

RYAN GRAY

**DANGER**  
**INFECTION HAZARD**  
QUARANTINE AREA

**AVOID CONTACT**

**BE ORGANIZED**  
**BE PREPARED**  
**BE SAFE**

**WHAT NOW?**

S B ZONE

B  
CLASS



# PLANET Z

BITE OF LOVE

# **Planet Z: Bite of Love**

by Ryan Gray

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# CONTENTS

Planet Z: Bite of Love	4-8
Author's Note	9
Join the Mission	10
Books by the same author	11-13

## PLANET Z: BITE OF LOVE

“You can’t force folk to sacrifice themselves!” The doctor stuck a slender latex finger at Samuel’s bearded face.

“Like heck, I can’t!” Samuel was mad! He pulled up his sleeves. Scars and bite marks tracked both arms from his wrist to his neck. “We all made a commitment to save as many as we can, but now I see almost everyone sitting around getting fat and lazy, forgetting where they came from!”

“Sam, just because you’re crazy and have a hero complex, doesn’t mean the rest of us can do what you do...I mean.” Samuel cut the doc off, “You mean since I won’t let myself forget what I was like before Free-day? I can’t ignore the pain and shame those outside the chain-link fence are going through. Everyday I’m out there getting gnawed on like a freaking chew toy, with virtually no help, no backup!” He shook a mane of long stringy hair back and forth, “I don’t expect everyone to help all the time! I just expect someone to help some of the time!” Samuel slammed a bloody rag down on the table next to the doc and crossed his arms.

Gently the doctor sighed, pulled down her mask and peeled off her gloves with practiced precision. She hopped up on her makeshift operating table and sat down next to the man she loved and rubbed his shoulder, “My love, one of the reasons why I love you is your passion for others, but please, don’t let that passion turn to frustration.”

“How? When I see the shame and pain in their eyes, I know the little bite they take from me is nothing compared to the joy they receive from being healed and...” The big man stopped and stared down at the gray concrete floor. He clenched his jaw and cleared his throat to stop the flood of emotion, but it didn’t work. Tears streaked his left cheek and he lowered his head onto the doctor’s slender shoulder and sobbed, “I’m just so tired...”

The doctor’s slender shoulder and soft curly brunette hair looked to be the only place of comfort for Sam. The doctor sighed and cradled him with a small slender hand and a gentle kiss to the top of his wiry, dark-haired head. The big man cried. From exhaustion, from frustration, from anger or from all of them, I couldn’t tell, and I didn’t care; if there was anyone in the settlement who deserved a good cry, it was Samuel.

## Planet Z: Bite of Love

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The year was 2179 and the place, Planet Z. The outbreak was originally thought to be a new malaria strain until it was proven that mosquitoes were not to blame. To put an exclamation point on how wrong the scientists were, the clinically dead reanimated and went on a terror spree, devouring anything and anyone in sight! Within a month, the police force and military fell to the infection. The cell phone towers and satellites went offline less than three months later. With communications dead, so was all hope of a cure. The world as we knew it, was gone.

Except in the heart of one man.

To him, the world was not gone, only lost. The first of the “Freed” had already been lost to time, but the story told was passed on to every Freed-man or woman...

He wasn't a scientist or doctor, but an engineer: a builder of bridges. He continued working on a cure, long after all others had given up hope. He'd discovered something that could only be described as providence or destiny. His blood had an extremely rare gene which isolated the virus. At first, he thought it would kill the virus. However, this would only serve to put an end to the “walking” part of the “walking dead”. If that happened, even greater problems would arise by leaving millions of dead corpses rotting in the sun; it would invite even more diseases and epidemics. But the bridge-builder soon realized that the gene in his blood transitioned the virus into something virtually impervious to sickness and disease. The walking dead transformed into an “Immune”!

