

ZOMBIE TURKEYS



ANDY ZACH

What readers are saying about this book:

"I love irony, and it works particularly well here. Nice job."

"This is what makes the book so fun to read. Nice storytelling."

"Great job with these press conferences and their spin."

"This is too good. Love it!"

"Just clever writing."

"This is great! Laughed out loud."

"I laughed out loud, thought the parody was spot on, and enjoyed the satire."

"Oh, this cracked me up! Classic. Love it. Well done."

"You use similes so wisely—and they're so apropos to the story too."

ZOMBIE TURKEYS

by

Andy Zach

Zombie Turkeys: How an Unknown Blogger Fought Unkillable Turkeys

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events in this book are fictional or portrayed fictitiously, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental. This is a work of parody and not to be taken seriously.

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To the love of my life, my wife

Acknowledgments

Although I have already dedicated this book to my wife, Julie, I want to acknowledge her first, for encouraging me to keep at it through the months of writing and editing it required. Since I'm going in time order, other people who have encouraged me include my sister, Bonnie Green; my friend Jerry Moehn; and my children, Tori, Olivia, Ray, and daughter-in-law Jacki. The children were initial readers who gave invaluable feedback, making the book much better. Tori also worked hard on the web promotion of the book.

I must also mention my diligent editor, Dori Harrell. How helpful was she? I plan to use her for all the books in the *Zombie Turkey* series.

Sean Patrick Flanagan executed the book cover illustration with his normal panache. Thank you, Sean.

Contents

Foreword	9
Chapter 1 Bartonville	11
Chapter 2 Edwards	23
Chapter 3 Princeville	38
Chapter 4 Henry	48
Chapter 5 Tiskilwa	66
Chapter 6 Hennepin	76
Chapter 7 Joliet	81
Chapter 8 Plattville	102
Chapter 9 Chicago	114
Chapter 10 Navy Pier	139
Chapter 11 Shedd Aquarium	150
Chapter 12 Turkey Institute	161
Chapter 13 Goodenow	170
Chapter 14 Schaumburg	191
Epilogue	215

Foreword

Wow. I doubt I could have written this story about Lisa and me better than Andy did. Sure, I can blog and write newspaper copy, but actually writing a book?

It was kind of fun, being the one interviewed this time, rather than interviewing. Some of Andy's questions were really penetrating, getting into what I thought and felt at different stages in the story. I hadn't really analyzed them before. He brought things out of me I didn't know I had in me.

You probably already know that Dr. Andy Zach is the foremost paranormal animal expert. His seminal paper “Methods of Revivification for Various Species of the Kingdom Animalia” has been used by the Turkey Institute and every paranormal animal research lab in the country.

In addition to being a genius, Andy is very modest. No one would ever know he has a PhD in paranormal animal physiology. Fortunately, I'm a professional reporter and can find out this kind of obscure information. So when he approached me to turn our reporting into a book, I researched Andy Zach to the nth degree. Being highly impressed by his PhD paper, what I could understand of it, I agreed to let him write our story. I, of course, retained editorial control—or rather, Lisa Kambacher, my editor, did.

Reading his first draft, I was amazed how matter of factly, but accurately, he described our incredible experiences. Were I not there, I would have thought I was the hero. I encouraged him to tone down his descriptions. Very reluctantly, Andy agreed.

So if anyone wants to criticize Andy's account as being too bland or boring, put all the blame on me. I am, after all, bland and boring.

—Sam Melvin, Investigative Reporter for the *Midley Beacon*
Famous Zombie Turkey Blogger

Birds of a feather flock together.

—*The Dictionarie in Spanish and English* (1599),
which was compiled by the English lexicographer John Minsheu.

Chapter 1



Bartonville

He felt different. More energetic, more alive. He bred with female after female in his flock without tiring. He stayed awake through the night. He feared no predator.

Then a turkey hunter shot him.

The setting sun overlooked a crisp, clear evening in early November. South of Bartonville, Illinois, a farmer had leased his wood lot to two turkey hunters. Big and burly in their bulky camouflaged outfits, they had just bagged one.

"Good shot, Pete!"

"He's a big 'un!"

