

Why Zombies?

By Jason W. Triplett

Halloween is approaching. With the questionable success of World War Z and the 4th season of [The Walking Dead](#) kicking off, I think we are on the backside of a decade long arc of fascination with the Zombie ethos.

[Max Brooks](#) now has three Zombie books on the market. (including [The Zombie Survival Guide](#), for the discerning prepper) We have a plethora of Zombie Movies, Video Games and TV, [Zombie festivals](#) and 5K "Zombie Runs" for those who are planning to survive the Zpocalypse by outrunning the undead.

Why even take this journey? Why has pop-culture deemed the undead, cool? Below are some possible reasons:

In the natural world, dead things don't reanimate. Zombies are an extreme example of what's never supposed to happen to people. The cause of morbid interest in anything is a base fascination and fear of that which is unnatural or not normal. There is danger in other humans who appear abnormal because these people lie outside of the thresholds of what an individual may deem healthy, good and right. Therefore they can be dangerous. The problem is that what's normal in our culture is largely determined relativistically by the individual beholder. Zombie's are the unnatural, abnormal state of humanity that we can all agree "just ain't right".

The undead are a mirror image, near perfect, enemy of humanity

Human, but without the limitations of human emotion, natural drives and most importantly, fear of mortality. The Zombie has one mission, to eat you no matter what. We are interested to see, from a safe distance, how people would potentially manage life with a counterpart humanity in the driver's seat. It's an alternate humanity which puts us in competition to survive and be at the top of the food chain. The archetype of this model is emotional connection. How many times in a Zombie flick have we seen a living person have to take out their sister, or brother, or mother, or aunt, or wife or whoever because they have become a Zombie? Will they see the person as "mom" or "monster"? What would I do? What would you do? This doesn't matter if we are at war with an alien race. If it's us again them, blast 'em. But if it's us against us, it means more to us. Will we overcome this enemy to survive

The concept of the undead makes us uncomfortable.

Americans live in a state of provision and luxury few people in the world know. We are becoming a society that believes we don't have to fight for anything. We believe we can defeat anyone who steps up. We believe we will always be prosperous and have more than enough. The extended effect of the undead on "normal" lives interests us because we are so far from the discomfort of survival. We sing, make movies, and devote holidays to death because developed countries know the least about it from experience. Everyone dies, but you can tell how distant we are from it because we play with the concept. The undead plague is our imagination putting

humans in a situation close to extinction, because it's a desensitized concept in our culture. In this way, "uncomfortable" is a playful vacation that we can come back from with a flick of the remote control.

The undead simplify things.

The world of the living is difficult; with hordes of questions that chew on us. If the Zombie apocalypse comes...well, we pretty much know what we have to do. We can go without water for 3 days, food for 3 weeks and shelter for 3 months. (From The Zombie Survival Guide) If people start twitching after death and get up to pandemic-ally chew on us, we know the answers to all the questions end with "and this will help us survive". Frankly, I would love to go on supply runs and loot abandoned stores and not have to pay for stuff. Getting water would have to do with finding untainted water and not the water company. Restful shelter would require being dry, warm and protected, not having to pay a mortgage. If we can fantastically exit this life into a TV show or movie about Zombies, it's a simple life in which you'd better be handy or you're a goner. It's that simple and we will daydream away safety for a simple form of living.

Finally, We are safe from the undead.

Clearly, a human dying and then reanimating and becoming a flesh-eating Zombie is impossible. Most "scientific" explanations of Zombies are that somehow the body of the victim has died while a primitive part of the brain lives on. Uh, sorry, if you're someone who believes real zombies, as they are described, could happen, you're an ignoramus. I've consulted with a doctor and my wife is a nurse. All the body systems rely on one another to exist, so the brain does nothing without the nervous, digestive, circulatory, and respiratory systems and vice versa. If one dies, they all die. Plus, if any of the systems exist, at least minimally, to sustain an undead being, then they aren't undead. Most of us know this, yet some of us still insist that a virus, or drug abuse, or medical experimentation or whatever will "punish us" by creating a plague of de-evolved Zombified humans. Because most of us know we are safe from Zombies, we are free to play with the concept in whatever way we want. But be careful, there are "Zombie purists" out there that want their Zombies in a certain way; dead, slow and hungry for flesh. These are the people that are right now stocking up and making spears vs. buying shotguns because they just "know" the bullets will run out when the Z-plague hits. But never fear, the Zacks aren't coming.

Some have said that Zombies are a fantasy about resurrection in Christ or an allegorical understanding of current human existence. In any explanation, one thing is true of mythology in general. It serves to interpret, express or explain the current predicament of humans. These are just a few possible answers as to what this cultural phenomenon says about us.