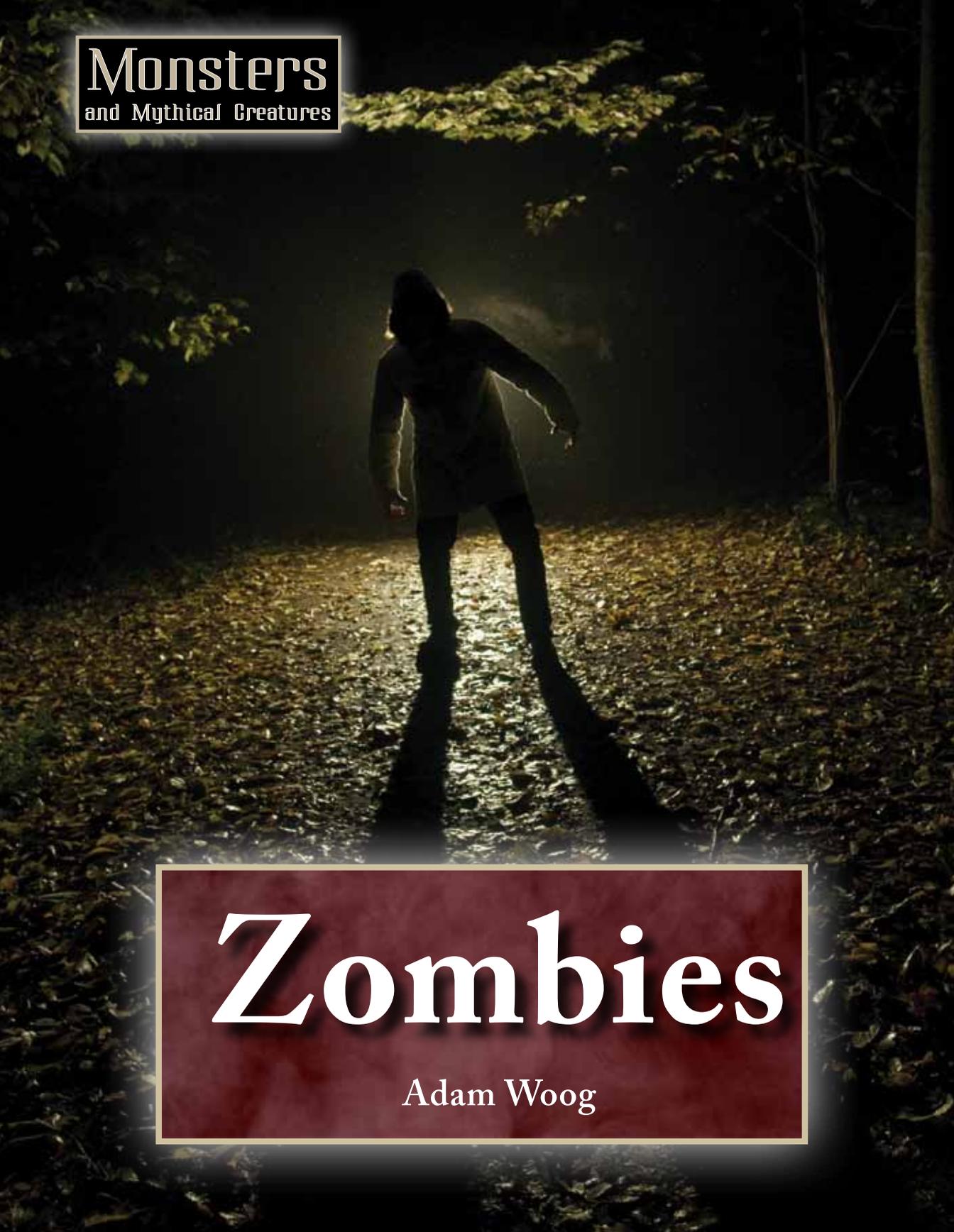


Monsters
and Mythical Creatures



Zombies

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Introduction

Mindless, Relentless, and Hungry

St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands is known for its sandy beaches, bright sunshine, and warm, blue water. But zombies? Not so much. Yet in 2002, reports of a zombie attack on one of St. Thomas's famed beaches circulated throughout the islands and, via the Internet, around the world. According to one report, tourists and residents spotted a creature, closely resembling a zombie on the beach. Some sources say the creature appeared to have washed ashore and was first seen lying in the sand. Others say no one noticed it until it started walking around on the beach.

Either way, the creature drew a large crowd including members of the local police force. Reports say police warned the creature to stay still, but it ignored the warning. When a young boy ran toward the creature, it seized the boy and tried to take a bite. At this point, reports say, a bystander grabbed a gun from the holster of

Did You Know?