The biggest problem was how to do a blood transfusion. Even if an infected subject was captured, they were far too violent and unpredictable for needles. Being clinically dead, anesthesia did not work. So, the engineer had to think much more practically. He set up a contraption to lure a lonely zombi-man into a cage. Feeding him meat infused with his own blood didn't work nor did oral blood drops in his water, the cells in his blood didn't seem to have an effect once exposed to air.

The story goes that quite by accident, the bridge-builder stumbled upon the answer. Five days into his “research”, when feeding the subject, the animalistic man got a hold of the builder and tore a piece of flesh from his forearm, greedily devouring the muscle and skin. Upon checking on his subject the next morning the bridge-

## Planet Z: Bite of Love

builder found a terrified young man, wondering why he was locked in a cage.

For the next few years, the bridge-builder freed others, men, woman, and children, but his body paid a heavy price. Bite marks riddled his arms and legs. The man decided it was worth it, and soon a small army of Freed-immunes were setting up triage centers and collecting supplies for a settlement. Many immunes even went out themselves to free others from the ravages of decaying flesh and insatiable hunger.

Then one day the bridge-builder announced to the group that he had to leave. His blood was the purest and most potent, so he would sacrifice himself to a horde of undead in the most strategic place he could find. His last words were “Don’t worry, as long as you continue to share my life’s blood, my work will always live through you.”

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I stood watching Samuel crying on the doc’s shoulder and wondered what I should be doing. I didn’t know anyone, where I was, or what I should do next. Only four hours earlier I had awoken to a big hairy man smiling down at me and a massive hand in my face, “I’m Samuel, welcome back to the land of the living.”

I immediately cowered from waves of fear and shame. Memories of feasting on whimpering dogs and squealing rats pummeled my mind. An unstoppable hunger driving me to destroy and devour anything organic I could wrap my claws around.

“Hey, kid, it’s okay,” Samuel placed a sympathetic hand on my shoulder, “It’ll take time, but soon you’ll learn to forgive yourself.”

I looked at his hand touching me, and the sudden gravity of the situation dropped on me like a ton of bricks. I didn’t know if it was because of the first human connection in years or the freedom from a need to consume his limbs, but whichever it was, I wept long, and I wept hard. The nightmare was finally over.

Not knowing what else to do, I followed Samuel around like a dog skipping along with his master. Along the way, Sam told me what had happened. He had found me digging through a dumpster and led me back to the settlement and then fed me a piece of his forearm.

## Planet Z: Bite of Love

The idea of eating Sam's flesh turned my stomach, yet his sacrifice instantly endeared me to this strange hairy soul.

Sam let me know we were on our way to say hi to his new family, the other immunes he had freed, and there were a lot! It took a couple hours to visit them all. Some also had bites on their arms, as they had found family and friends to free. Samuel had no relatives or friends left, so he had decided Planet Z was his opportunity to make more friends and start a new family.

We then stopped off at the medical tent to get his arm treated from his "war wound" as he called it - and visit his girlfriend, the only doctor in the settlement. It was at the medical tent that he had learned of the other "leaders" waning enthusiasm for freeing the walking dead. He had been the only leader of the settlement to leave the confines of the security fence for almost a year. The others had forgotten where they had come from.

"Security breach!" A siren suddenly blared "Security breach!"

Samuel jumped off the table and pulled me by the arm toward a safe zone deeper into the complex. The doctor was in hot pursuit. Like an approaching train, ravenous roaring rang in my ears louder and louder. A horde of zombies had found us, and they would breach the main gate at any moment. We pushed our way into a crowd of immunes fighting to escape. A bottleneck had formed trying to squeeze through the only entrance leading to the safe zone.

The sound of the chain-link fence clanging on concrete behind us made Samuel turn. More than a hundred zombies stormed towards us with bloodshot eyes and drooling mouths, claw-like fingers outstretched, looking for something more to devour.

"We won't make it," Sam said. The statement was matter-of-fact and cold. I instinctively grabbed his arm as he tried to pull his way through the flow of the crowd and towards the oncoming vicious mob.