Pete and Bob walked up to the tom turkey, bleeding on the cold ground. The rest of the flock had scattered into the woods. He had exceptionally good plumage and weighed perhaps twenty pounds. Pete reached down and picked him up by the neck.

"He weighs at least twenty-five pounds!"

Then the turkey's eyes opened—and gleamed red. He kicked with his spurs and pecked savagely at Pete's arms and eyes. Dozens of his hens attacked the men from behind.

"Gobble! Gobble!"

He felt different. More energetic, more alive. He had no memory of being shot, but a certain turkey satisfaction at killing his killers. He also enjoyed pecking at their dead meat. He had always liked frogs, but this meat tasted better. He led his flock down the road, in search of more predators to eat.

* * *

Bill Westcot, the coroner of Midley, Illinois (population 512), had seen his share of grisly deaths, but this one took the cake. Two hunters apparently pecked to death by turkeys. How could this be? Wild turkeys were normally shy and secretive, not even as aggressive as geese. Bill looked up as a man came in—average height, maybe five nine, medium build, not fat, not skinny, roundish face, hazel eyes, and brown hair. He would be hard to remember. But Bill had known him all his life.

Sam Melvin, the reporter for *Midley Beacon*, dropped in for his daily chat. Sam and Bill had been friends since elementary school, and they had both stayed around Midley all their lives. Bill, a short, stocky guy with blondish hair, had gone off to school and become a coroner.

Sam had stayed in Midley after high school, doing odd jobs, until he got on with the *Midley Beacon*. As a reporter and blogger for a small-town weekly paper, Sam wasn't especially busy, and he liked to socialize.

When he saw what remained of the corpses on the mortuary slabs, Sam exclaimed, "Gowlurp! Gaawka-urop!" He ran to the bathroom and puked. After washing out his mouth, he returned, eyes averted.

"Who in the hell were those poor bastards?"

"Peter James and Robert Smithville, according to their drivers' licenses and their shooting permits."

"They look like someone went at them with a thousand pickaxes."

"Yup. Pretty gruesome, even for me."

"What in the world happened?"

"As far as I can tell, they were pecked to death by a flock of wild turkeys."

"I've never heard of anything like that!"

"Yeah, that's not really normal turkey behavior."

"Could they be rabid?"

"Turkeys don't get rabid, Sam."

"They don't attack hunters either. Is 'death by wild turkey' what you'll put on their death certificates?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Well, that's what I'll put as my story headline then. It'll be in tomorrow's paper."

"Make sure when you write it up, people know that 'wild turkey' is a bird and not liquor."

"How can you joke when you have these poor fellows on the slab over there?"

"It's a job. You get used to it."

* * *

He led his flock in the evenings and mornings across the woods and fields. They rested during the day. They did not encounter any more predators. If he'd been human, he would have sighed. They settled for their normal forage, as well as small amphibians. They met a couple of other flocks of wild turkeys. He defeated their toms and took their hens. His flock numbered over a hundred now.

He smelled something on the wind. Turkeys. He headed that way, leading his flock.

* * *

Leaning on the gate to his barn, Amos Yoder, owner of Yoder Turkey Farms, looked over his turkeys with pride. He raised over ten thousand turkeys, all fed on non-GMO grain that he grew himself. His internet business was booming. He was even selling turkeys on Amazon! Selling organically fed turkeys over the internet had led to him buying a Cadillac and motor home with cash after growing up on the family turkey farm. All he had to do was keep the turkeys clean and comfortable and fed.

A life of hard physical labor had given him arms thick as a chuck roast. People always thought of him as taller than he was because of his broad chest and big head. Most of the time, he took things as they came. In trouble or opposition, he was an immovable rock.

Behind him he heard the "Gobble! Gobble!" of a turkey. He thought one had slipped out of the other gate in the barn. Turning around quickly, his mouth dropped. Over a hundred wild turkeys were running at him! A big tom with a reddish stain on his breast led the charge. Their bright-red eyes chilled Amos's blood.

"Gobble! Gobble!"

Slipping around the gate to the barn, he grabbed his gun. Aiming carefully, he shot the tom in the breast. He dropped like a stone. The remaining turkeys continued in a wave toward the gate, flying up and bouncing off the heavy mesh used to keep the turkeys in. "Gobble! Gobble!" they screamed in futility.

Amos smiled smugly. "That'll keep them out." But the tom stood up. He wobbled a little and led the flock to the other side of the barn.

"I swore I hit him!" Amos put down the .22 long rifle he'd used. In the office he pulled his shotgun out of the gun safe. "Let's see how he handles a shotgun blast! At least I won't miss

with this." He ran to the gate at the other end of the barn. The turkeys flew up, trying to peck their way through the mesh.

"It's like Hitchcock's *The Birds*," Amos grumbled. "But they didn't have a pump-action shotgun in that movie."

He cracked open a door and blasted them. Three or four turkeys exploded in a spray of blood and feathers. But the rest didn't flee in panic. They turned as one and charged toward the door. *BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!* As fast as he could pump, Amos fired shell after shell of 00 shot into them. Over two dozen fell into piles of shredded meat. Then the first ones he'd blasted stood up. The turkeys' exposed muscle glistened red with blood, with entrails hanging down and dragging on the ground—but they hopped and staggered toward him.

He was so dumbfounded—the turkeys actually reached the door. *BLAM!* Three more birds turned to turkey burger. Click. Out of ammo. He tried to slam the door—but the big tom blocked him. He had blood all over his breast, but he pecked and kicked with his spurs like a demon.

"Ow!" Amos slammed the butt of the shotgun into the turkey with a satisfying crunch. Three turkeys flew through the open door and landed on his face. Spurs gouged his cheeks and eyes. He thrashed wildly, but dozens more piled on. A pile of pecking, kicking, gouging turkeys soon buried him.

"Gobble! Gobble!"

The mound under the feeding turkeys twitched and was still.

* * *

He felt strong, powerful. He now had many more hens with which to breed. So he went to it immediately.

The turkeys only had one door ajar into the barn, but as dozens and hundreds and thousands joined the flock, the weight of them sprung the door completely open. They found other predators around the barn and dispatched them. They spotted the grain silos and feasted. They continued into the woods and fields around the barns, ever expanding their territory.

* * *

"What?" Sam Melvin exclaimed as he read the *Normal Shout*'s story about the mysterious death at Yoder's turkey farm and the disappearance of ten thousand turkeys.

"Keep it down," growled Lisa Kambacher, his boss and the editor of the *Midley Beacon*, and the only other employee at the small weekly newspaper. "I'm busy editing your crap."

Sam swiveled his ancient, uncomfortable office chair from his laptop so he faced Lisa. He'd garbage-picked that chair from his neighbor in Midley when he was hired fifteen years ago. Her thin face, framed in brown hair, peered at the computer screen.

Lisa's dark-brown eyes stared intently at what she edited. Maybe it was the piece Sam had written about Mrs. Huntington and her award-winning afghans. He hadn't enjoyed reporting that; he couldn't imagine she'd like editing it.

"Drop that story and put in this one. The crap has really hit the fan now. Remember the grisly deaths of those turkey hunters I wrote about last week?"

"Yeah. That was a great story. We sold out that edition and had to run another five hundred copies." Lisa looked up from her computer.

"It looks like that flock of killer turkeys is now ten thousand or more."

"That *is* a good story. Where are they?"

"No one knows."

"Well, go out and find them! Oh, and write a story connecting the two occurrences before you go. Maybe we'll publish a special 'Killer Turkey' edition. It will be very appropriate for November, between Halloween and Thanksgiving." She smiled hopefully. "Maybe that one will sell out too! I could use a new laptop."

"I want some hazard pay for this story."

"OK, I'll give you an extra hundred bucks if you come back with the turkeys' location. Oh, and take a shotgun."

"Fat lot of good that did for poor Amos Yoder. He emptied six shells from his, and he still got henpecked to death." Sam shook his head sadly.

"What could they tell from the dead turkeys they found?"

"That's one more weird thing: there were no dead turkeys. They found lots of blood, 00 buckshot, and his bloody corpse."

"That's good stuff. Write it all up and hightail it out of here," Lisa urged.

After typing up his story and sending it to Lisa for editing, he stared at her.