Experts have identified three characteristics that are dead giveaways of a zombie: It moves slowly, it moans pitifully, and it is actively trying to eat the flesh of a living creature.

one of the police officers and coolly dispatched the creature with a shot to the head.

Mindless, relentless, half-alive and half-dead, ravenous for human flesh—zombies like this one have terrified and fascinated people—or at least their imaginations—for centuries. Vicious and



Whether real or imagined or splashed across the big screen (as in this scene from the 1990 remake of Night of the Living Dead), the mindless, relentless, flesh-eating zombie has terrified and fascinated people for centuries.

Zombies and the Mentally Ill

Davis's conclusions are not the only scientific theories that have been put forward to try to explain zombies. For instance, several observers have speculated that zombies are not victims of poisoning at all. Instead, they offer a more ordinary (if tragic) explanation: that so-called zombies are people who are mentally ill, brain-damaged, or suffering from disorders such as epilepsy, fetal alcohol syndrome, or severe alcoholism.

Considerable evidence suggests that this account may be true. Lamarque Douyon, the Haitian psychiatrist, has reported over a dozen cases where alleged zombies turned out to be people who simply had problems that affected their mental health. Presumably, these mentally ill people, as well as those around them, believed strongly in the reality of zombies. As a result, they were convinced in their own minds that the "zombies" were, indeed, the walking dead.

Strange behavior caused by mental illness may explain some reports of zombies. The popular notion of zombies as insane has been reinforced by movies, such as the 2007 film Diary of the Dead. A scene from the movie depicts a scuffle between a zombie patient and a hospital visitor.



Other research has supported this theory. For example, in 1997 Roland Littlewood, a British professor of anthropology, published an article in a distinguished British medical journal, the *Lancet*. In it, he describes how he and his colleagues examined three cases of reported zombies in Haiti. They performed neurological (nerve- and brain-related) exams and DNA analysis. They also conducted interviews with patients, family members, neighbors, and priests from both the voodoo and Catholic traditions.

Littlewood concluded that the subjects' zombielike symptoms were indeed rooted in psychiatric disorders or brain damage. One such disorder seemed especially likely to be the cause. This is catatonic schizophrenia.

Some victims of catatonic schizophrenia are unable to speak, move, or respond to stimuli. Sometimes, if another person moves the limbs of a victim, those limbs will stay in place for hours. Another symptom of the disease can be the unintentional imitation of the sounds or movements of other people. Observers might mistake these forms of behavior as signs of zombiism.

Searching for Evidence in Greece

Serious scientists like Davis, Littlewood, and Chavannes Douyon are sincere about hoping to find evidence of zombies—or to prove that they do not exist. However, even genuine scientists are not always so earnest. They sometimes discuss the possibilities of the walking dead in more playful terms.

One example is Friedman, the archaeologist from the British Museum who wrote about the ancient Egyptian cemetery in Hierakonpolis. In her article at Archaeology.org, Friedman considers the possibility that the remains her team found there (which was a genuine discovery) were the victims of a zombie virus. Friedman notes that a fragment of writing uncovered there, the “Palette of Narmer,” may tell the story of a zombie attack that ended in victory for the humans.

She adds that other clues include cut marks on the neck bones of some corpses, indicating that they were decapitated. However,

For Further Exploration

Books

Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Recorded Attacks*. New York: Three Rivers, 2009.

Nathan Robert Brown, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Zombies*. New York: Alpha, 2010.

David Flint, *Zombie Holocaust: How the Living Dead Devoured Pop Culture*. Medford, NJ: Plexus, 2009.

Glenn Kay, *Zombie Movies: The Ultimate Guide*. Chicago: Chicago Review, 2008.

Jonathan Maberry and David F. Kramer, eds., *They Bite!: Endless Cravings of Supernatural Predators*. New York: Citadel, 2009.

David P. Murphy, *Zombies for Zombies*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2009.

Rob Sacchetto, *The Zombie Handbook: How to Identify the Living Dead and Survive the Coming Zombie Apocalypse*. Berkeley: Ulysses, 2009.

Web Sites

All Things Zombie (www.allthingszombie.com/index.php). An extensive site with movie reviews, interviews, zombie news, and more.

The Federal Vampire and Zombie Agency (FVZA) (www.fvza.org). Supposedly tells the history of a secret government agency devoted to zombie control.

Zombiedefense.org (www.zombiedefense.org/main/index.html). Reportedly specializes in preparedness for the coming zombie apocalypse.

Zombiemovies (<http://zombiemovies.org>). As its name suggests, a source of information on cinematic walking dead.

Zombie Research Society (www.zombieresearch.org/home.html). Alleges to represent an organization that fosters further knowledge of zombies in the arts and sciences.

Zombie Squad (www.zombiehunters.org). Maintained by what is claimed to be a company dedicated to eradicating the worldwide zombie menace.

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