

# The Worst Summer Ever

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A family rents a cabin and finds that bugs aren't the only things that bite in these woods.

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Squashed between my two hulking brothers in the back of my father's coupe on a two thousand mile trip was not the way I wanted to start my summer vacation. The summer after the first year of college is a crucial time for a young adult. You need to be available to strengthen the relationships you just forged at school and you need to be around to reinforce your friendships with the people who live in your town and went to your high school. The last thing I needed was to leave Pennsylvania behind and drive to something called Flathead National Forest where there were no people and no internet. My younger brother was a loser and had no friends but my older brother shared my sentiments. "Dad, I don't want to go. My girlfriend is finally home from London and I'd like to see her for a change," he said. That was a weak argument in my father's eyes. "You can see her when school starts again. How many more chances are we going to have to go on a great family outing?" I thought that the two of us united against my father would be enough to deter him, but he was having none of it. "You're both going and that's the end of it," he said. "I already paid for the cabin in cash and requested time off from work." When I had failed, I tried to recruit my mom to the cause. "You can't just pick them up and take them wherever you want," she yelled at him over the phone. "I don't care that you're going through a tough time. They're adults now and they can't afford to waste their summers with you. They need to grow up and learn responsibility. Something you should do." My mom never pulled punches and often erred on the side of harshness, especially towards my father. That was probably the chief reason for their divorce. If not for that last tiny detail, the trip never happens. Mom got the house in the divorce and Dad moved to a new place only a block away. Every day, he would drive past his old house and see mom's new boyfriend's car sitting in his old driveway. On those really unlucky days, he would see the new boyfriend kissing his old wife on his old porch. I could understand why he needed to get away, but still. It was summer! Halfway through the trip, somewhere between boring flat farmland and boring stinky cow manure land, the air conditioning went kaput. Uncle Jerry, who wasn't really our uncle, stuck his head out of the passenger's side window and enjoyed the wind. Those of us stuck in the back of the car weren't so lucky. I thought the increasingly strong smell of cow manure was getting to my head until I realized it was the stink of my brothers' sweaty armpits that I smelled. "Dad, can we please stop," I begged. "I'm going to die back here." He didn't even have the

decency to look at me in the rearview mirror when he answered. "You're not going to die. We're making good time." My father hated stopping for any reason whatsoever. Your kidneys had to be just about ready to burst before he would stop to let anyone pee. He loved shaving minutes off the GPS arrival estimation and hated when the thing would skyrocket by a half hour when we stopped for only a few minutes. When we finally arrived at the cabin after that horrendous car ride, I thought things could only go up from here. I couldn't have been more wrong. There were holes in the roof of the living room, allowing mosquitoes and other nasty bugs to crawl in. There were only two beds that both of my brothers claimed before I could even drag my suitcase through the front door. We had to use a hole in the ground outside the cabin when we had to go to the bathroom and the running water barely worked. When it did, it came out thick and brown. I was certain the outside toilet and the sink were crossing lines somehow. Fishing was the only thing to do and I didn't like fishing. There was no TV. Uncle Jerry, my dad and my brothers all snored. Hot dogs, hamburgers and marshmallows were the only food we brought and I was a vegetarian. Cell phone service was spotty. A raccoon was living in my closet, there were snakes everywhere and a poison ivy rash was creeping up my leg. It was the worst summer ever and I didn't even mention the zombies yet. The moans sounded like the power generator kicking into overdrive or even the wind howling through the trees, but as they got louder I thought it was someone playing a trick. Dad and Uncle Jerry were pounding their cheap beers and I wouldn't put it past them to play some stupid joke, but I ruled them out when I saw Uncle Jerry passed out on the floor and Dad trying to drunk dial mom. It could have been my older brother, who despite having a girlfriend was hanging out with some girl he met at the general store like the sleazeball he was. Yet, when he returned to the cabin with the girl in tow, I knew it wasn't him. "Dad, what the hell is that noise?" I finally asked. He put down the phone and cocked his head to the side to listen. "Sounds like the generator," he said, slurring his words and returned to trying to dial my mom. "Dad, I swear I hear..." "Wait...I hear it. Darrell, get off the roof for crying out loud," my dad yelled at my youngest brother. "I'm not on the roof," my younger brother's tiny voice responded. He was slouched in a chair in the corner and reading a book. Dad and I both looked up at the same time to see the face of a woman sticking her head in through one of the larger holes in the ceiling. Pieces of skin fell from her face onto the couch and gray ooze dripped from her wounds onto the hardwood floor. I screamed and Dad jumped up and started kicking Uncle Jerry. "Michael! Michael!" he yelled for my older brother. Michael came running out of his room without a shirt and his new girl followed barely clothed. "Push that couch in front of the door," he told Michael. "Darrell, help him!" Uncle Jerry staggered to his feet and nearly fell down when he saw the rotting head poking through the ceiling. "Here," Dad said. "Handing me a broom. Jab at that thing till it goes away." I held the broom away from my body as if it were going to bite me. "Where are you going?" I asked my dad. He was stumbling down the hallway towards his bedroom, crashing into the walls as he went. "I've got a gun," he yelled. "God, I didn't know your mom came on the trip too," Uncle Jerry said before cackling like a hyena. I only nudged the woman's head with the broom handle, but it sunk into her soft skull. More gray goo poured out and dripped to the floor. "Gross. This is gross," I shouted, handing the broom to Uncle Jerry. He jabbed the broom with authority, but missed the head a few times and created more

holes in the ceiling. When he finally connected, the broom went through the back of her skull and the woman shrieked before collapsing. Jerry let go of the broom and it hung in the air. "I need help!" Dad yelled from down the hallway. Uncle Jerry and I ran and found my father in one of the bedrooms kicking at a group of zombies that were trying to climb in through the only window. Uncle Jerry ran to the dresser and started dragging it towards the window. "Help me," Uncle Jerry demanded. I pushed while he pulled and soon the dresser was in front of the window, blocking it. You could hear the monsters scratching against the hollow wood trying to claw their way in. Across the hall, two zombies had already staggered through the window and more were threatening to climb in. They shambled through the room and across the hallway towards us, moaning as they went. Dad reached under the bed and pulled out a duffel bag. Inside was a shotgun. "Move," he said to me and Uncle Jerry as he cocked the shotgun with one hand. His first shot blasted the wall where the light switch was. His second shot blew a hole in the door sending splinters everywhere. The zombies waddled through the hallway unimpeded and into the room. "This is hard when your drunk," he said, offering the shotgun to Uncle Jerry. He shook his head and waved his hands. "No way. I'm more drunker than you," he said, slurring his words. He offered the gun to me. "I've never fired a gun before," I said. "I don't know..." "Take it," my dad said as he forced it into my chest. I cocked the gun like he did and raised it up. The zombie's hands were outstretched and pieces of skin and flesh were dropping from him with every step. I closed my eyes and squeezed the trigger. With a loud bang, the first zombie hit the floor. His chest had exploded and bits and pieces were all over the room. I took aim at the second zombie and fired. His arm flew off and into the hallway, but he kept walking. I fired again. The skull erupted, covering the ceiling with brain matter and gray goo. The zombie fell to the ground with a thud. "Woo! Nice shot!" my dad proclaimed and handed me a pouch of ammo. Uncle Jerry patted me on the back, but soon turned to vomit all over the bed. More zombies were coming in through the bedroom window so I cocked my gun and rushed into the hallway. I dropped three of them and cleared the immediate area outside the window so Dad could muscle the dresser in front of the window. "That should hold them," he said. "Where did..." A cry of pain came from the other bedroom. We found Uncle Jerry laying on the floor holding the head of the zombie whose chest I blew in. Evidently blowing a hole in the chest wasn't enough. As Uncle Jerry tried to follow us into the other bedroom, the zombie grabbed his leg and pulled him to the ground. It took a big chunk of flesh from the side of his face before he managed to rip the rotting head off its shoulders. "Give me the gun and go check on your brothers," my dad said, holding out his hand but keeping his eyes on Uncle Jerry. Black goo dripped from the wound on his face and he was starting to shake. "Dad, you don't have... This isn't the movies. You don't know..." "Amanda, give me the gun." I handed over the gun and ran from the room and down the hallway. I held my hands over my ears to muffle the gunshot, but it was still one of the loudest noises I've ever heard in my life. In the living room, I found my older brother keeping his weight against the couch that barred the door. His new girl helped him, but her arms and legs kept wobbling as tears streamed down her eyes. The door thumped against the couch as the zombies tried to push their way in. On the opposite side of the room, my younger brother had unplugged one of the tall metal lamps and was using it to police three windows and keep the zombies from climbing