Because of his good grades, Sam's high school English teacher had suggested he volunteer for the school paper. He'd gone to the newspaper "office," a walk-in closet, and had seen a tall, slender girl pounding away on an old IBM PC. She'd looked up sharply, scowled, and said, "What do you want? Do you have a story?"

"Uh, um, I'd like to work for the newspaper."

"Hmmm. I could use a reporter. Let me test you out. There's a track meet today after school. Go to it. Get all the winners and losers and their *feelings*. Our readers care about them. Write it up, and report back to me here by seven p.m."

"You'll still be here at that time?" Sam asked incredulously.

"Of course. I'm the editor and head reporter and writer. I've got twenty stories to write, and I've got to report on the tennis match after school today. I expect you to work just as hard, if you want to stay on."

"Uh, OK."

"What's your name, anyway?"

"Sam Melvin."

"Sam, I'm Lisa Kambacher. Do what I say, and we'll get along fine. Cross me, and you'll regret it for the rest of your life!"

Sam had later learned that after she'd graduated from college, Lisa had started the *Midley Beacon*, the town's first newspaper and one of the first online newspapers in the '90s. Amazingly, by pinching pennies, she'd actually been able to keep it going these past fifteen years.

Sam sighed. Shaking off his reverie, he pulled up a map on his laptop and studied central Illinois. The turkey hunters were killed west of the Illinois River and south of Bartonville. Yoder's turkey farm sat between Hanna City and Smithville. So the wild turkeys had traveled about fifteen miles during that week. They went northwest through farms and scrub. From Yoder's farm they had a clear shot due north to the several square miles of wilderness surrounding the Wildlife Prairie Park. Sam guessed they would avoid built-up areas and travel by night, roosting among trees during the day. Central Illinois was pretty sparsely settled, and even a flock of ten thousand turkeys could hide in the many wooded creeks and valleys.

The Yoder farm had been attacked yesterday. If the turkeys moved two miles a day, they'd arrive in the park in about two or three days. Sam drew a circle of four miles around the turkey farm. He'd spend the day circling around it.

* * *

Most of the day Sam drove up and down Illinois 116 and Taylor Road. The sun shone brightly, making the November day surprisingly warm. He used his binoculars to look across the fallow fields of November to the tree line of the nearest creek—Johnson Run.

He drove around Greengold Road and Murphy Road, and stopped and talked with the people of Hanna City. They were pretty upset over Amos Yoder's death. The townspeople knew and liked Amos since he had grown up in the area. People in central Illinois were pretty stable; they tended to live and work in or near the towns where they grew up.

Sam stopped at the office of the *Hanna City Monitor*, the town's paper, to trade what the *Monitor's* reporters had found with what he knew about the story. It was twice the size of the *Midley Beacon's* one-room rental on the Main Street of Midley. It had better furniture too.

"Hi, Sam Melvin of the *Midley Beacon*."

"Hi, Sam. I'm James Appleby, the feature's reporter. What can I do for you?" said a middle-aged man with gray-and-brown hair. "Have a seat." He gestured to a spare chair.

Sitting, Sam said, "I've been following these turkey attacks since last week when we had two hunters killed in Bartonville. What can you tell me about the attack on Yoder's turkey farm?"

"You don't say? Well, poor Amos's body, or what was left of it, was discovered by a truck driver dropping off supplies for the farm. The attack apparently had taken place at about seven a.m. in the morning. His wife, Helen, had already left for town, where she teaches third grade." He paused. "I didn't know about the deaths of those turkey hunters. What can you tell me?"

"They were hunting turkeys that evening and were pecked to death. Here's a printout of our news story and our website. Go ahead and use it and cite us as your source."

"Thanks. I'll be sure to link to your original story."

Sam looped around to the south of Hanna City and drove to Yoder Turkey Farms. He slammed his car door in the driveway and headed toward the nearest building. The grounds were neat and tidy, with white fences and white trim on the dark-green barn, but the barn doors gaped open. The turkeys had left, but their smell remained. A dark, wet area stained the ground in front of a sprung door. That must be where Amos Yoder had died, Sam thought.

"Can I help you?"

Sam turned around and saw a middle-aged woman looking at him. She had light-brown hair with a few gray streaks. She looked like she would be a fine grandmother in a few years. Her eyes were weary and her face haggard though.

