

A HISTORY OF ZOMBIES

Almost everyone is familiar with the modern zombie: a shuffling, ravenous, reanimated corpse that terrorizes and eats humans. But since zombies aren't real, how did their legend get started? Where did the word "zombie" come from?

Zombies Across the World:

For thousands of years, zombie-like monsters have appeared in legends and myths all over the world. In the Middle Ages in Europe, many people believed in *revenants* – ghosts or reanimated bodies that would return from the grave to terrorize the living, sometimes with a specific purpose, like revenge, or to torment someone who had wronged them in life. In Norse mythology, *draugr* were said to be the reanimated bodies of warriors who had been reborn with amazing abilities, like being able to turn into a wisp of smoke and pass through stone. *Draugr* were said to drive humans and animals mad and cause chaos everywhere they went.

Chinese cultures told of *jiangshi*, living corpses that had white hair and greenish-white skin, doomed to hop everywhere because of the stiff limbs that had set in after death. Many Asian countries have variations on the *jiangshi*, including Japan, Vietnam and Korea.

One of the earliest known references to the living dead is in The Epic of Gilgamesh, an ancient Mesopotamian epic poem. In it, Ishtar, the goddess of love and war, travels to the underworld and demands to be let in, threatening that she "will bring up the dead to eat the living."



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Zombies in the Caribbean:

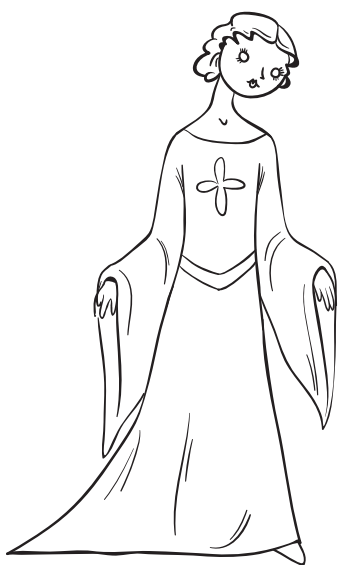
The clearest connection we have to the modern zombie comes from the Caribbean, where religions from West Africa blended with Christianity and Catholicism to create *vodou* (voodoo), a religion that includes belief in spirits, witchcraft and sorcery.

The word zombie is thought to have originated from the Caribbean, possibly from several different sources. The Haitian word *zombi* refers to a person's soul, while the word *nzambi*, of African origins, means "god" or "soul."

In vodou, *bokar* are priests who use black magic to create a zombi to use as a servant. The bokar would sneak the person a powder that would make them appear dead. It is believed that the bokar was able to capture the spirit or soul of the person, ensuring the future zombi's obedience. Once the person is reanimated, they have no recollection of their previous life, and would operate in a near-deathlike state. It is believed that salt will bring a zombi back to their senses.

Belief in vodou and witchcraft in Haiti is still strong, and the laws regarding murder specifically address this issue: "It shall also be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made against any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the person had been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows."

ZOMBIES IN MOVIES



Vodou Zombie



Slow Zombie



Fast Zombie



Friendly Zombie

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Modern Zombies:

When zombies first started appearing in movies in the 1920s and 30s, they were depicted as typical vodou zombis with the movies taking place in Haiti. Then, in 1968, filmmaker George Romero made *Night of the Living Dead*, the first movie to introduce the idea that zombies must eat the living. The film terrified audiences and helped turn horror movies into a box-office favorite. Romero's version of the zombie is what most modern zombies are based on.

Now, it seems as though there's a new zombie movie every summer! Even the word zombie is now used to describe people who go through life in a trancelike state, doing the same tasks over and over with no enjoyment or excitement.



What do you think?:

This “zombie” narrative dates back very far in human history. Why do you think our ancestors told stories or held beliefs about the dead coming back to life?

The evolution of the zombie narrative has been an interesting one. What makes the modern zombie story so appealing to TV and movie audiences today?

Do any of the zombie precursors remind you of characters or events in modern pop culture? Explain the connections you noticed.

What will the future zombie narrative be like? Look forward one hundred years into the future, and tell your version of how the zombie will have evolved.

Undead Map Matchup:

See if you can match up the geographic areas below with the undead that originated there, based on what you've read over the past couple of pages.



_____ **DRAUGR:** They delight in terrorizing animals and people.

_____ **ZOMBI:** They obediently serve their master, unless they are fed salt!

_____ **JIANGSHI:** Their stiff limbs don't make it easy to get around.

_____ **ZOMBIE:** They are the stars of many movies and games.

_____ **REVENANT:** Maybe they have a bone to pick with someone!