

NOVACON

9-11 November 2018
Park Inn, Nottingham

“These SCIFI Edition Kinder Surprise Eggs are getting out of hand!”



Guest of Honour
Chris Beckett

**THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP**

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EDITORIAL.....

My wife has, in no uncertain terms, told me I have to stop impersonating a flamingo at home, of course, I've had to put my foot down.

It's actually been quite a rough week, I bought a new thesaurus the other day but all the pages were blank, I can't find the words to tell you how angry I am about that.

I know what you're thinking, but you are wrong; it can only go up from there. Please enjoy **PR2**, or at least lie to people, and tell them that you enjoyed it. Please study these pages carefully because at the con there will be a test... Nah, not really; just trying to encourage you to read it. There are some good bits, you just have to dig quite deeply, that's all.

Enjoy... sort of..

Look, you've been told about this before. The material herein is copyright to the stated authors, or **Novacon**, whichever can fight better. So, please, no copying without permission. Don't make me angry, you wouldn't like me when I'm angry... truth be told, you probably wouldn't like me when I'm not angry, but that's my problem.... unless you copy something.

~~A WARD FOR~~ WORD FROM OUR CHAIR



Since PR1 I've moved in with the Lawsons. No, there hasn't been some domestic upheaval that has forced me to flee the Convention Secretary in Leicester (with whom I currently live), and have been given shelter by two other committee members. It's simply that I have a contract job in Sheffield (by contract job I mean actual job.... I'm not a hitman) and they now have a Monday-Friday lodger. You'd think this would mean even *more* opportunities to discuss plans for Novacon, or at least provide the basis for a fan-based sit-com. However, they have a bunch of DVDs I don't. And a **** load of box sets stored on their *NOW* box. And a run of Batman I hadn't read... and.... and.... .

That's the life of a modern SF fan in a nutshell. There's just *so much* stuff out there to read/watch/play. It's overwhelming. Fortunately nice people with fine taste (or, at a pinch, us) take it on themselves to organise SF conventions, where there's a programme of specific events and themes you can focus on.

We'd very much like you to be focussing on the excellent **Chris Beckett**, our GoH this year, whose paperback of *America City* is due out in the Autumn.

So, work your way through that pile of unread books by the settee before you get to the convention, ready to restock with brand new signed copies of Chris's books.

Lastly, we're a community fascinated by the possibilities of technology and the future, like magnetic monorails, travel tubes, hover cars, even teleportation. But, in actuality, we live in a country where the rail service appears to have collapsed and, once again, the motorway south of Nottingham (a bit further down this year) has fresh road works that are a total person-born-out-of-wedlock to get through on a Friday night. So, if you're coming to **Novacon**, it's probably best to set out now.



Mansfield Road, Nottingham
NG5 2TB



As usual, I'm going to nag you to book your hotel room now, if you haven't done so already. If you have, good for you, we like you. If you don't have a hotel form you can download one from the website (www.novacon.org.uk).

Rooms are £49ppn for double/twin room.

£67pn single room.

There are a limited number of family rooms (2 adults and 2 children) for £110 per night. Children under 4 years old at the time of the con go free, 4-12 years half-price, after that you are adults!

IMPORTANT: Last year we had a number of no-shows. Now, this may be beyond your control, but if you cancel a room less than 1 week before the convention, or don't turn up, the hotel reserves the right to charge you for one night's stay. Please bear this in mind.

If you are going to arrive after 4pm on the Friday evening then please ring the hotel (0115 9359988), and reserve your room with your card. This prevents the hotel flogging your room to someone else.

On Sunday evening there will be the usual Banquet and Beer Tasting. The hot buffet meal is chosen by our guest of honour and you MUST buy a ticket for it by 12 noon on Sunday. If you just want to drink the beer, you can either bring 3 bottles/cans of interesting beer to registration to get your beer badge or just buy one for £6. A selection of soft drinks will be available to everyone free of charge.



There will be a **Code of Conduct**, substantially similar to the code of conduct last year. The **Novacon** code of conduct is revised continuously, but the version to be used at any given **Novacon** is fixed and published a couple of months in advance of the convention itself.

By taking a membership of **Novacon 48**, you signify your consent to be bound by the code of conduct as published in **PR3** and the convention programme book.

THE ART SHOW

Will there be an Art Show this Year? I should bloody coco there will be. Not only that but it will be the biggest that we have had for many years. The list of people wanting to exhibit themselves is impressively long... and that's just in the Art Show, what happens in the bar has nothing to do with me.