"Sam! What are you doing?" I screamed.

He turned and smiled softly at me, "I'm gonna say 'hi' to some new folks."

"You can't!" Tears rolled down my cheek, "They'll tear you apart, and..." I gulped down the lump in my throat, "...and I just got here."

## Planet Z: Bite of Love

“It’s okay, Kid, the Doc will teach you all you need to know.”

“Don’t, please!” I begged, “Haven’t you done enough?”

He put a big hand on my head gently, and waited a second for me to look into his eyes. Beyond the hazel iris, I saw something extraordinary. His gaze was steady, gentle and calm. “Ain’t no way to love more than giving your life for a friend.”

I used the back of my hand to wipe fluid and tears from my nose, “But you don’t even know any of them.”

Samuel grinned at me and winked, “Doesn’t mean we still can’t be friends.”

I didn’t know what happened to Sam after that, I couldn’t watch, but two days later, I did find out that the only thing left of Samuel were over 100 newly Freed-Immunes; confused, but overjoyed to awake from the same nightmare that Sam had used his life to free so many others from.

And now...I look down at my arms. They are bare, without a scratch on them. Blonde hairs bristle from a stiff breeze as I walk out the gates of the settlement. I roll up my sleeves and get ready to follow in the footsteps of my emancipator. I set off in search of the walking dead, ready to give a piece of myself, so at least one more can be freed, one more can enjoy the sun on their face and wind in their hair. I set off to bring beauty to the world, one Freed-Immune at a time.

...And how 'bout you, Reader? Did you forget where you came from?



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Planet Z: A Bite Of Love* is an allegory that I was inspired to write from my career as a non-profit social worker and Christian missionary. My intention was to challenge the reader to examine their lives and consider how they may give back to their community. Reaching out to individuals needing the same helping hand that they may have needed in their own lives. It further examines how in order to help others, we have to often give a 'piece of ourselves' in the process.

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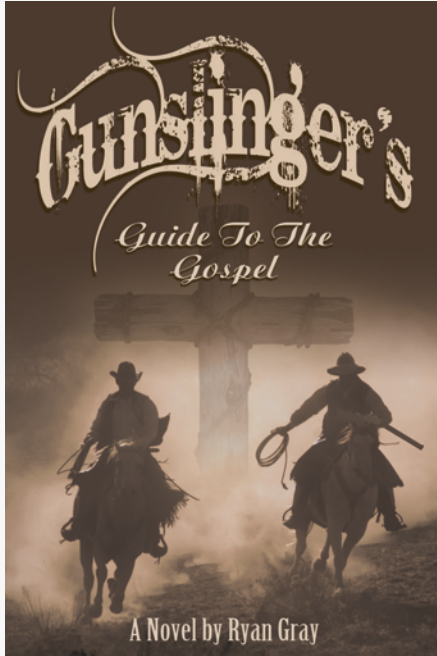
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## BOOKS BY RYAN GRAY

### GUNSLINGERS GUIDE TO THE GOSPEL

DOWNLOAD



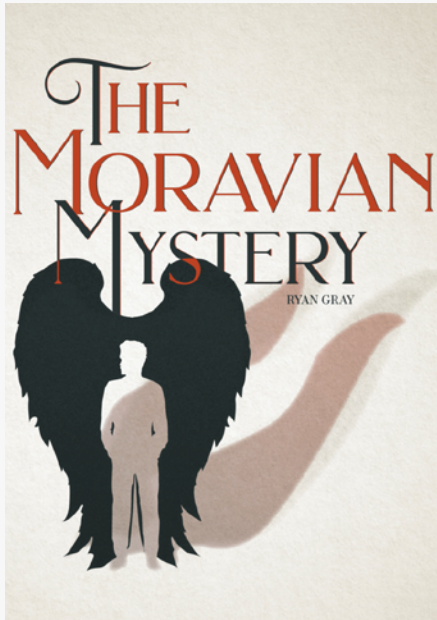
What if the right friendship could change your life forever? An aging gunfighter is about to find out.

