

TILL UNDEATH DO US PART

Have you ever read a hom-zom-rom-com? That's a homosexual zombie romantic comedy, in case you're wondering. Till Undeath Do Us Part is a short story that avoids the clichés of both gay and zombie fiction as it explores the fate of lovers Olly and Josh in the aftermath of a zombie outbreak.

Till Undeath Do Us Part is a fun read, employing gentle British humor, touching romance, and zombie horror in spades. The narrative is split, flitting between a breathless zombie chase through the streets and university buildings of Cambridge, England, on the one hand, and flashback scenes from the boys' burgeoning relationship on the other. The pace is relentless and the two parts of the narrative are skillfully woven together. With well-drawn characters and the scenery of zombie-infested Cambridge brought to life in vivid detail, I was left yearning to linger a little longer in this world on the brink of apocalypse.

After devouring the braaaaaains... er, book in no time at all, I was lucky enough to put some questions to its author, Anthony Camber.

What made you want to tell a zombie story?

You know, I wasn't going to. It was a bandwagon, and I wasn't going to jump on it. I'd read *World War Z* by Max Brooks, which is a great book, and *Patient Zero* by Jonathan Maberry, which I also enjoyed, and I didn't think I had anything to add.

And then I thought of the title "Till Undeath Do Us Part", just scribbling ideas in my notebook one day in a bar. And I thought, obviously, that's a zombie love story. Then I do what I often do, which is to write an opening paragraph and see what happens. The golden rule is to start as late

as you possibly can in a story otherwise people are checking their watches waiting for something to happen. Where do you start with a zombie love story? Start with an attack.

I wrote something down which I found really compelling, straight into the action, and it formed the basis of the opening paragraph as published.

And that dictated the story structure. I wanted to show how we'd got here, so I introduced the second timeline and played everything out in parallel.

What I wasn't interested in was any technobabble about the cause of the zombie epidemic. There are hints, but the last thing I wanted to do was bring the whole plot to a screeching halt with exposition. It's not that sort of story. It's about the people.

It's been described as a "hom-zom-rom-com". Is that what you'd call it?

I didn't come up with that description but I love it. *So So Gay* called it "Like *Shaun of the Dead*, but gayer" which is about the highest praise I can think of. I think of the four "oms" there's more emphasis on the zom and the rom than the hom and the com. Actually the hom is probably tiniest of all: love is love, relationships are relationships.

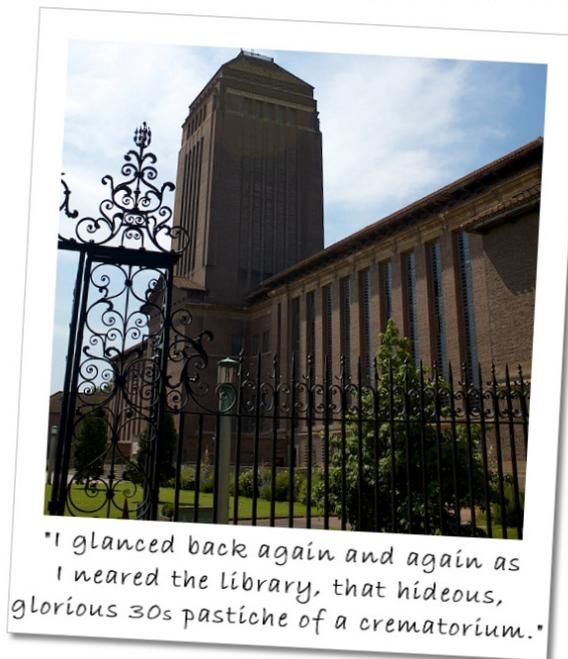
The sexuality of the two main characters is entirely irrelevant, which is how it should be.

I suppose in traditional categorization it's a contemporary gothic horror, though I never thought of it that way when I was writing it.

Why Cambridge?

Mostly because I live there. I know the locations very well – I studied at Downing College and then stuck around. Also I think stories like these work best if the locations are iconic. Think about one of the opening scenes of *28 Days Later*, with the guy staggering over a deserted and wrecked Westminster Bridge with the Houses of Parliament in the background. That's an unforgettable, classic shot.

King's College Chapel is a pretty iconic building. There's a line where one of the characters says the chapel's five hundred years old and has seen everything. And if you



look into its history, it has. When the first stone was laid, Cambridge was still a port. The chapel was used by Cromwell's troops as a parade ground during the English Civil War. It's one of the most amazing, beautiful buildings in the country, and what better place to have a zombie outbreak – something it definitely hasn't seen.

Was it important to you to feature a gay relationship at the core of the story?

Absolutely. Sexuality doesn't matter to the plot, which could be told with a man and a woman without losing anything, and in too many books that irrelevancy means it'll be a man and a woman by default. As a gay man myself I think it's terrifically important to tip the scales in the other direction, to tell stories that reflect a wider society. And if I were growing up gay in this society I'd want to read stories featuring people like me, across the genres. I don't want this book stamped as gay fiction: it'd be like putting *The Jungle Book* under Natural History. Gayness isn't its defining feature.

Have you had any negative reactions?

None whatsoever. I've had great comments from readers of all persuasions.

What was your inspiration for the characters?

There are hints of a few people I know. One character more than others. I daren't say more than that as nobody's noticed and it's funnier for me that way. Mostly they're slices of my own psyche, I think. Olly more so, as he's the narrator for one of the timelines.

The other characters mostly emerged from a line of dialogue that instantly felt right. Sometimes that was in the outline, sometimes in the first draft. I struggled with Josh for a time, and then he talked about sifting out the fatties and the cocks at rowing practice and I knew immediately who he was. He's my favorite character. I loved writing him.

Speaking of basing the story on things you know... sex on the chapel roof. Anything you'd like to tell us?!

Well, I'm sure it's happened. Because the chapel has seen everything...

Would you ever go back and re-work this short story into something longer?

It's tempting, but I don't think so. One of the things I like is the relentless, accelerating pace of the 'now' timeline. Expanding it to novel length without adding chunks would slow it down, and adding chunks would feel like inserting unnecessary detours. I do think, though, it could be reworked as a screenplay, if anyone out there wants to option it...

Any plans for a sequel? Jill the Porter leads the human uprising, perhaps...

It's funny. I was letting my pencil wander in my notepad a few months ago and it started writing something that it took my conscious mind a moment or two to recognize as a potential sequel. I let it run for a few paragraphs, and then got scared and quickly turned the page. I have a few other stories I want to tell before I think about returning to the zombie world. I'll keep the notepad, just in case.

Any other writing projects in the works?

Well, I've recently published another book, a full novel, called *The Pink and the Grey*. Again it's set in Cambridge, around a fictional college called St Paul's and a fictional local newspaper called the Cambridge Bugle. There are no zombies: it's a comedy of revenge and truth. It's gayer than *Till Undeath Do Us Part* – the college has a reputation, shall we say – but again it's not what I would call gay fiction; it's a comedy with gays in.

And I've just started writing a new story, which doesn't have a firm title yet. The plot's liable to shift around as I settle into it but it's a story I'm eager to tell before real-life events overtake it, which is very enigmatic and all I'm willing to say for now. Oh, it's not set in Cambridge, I'll let you have that. I suspect it'll be a short novel – time will tell.

Interview by alimac30. Images adapted, with kind permission, from www.anthonycamber.com. Till Undeath Do Us Part is available in e-book formats via the author's website.

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