Seriously though we do have a long list of people ... as long as your arm... alright a baby's arm but still a long list, look and see:

Dave Hardy

Alex Storer

Fangorn

Margaret Walty

Jackie Burns

Giulia de Cesare

Penny Hicks

Julie McMurray

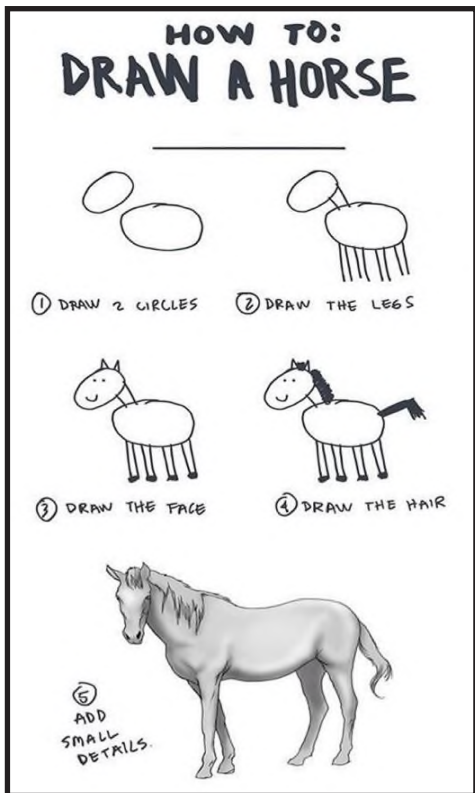
Judy Perrin

Peter Harrow

And various Spanish illustrators as seen at **Follycon** to name but a few!

Even the Committee have prepared an installation which you can see if you look through the glass of the ops room, they call it "Drunkards", and have apparently, been working on it for some time. Sounds exciting!

With all these exhibitors this year we've had to expand into another room,





which means we still have loads of room left for more, so if you would like space there's still plenty. My dream is to (one day) take over the whole of downstairs then start creeping upstairs until I eventually invade the main room and then the convention is mine, ALL MINE! BWA HA HA HA HA!

Ah, I seem to have gotten off-topic there, but the point is there's still lots of room left, so if you want space let me know by emailing Tony or Steve (see page 2), and it will be forwarded on to me assuming they can drag themselves out of the pub long enough to do anything.

This, of course, means lots to purchase for yourself, or perhaps as a Christmas present in the inevitable Art Auction, where we will have original art, prints and "things of an art related nature" for you to bid on.

Remember, get in touch soon if you want to expose yourself... oh, you know what I mean.

DEALERS TABLES

Dealers' tables are available for £20 for the weekend, (when we say dealers.... you know what we mean right? We don't want to have to confiscate anything, or call the police, or have really wild room parties (*Editor's Note: **Novacon** in no way advocates the use of illegal mind-altering drugs.... no matter how much they would MASSIVELY improve committee meetings.*)).

If you want a table, but don't wish to attend the convention, we can talk about this too. Either way, contact Steve or Tony at the email addresses on page 2.

ART SHOW

If you want to show your art it is free, but you will need to reserve space. So, if you need half a table, a whole table, a wall or, God forbid, you are planning to bring a whole installation, then it might be a good idea to let us know so that we can do a little planning (I know, why start now right?).

Contact Tony or Steve (see inside cover) and tell them what you need, you like, your hopes and dreams...

CONVENTION TABLES

These are free to any poor damned souls who are also running a convention. God help you.

Contact Tony or Steve for reservations, help, support, drink, a massage... whatever you need.

MOTHER

OF EDEN

by

CHRIS BECKETT

A review by Helena Bowles

As this is the middle book of a trilogy, there will inevitably be some (minor) spoilers for the first book, *Dark Eden*. Read at your own risk!

Mother of Eden picks up a couple of hundred years after the events of *Dark Eden*. John's exodus from Circle Valley has opened Eden to the family, though this has come at a price. There is no longer a single culture holding the family together, rather the family has split into several subgroups, all of whom have their own place to live, their own traditions, and, most importantly, their own version of Gela's and Tommy's story. The most powerful groups are the Johnfolk, who are descended from those who followed John across the Worldpool, and the Davidfolk, named for the man who opposed John, who remained near the original Circle Valley settlement. Enmity between these two factions is longstanding and deeply embedded into their world view. Each believes that they, and they alone, are the true children of Gela, living as she would want. However, as John led his tribe across the Worldpool, and settled some distance away, they rarely meet.

There are other, smaller, groups of settlers who revere other members of John's band, including Jeff, the clever, the thoughtful one. One group of Jeff Folk is a small island community that has remained tribal, content to live off the fish they catch from the boats they make and items they trade. Most people on Eden barely know they are there. Life is slow, relatively easy, quiet, and not a little dull.

Starlight Brooking is a member of this island community. She is clever, sharp, ambitious and restless. So it is unsurprising that when news reaches them that Johnfolk have been seen this side of the Worldpool, Johnfolk who seem to have *metal*, unheard of on Eden, she is determined to get off the island, if only for a little while, and find out what the rumours mean. She strongarms her uncle, her half-sister, and a friend into taking a journey – part trading mission, part pilgrimage, and part tourist trip – to the Veeklehouse. The Veeklehouse is more or less neutral territory, being of religious importance to all the groups on Eden. Technically it is in Davidfolk territory, but it has become a major trading post. