

1) Brain-dead, brain-eating monsters

It was Monday, September 7, 2015. Jesse Biggsee was jarred out of a nightmare by a loud banging on his bedroom door.

“Time to get up!”

Jesse felt a moment of panic. His stepfather Joe, shouted again.

“I’m not gonna tell you again!”

Jesse threw off the sheets and jumped out of bed. Had he slept through his alarm? Had Mark already left? He checked the clock—it was two minutes before it was supposed to go off. Jesse heard Joe open his stepbrother’s door.

“Mark, it’s time to get up,” said Joe softly out in the hallway. “Breakfast is cooking. Come down when you’re ready.” He gently closed Mark’s door and thumped past Jesse’s room, down the stairs to the kitchen.

Jesse flopped back down onto his bed and pulled the bed sheets off the floor. His heart was still pounding—not from the rude awakening, but from his nightmare. He’d had the same dream every night for nearly a week. In it he was lost and desperate and running from a group of zombies. Brain-dead, brain-eating monsters, all exactly alike. They had horrible faces, lumpy and decayed, and unblinking eyes. They were dazed and mindless, with arms swinging lifelessly at their sides as they shuffled toward him. Jesse cringed and shuddered in fear just thinking about it.

He opened the curtains and looked out his bedroom window. On a branch of the small tree out front sat a red-tailed hawk, screeching, holding a squirming mouse in its claws. Jesse looked at it in astonishment. He’d never seen one before, not that he hadn’t seen a hawk or a mouse—it was a hawk holding a mouse in its claws that he’d never seen. To Jesse, it was a sign of victory. He was a curious scientist, and his mind never ceased to question. Jesse felt like that mouse, caught in an impossible situation, wondering if he could ever get himself out.

What was he thinking? He had to be on time! He didn’t have time to wonder about some stupid little mouse. He was frantic. He could not be late!