"Hi. I'm Sam Melvin, reporter from the *Midley Beacon*. Are you Mrs. Yoder?"

"Yes."

"My condolences, ma'am. I can't imagine how you feel."

"Thank you. I'm a little numb. It doesn't seem real. It's like something in a book." She rubbed her hands up and down her arms, as if chilled.

"Yes. I can understand if you don't want to talk. Are you able to answer a few questions?"

"I'll try."

Sam flipped to a blank page on his reporter's notebook. "Was there anyone else on the farm at the time?"

"Yes. Fred Jones and Harry Bishop were working here. They're as dead as poor Amos."

"You don't say! I hadn't heard that."

"The truck driver found Amos, and I got notified. Later, the police found the others. I was completely out of it yesterday."

"I understand. I read that Amos's shotgun had been used."

"Yes. At least he went down with a fight. He also shot his .22 rifle. The police found that in his office, and his gun safe open."

"The most puzzling thing is there were no turkey bodies found."

"Not exactly."

"What do you mean?"

"The police found pieces of turkey scattered around the barn gate, just as you'd expect from a shotgun, but no bodies."

"What do you think happened to them?"

"I don't know. Maybe the turkeys ate them."

"But why would they leave behind scraps?"

"I don't know, Mr. Melvin. I don't know how I'm going to live. I've lost Amos, I've lost the turkeys, and I'll probably lose the farm!" Tears trickled down her cheeks.

Sam uncomfortably put his arm around the crying woman. "Do you have any insurance?"

"I don't know!" She sobbed and then hiccupped. "I think so. I know Amos had life insurance. But he ran the business! I teach school and decorate the house and then do gardening!" She cried again.

"Um, did anyone know Amos's business affairs?"

She stopped crying. "Yes—his insurance agent, Zo Limbach. I could call him."

"Good idea."

"Would you mind leaving now?"

"Thank you for your time Mrs. Yoder. God bless you."

"Thank you for your help. Good-bye." Sam looked around. It was a big farm. Down two hands, the owner, and ten thousand turkeys. He didn't know how she was going to live either.

* * *

He felt great. He was full of energy, he had many hens to breed with, and he was the leader of a great flock. The flock stayed close to the woods and streams. They rested now, in and under the trees by the river. In the evening he'd lead them upstream. That felt like the right direction.

Author Bio



Photo by Barb Lloyd

Andy Zach was born Anastasius Zacharias, in Greece. His parents were both zombies. Growing up, he loved animals of all kinds. After moving to the United States as a child, in high school he won a science fair by bringing toads back from suspended animation. Before turning to fiction, Andy published his PhD thesis "Methods of Revivification for Various Species of the Kingdom Animalia" in the prestigious JAPM, *Journal of Paranormal Medicine*. Andy, in addition to being the foremost expert on paranormal animals, enjoys breeding phoenixes. He lives in Illinois with his five phoenixes.

I killed a Zombie Turkey. Now, will it stay dead?

Sam Melvin, an underachieving e-reporter from a small town, changes forever when he meets turkeys that won't stay dead. You can shoot 'em, chop 'em, burn 'em—they come back stronger. The undead plague of poultry spreads uncontrollably, rocking the whole country. As Sam tracks down the zombie turkeys and how to eradicate them, his editor, Lisa Kambacher, nags him to turn his stories and expenses in on time. During their years of working together, Lisa has mellowed from bitchy into an irascible pinchpenny.

Lisa snipes at Sam for plebian writing but uses her intelligence to pursue the lucrative carnivorous turkey story. Sam and Lisa ricochet across the landscape, tracking turkeys and fleeing the bloodthirsty hordes. Careening from shell-shocked grocery store owners fighting turkeys crawling out of refrigerators, to machine-gunning turkey farmers, to secret militia, Sam and Lisa doggedly report. Throughout the turkey apocalypse, they dare ravaged cities, plow knee deep in gore and corpses, and upload streams of zombie turkey video news to the world.

With paranoid militias clashing with the federal government and unkillable turkeys, Sam and Lisa doubt their ability to survive. Sam and Lisa have no superpowers. If you have a heart condition or lack humor, you should not read *Zombie Turkeys*, no matter how much you want to find out what happens.

Andy Zach
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