see why most females prefer to be a human. Most males probably like being a zombie because they do not care whether they are hit in the face or not. They may in fact actually find it entertaining.

### **The Bigger Picture**

After observing the community of Outbreak for four weeks, I learned that everyone who goes and participates has fun and enjoys partaking in the live action role-play games. Nobody there is in a bad mood or has a frown on their face. The games were nothing like I thought they would be. They were intense and not boring at all. During my interview with him, President Malik says, "I joined Outbreak: Eastern because I enjoy zombies, and a nerf war on campus seemed too good to be true. I can say that it is easily one of my best decisions I have made at school." Malik found something he liked on campus, had fun with it, and worked his way up the chain to become the president of something he truly enjoys doing.

From watching the members' enjoyment I realized that during college, people should go out and find an organization or group they might like. Even if they are not sure of what is in store for them, students should still try it out. College is a time for people to step out of their comfort zone and explore new territories. Joining a community like Outbreak can build new friendships and memories that can last a lifetime.

References

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