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College of Liberal Arts

Department of Anthropology



The Zombie Apocalypse

by Benjamin Monti

May, 2018

The concept of the living dead has been a subject of human fascination for thousands of years, dating back to 8th century Africa. According to researchers at Michigan State University, the word “zombie” stems from the word “nzambi”, which, in the language of the Kingdom of Kong, means “spirit of a dead person” (MSU). The idea was originally associated with voodoo folklore, but since its origination, has been modernized and popularized with TV shows, movies, and other popular culture facets including *The Walking Dead*, *Night of the Living Dead*, and *Call of Duty: Zombies*. With this popular fascination, however, comes concern. After years of exposure to gory, brain-eating, zombie-inspired violence, many people began asking the question “could an apocalypse actually happen”? Answers to this question vary greatly, with people from avid fans to licensed doctors taking strong stances on both sides. The goal of this paper is to present research and opinions on both sides of this argument, allowing you to determine whether or not you’ll be building an underground apocalypse bunker anytime soon.

One of the most pondered questions regarding the possibility of a zombie apocalypse is concerned with the physical feasibility. As a living organism, the human body requires a very specific set of conditions to be present in order to properly function. If that body were no longer alive, as would be true for a zombie, many people argue that the organism would be non-functioning. One example of this is the human nervous system. The nervous system is known as the body’s command center, and is comprised of the brain, spinal cord, and a network of nerves. Due to the sensitivity of the nervous system, if any part of it becomes damaged, the rest of the system may be inoperable. (HMT) This means, in the event of a zombie apocalypse, the majority of these zombies would be unable to walk due to brain damage. If they are unable to walk, it would be difficult for these zombies to infect more people, disabling the spread of disease, (Chandler).

Another reason that zombification may not be physically feasible is metabolic breakdown. In order for organisms to sustain themselves and process energy, they must digest food. This applies to zombies as well, as they would need to metabolize food in order to walk and continue infecting people. However, being dead, a zombie would not have any metabolic function at all. This means that they would be unable to convert the potential chemical energy in food to mechanical energy, meaning that they would not be able to walk. These zombies would simply decay, and the spread of the infection would be nearly impossible, (Chandler).

Although zombification may not be possible through the undead, some argue that an apocalypse is still possible through other means. According to Harvard Health Publishing, there already exists a virus that simulates zombie-like behavior in humans. The disease is called “kuru,” and it causes loss of speech, open sores, and poor coordination. It has also been related to the development of cannibalistic tendencies. The disease is spread through consumption of infected human brains, which is a trademark of classic zombie tendencies, (Watson).

Some say a new virus could also arise that causes zombie-like behavior in humans. Viruses mutate work by multiplying and copying their genetic material within humans. If two viruses were to be located in the same cell when they multiply, one virus could fuse their genetic copy with a genetic copy of the other virus. This could potentially create an entirely new strain of virus

that combines symptoms already found in existing viruses such as aggression, loss of coordination, and even death, ultimately creating a zombie-like virus, (Dell'Amore).

If any of the previously mentioned conditions did occur, there has been much deliberation regarding the safest procedure to follow during an apocalypse. Some believe that chances of survival are best in big cities, while others consider the country to be the place to go. Those who believe people in cities are safest cite transportation and infrastructure as two major safety factors. They note that, during an apocalypse, transportation via car would be impractical. Due to low fuel availability and attention-attracting noise, many believe that biking would be the best transportation option in an apocalyptic scenario. Due to pre-established bike lanes and generally flat grounds, cities seem to be more conducive to efficient biking than rural countryside's, which tend to be more hilly and grassy. Another reason the city may be more practical is because of infrastructure. In the event of a zombie apocalypse, government-regulated buildings would most likely be shut down. These buildings, including libraries, schools, and offices, could be used for bunkers for protection against hordes of zombies. The number of buildings in more rural areas does not compare to that of urban areas, meaning less protection overall. Lastly, cities typically have larger food supply, an advanced biomedical research and development, both which are crucial for survival, (Devaney).

If, during an apocalyptic scenario, one finds that they are not in a safe area, there are a few things that can be done to increase chances of survival. One of the most noted tips included is the selection of weaponry. In order to defend the living against the undead, weapons are a necessity. According to those who have considered this idea, these weapons must be selected carefully. Weapons used during an apocalypse should be renewable, easy-to-use, and as minimally attention-drawing as possible. This is because ammunition may not be widely or readily available, weapons may need to be used quickly and at both close and far ranges, and loud noises may attract more zombies. For instance, an assault style weapon should not be used because they are loud and you can run out of ammunition. A better choice would be a cross bow, or spear, (Davis).

It is also suggested finding a building to take cover in with the least number of ground level windows as possible. This is recommended because zombies will not be able to see or get inside through a window, and other survivors looking to steal resources and provisions will not be able to see or get inside through a window, and other survivors looking to steal resources and provisions will not be able to either. This is important because windows are typically made of glass, which is much weaker than any type of wall, and would allow uninvited people, both alive and undead, inside of a survivor's bunker. If you find yourself in a building with a large number of ground level windows, try boarding them up with thick wood and strong nails, (Davis).

Overall, the chances of the zombie apocalypse actually happening are slim. But, just because the chances are slim, doesn't mean it cannot happen. The zombie apocalypse should never be something to be overly worried about, but should be kept as a topic of scientific discussion. As of now, medical research scientists should be more worried about finding cures for existing diseases such as cancer, rather than the currently non-existent zombie infection.

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