Flint is an over-the-hill gunslinger in the old West: tough as nails and afraid of no one. He killed his first man before he could shave, has no family and few friends. He'll never attack innocents nor shoot a man in the back; so, compared to many hired gunman, he's actually a good person. However, after the past couple days, the gunslinger's world and way of thinking has been turned upside.

It all started when a wily mountain man, who throws a quick blade and is a crack shot with a rifle, invited the old gunfighter to ride with him. The rumor mill claims that if you tangle with "the Boy", you'll earn yourself permanent residence in boot hill. Surprisingly, the Boy offers Flint a partnership and something he secretly craved for since he was a small boy. The Gunslinger's Guide to the Gospel is a story of an unlikely partnership between two tough frontiersman. One willing to leave an old life behind to chase after the unknown in search of peace and forgiveness—the other, to share his secret of peace and forgiveness with anyone he meets.

## THE MORAVIAN MYSTERY

DOWNLOAD



A grieving, hungover detective is assigned to a mysterious attempted kidnapping case. An overworked single mom is the victim and only witness. Together, they stumble upon a truth both thought only existed in fairy tales.

### Story Excerpt

Saul's jaw dropped slightly and he leaned back, he studied the other man's face. He looked like a different person. His eyes were clear, his teeth even looked healthier, not the usual rot left by smoking crack, and his smile had changed. It was warm and genuine. However, that is not what shocked Saul. Zac had the same brilliant glow, the glow he had seen on

Barney's church people.

The detective stood quickly, almost stumbling to the ground. He didn't understand what was going on but needed to space himself from it.

Saul stumbled out of a side door, into an alley. He leaned his back against a wall next to a dumpster and planted his hands on his knees, as he breathed short concentrated breaths trying to make sense of what was going on.

Suddenly, a loud baritone voice barked out, "Shut it! I don't want your excuses, only results, the boss had plans with that woman... and her boy. Now, she's found some protection, we're gonna have to start over with someone else."

No ways! I can't be hearing two thugs talk about Jennifer and some conspiracy for their boss, could I? I'm not that lucky! Saul thought. The detective was completely hidden behind the dumpster, so he could not see the origin of the voices.

The voices continued, "But, Shameless, I'm telling you. I didn't see them coming, and they had such power. There's been nothing like it around here in over a 100 years!"

Shameless? Must be the Irish mob or some stupid nickname. But what does the other yahoo know about what happened here a century ago? Saul pondered this as he slipped his Glock 22 from its holster. With his other hand, he texted his partner Bobby his location and to bring back up.

A massive thud interrupted his thoughts. "Lascivious, you know nothing of control or power. Stop your whining before I drag you by that long tongue of yours to the boss and he eats you alive!"

## RALPH'S WAR

DOWNLOAD



At Gettysburg, Ralph lost a piece of himself. The only place he'll look for it is at the bottom of a bottle. Just as the traumatized soldier sinks to his lowest, Ralph is faced with a choice – rejoin the fight or watch his cousin be gunned down in the street.

### Story Excerpt

Ralph stared.

The words stung worse than a bullwhip on a wet back. “Why are you saying this, Bill?” Ralph managed.

Bill exhaled and looked down at his feet, “Cause, I just want my friend back. But, don't rightly think he ever come back from the war.”

Like a youngster avoiding a whoopin, Ralph avoided eye contact by looking the opposite way, but was open enough to hear what his cuz had to say, “What do you mean by that?”

“Don't know, really, cept maybe you never left the war, cause you're afraid to fight the next one. Fact is, we all gotta fight one war after another. You might think your problems come from failing at the “Charge” or maybe you think your battle's with the bottle. Fact is, the greatest war there is, is in here.” Bill thumbed his chest with his fist and looked his pal in the eyes...”

PLANET

Z

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