

Infectious role-play game at HMC ends with zombies eaten by brains

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by Rich Smith

Let's say you're a zombie with an empty, growling stomach.

Where do you, as one of the living dead, go to find delectable prey upon which to feast?

Harvey Mudd College, of course.

To a hungry zombie, HMC is a veritable five-star dining establishment with nothing but grade triple-A brains on the menu.

However, even at a place as well stocked as HMC, a zombie feeding frenzy can quickly deplete the available supply of cerebellums—the very situation that threatened to develop during February when the game craze known as Humans vs. Zombies swept through the five Claremont Colleges with all the intensity of a lab-engineered virus infecting a hapless host body.

The game started at a Maryland college six years ago and since has spread contagion-like to over 200 institutions of higher learning around the globe. It's been a Claremont Colleges staple now for the past three semesters, according to HMC sophomore James White, who served as a game moderator.

As many as 70 of the approximately 400 Claremont Colleges players in the most recent contest were HMC students, White said.

HvZ (gamer shorthand for Humans vs. Zombies) begins with everyone playing the role of a human, except for a handful of participants selected by the moderators to function as so-called original zombies who set the chaos in motion.

Every human player touched by an original zombie turns into a second-generation zombie. These “converts” then roam about in search of other humans to touch and zombie-fy.

The game typically ends when the lone surviving human—outnumbered and ultimately cornered—is dragged shrieking into this legion of horror.

It amounts to a sophisticated game of tag, but one in which the zombies have distinct tactical advantages. The biggest is that, unlike their movie counterparts with the halting gait, HvZ deadsters are permitted to sprint in pursuit of quarry.

However, the humans don't simply behave like cattle passively awaiting the cull. Their goal is to elude the zombies for however many days the game is scheduled to run.

They do this with the help of special 'weapons"—namely, Nerf-blasters and hand-thrown socks (zombies hit with these are out of play for 15 minutes, affording the humans an opportunity to flee and seek refuge in designated safe zones).

The corps of ambulating corpses won the first two times HvZ was played at HMC. But, on this occasion, victory went to the humans.

Zombie dreams of campus domination died (and failed to reanimate) when Pomona first-year student Scott Lindburg pulled off a daring escape from the foyer of Galileo Hall, which the zombies had claimed as their hive.

Lindburg said he was able to activate a "trip switch" while fleeing and this caused "charges" placed deep within the hive to "detonate." The charges, he explained, were planted by a determined band of resistance fighters that had become surrounded and were fast running out of hope (as well as socks).

The ensuing pulse "explosions"—harmless to humans—"vaporized" the entire horde of zombies.

With the rapacious, brain-lusting creatures vanquished, the dozen or so surviving humans promptly set about the task of building civilization anew at HMC, White reported.

"Players had a fantastic time," he said. "HvZ is a game that really brings people together."