in. The two windows flanking the front door were closed, but the zombies were pounding on them with their rotting fists. One of the windows was starting to crack. I grabbed the broom and wrenched it free from the skull of the woman on the roof. More hands were reaching through the holes in the ceiling and heads were trying to squeeze through. I only hoped the roof wouldn't collapse under the weight of all of them up there. When the window finally smashed, Michael's girl fell to the ground and started sobbing hysterically. I ran over to the window and pushed back the zombies with the business end of the broom handle. The goo from their rotted flesh clung to the handle in long stringy strands. Dad finally emerged from the bedroom, dragging a mattress through the hallway. He propped it up against one of the back windows before running back to the bedroom to fetch his gun. "Hurry, Dad! My arms are getting tired," Darrell said, stamping the base of the lampstand on a zombie's face. He returned with the shot gun and I threw him the bag of ammo. He looked a lot more sober as he unloaded shot after shot into the zombies trying to climb into the window. The other window flanking the door had shattered and the zombies were pulling themselves up. "Grab the fire poker," I said to Michael's girl. "Help us!" She looked up at me with swollen, red puffy eyes. Her blonde hair was a tangled mess and her white tank top was stained from the dust on the couch. "Go!" I yelled. She staggered to her feet and ran over to the fireplace and pulled the fire poker from the stand. Her shaky hands dropped it a half dozen times before she had a steady grip on it. "What do I do with it?" she asked. I was ready to take my broom stick and jab it through her skull. "Start smashing the monsters!" I yelled. She looked pale and ready to wet herself but she ran to the other cracked window and started to stab at the zombies. On her first jab, she stuck a zombie right in the face and the eyeball stuck to the poker. She shrieked and dropped the poker. Michael had seen enough. He picked her up and sat her on the couch. I felt much more confident with Michael holding the poker and stabbing the zombies. Dad handed the gun to Darrell and told him to hold the three windows. The zombies kept knocking the mattress over and threatening to climb in. Dad went and grabbed the other mattress and the two box springs and placed them over the window. Two whole bed sets were too heavy for the zombies to knock over. Now there were only four windows and the front door and we had a person stationed at each one. We were a well-oiled killing machine, stabbing, bashing, and smashing zombies. When one of us got tired, we could sit on the couch while the other person took our place. Even Michael's girl, whose name turned out to be Lauri, managed to control her tears and do a little fighting to give one of us a break. The zombies were dropping fast, but it seemed that every time we killed one, two would take its place. The night sky was beginning to lighten and dawn was on its way. "Dad, my arms are getting cramped," I said. My shoulders had been burning for a few hours, but I couldn't stop. Just letting one zombie inside could be the end of us. Dad had run out of ammo for the shotgun a while ago and was now treating the weapon like a club. "We have to keep fighting," he said, cracking a zombie over the skull. "They'll disappear soon." More time passed and now I could see the sun rising on the horizon, painting the landscape in an orange-blue hue. Outside, there were hundreds more zombies surrounding the cabin. "There are so many," Lauri yelled, beginning to sob again. "We can't...we can't..." The fire poker fell to her side and soon the zombies had a hold of her, dragging her through the window. She didn't scream or yell, but only silently cried as the zombies began

tearing at the flesh on her face. Michael grabbed at her legs and tried to pull her back, but Dad grabbed him and pulled him off. "Let her go," he said. "We can't keep this up," Michael said. "We can't..." A loud moan came from the hallway followed by loud footsteps. Three zombies shambled into the hallway. "The bedrooms," Dad said as he rushed to meet them. He kicked one in the shin, snapping its leg and knocking it to the floor. Michael stomped on its head and the skull shattered. The other two lurched for Dad and pinned him to the floor. Michael kicked the head off one of them like a kicker kicking a field goal while Dad muscled the other one off his body and smashed its head in with his gun. Five more zombies came walking down the hallway towards us and one dropped in through the roof. Both of its legs broke on impact but it crawled its way towards Darrell. The zombies were climbing in through the windows that Lauri, Dad and Michael had abandoned and soon I was forced to fight the ones in the room and leave the window behind. "I'm too hungover for this," Dad said. Backed up against the fireplace, the four of us swung at anything that moved, trying to create as much space as possible, but the monsters kept coming. From the windows, from the bedroom, from the ceiling, from everywhere. "Guys," Dad said, decapitating a zombie, "I love all of you with all my heart. Mom's going to kill me for all of this." My brothers and I managed a chuckle. Not even staring death in the face could stop Dad from being Dad. We had just about run out of space when loud engines roared outside, drowning out the noises of the zombies. There were bright flashes of light and gunfire and screaming. Men in green felt campaign hats with matching uniforms burst through the front door with rifles and unloaded on the zombies. With the zombies' attention split, our family drove them back. One of the men fell to the ground, losing his sunglasses. A zombie sprung forward, crushing the glasses and landing on the man. His hands went to the zombie's neck to keep it from biting him. As he struggled under the weight of the zombie, I picked up his fallen rifle, placed it against the monster's skull and squeezed the trigger. The man gave me a thumbs up, leapt to his feet and rejoined the fight. The six men in green fought with us side by side. They were clumsy and careless, but they fought the zombies tooth and nail. They were mostly older men with graying hair and bulging stomachs. One of them wore an eye patch and one of them only had one arm and fought with a small shovel. When the last zombie fell, one of the men dropped his weapon and pulled out a cigarette. Another sat on top of a pile of zombies and wiped the sweat from his face. "You folks alright?" the man with the eye patch said. My dad looked over his kids. "I think we're ok," he said. "Thank God the army showed up. It was looking bad there." "We're not military, sir," the man with one arm said. "We're just park rangers." I didn't care who they were. I was glad the nightmare was over. I just wanted to curl up in my bed at home and cry. "Let's get the hell out of here," I said and my brothers voiced their agreement. "Folks, there's a lot of people still trapped in cabins," the one armed man said. "We can really use your help to save them." My dad sighed and said, "Come on kids. The trip isn't over yet." I picked up the fire poker and followed the men out the door. "This is the worst summer ever," I mumbled.