



CONVERSATIONS

Emma Freud's legal highs: Zombie experiences

Emma Freud | Saturday March 07 2020, 12.01am, The Times

When my oldest son was 11 he became increasingly concerned about our family's predicament in the event of a zombie apocalypse, and particularly the plight of Spike, his five-year-old brother. He drew up a detailed plan of action, laminated the drill and attached it to the fridge. It included the line: "If Spike gets infected, we will pull straws to see who decapitates him with the shovel. Bagsy go first."

I was grateful for this early training when I set off in pursuit of a high at the London branch of the Zombie Bunker Experience. According to the handsome soldier who led my gun-training session (I'm not going to lie, he may not have been an actual soldier), the world had been infected by a zombie contamination. We were dispatched with weapons into a menacing labyrinth of dark, damp tunnels and chambers to confront the 12 mutants attempting to devour the flesh of the 18 of us who had paid to destroy them. What is it about the allure of fear that made seemingly sane people cough up £115 each to spend three hours being ordered to crawl, screaming, through a zombie-infested air-vent in a pitch-dark, moist former car park - and give the living nightmare a five-star rating on TripAdvisor?



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The answer is biological. When we're scared our bodies go into fight, flight or freeze mode, causing a rush of adrenaline, which increases the blood circulation to ensure our bodies are primed for response. This has kept us alive for millennia. But with "controlled" fear - where we know we're actually safe - this biochemical rush of endorphins and dopamine can result in an opioid-like sense of euphoria. Tick.

There are side benefits too; remember the theory that a first date should be at a horror film, so you can fast-forward to the cuddling stage? At the worst moments in the zombie chambers of hell I found myself burying my face into the chest of the nearest un-dead person for succour (he was an engineer from Watford; sadly we've lost contact).

An hour into the ordeal my endorphins pumped so effectively that they took me straight out of that bunker and as quickly as possible towards the exit. Reader, I panicked and, in an unforgivable act of desertion, left the undead to eat the flesh of my team members.

PS There was a golden lining: the journey home was wild. It took 30 minutes, a large pizza and two cans of beer before the endorphin and dopamine high subsided, my heartbeat returned to normal and my brain calmed. I really, really hated those zombies, but, damn, it was good when it ended.

zombieexperiences.co.uk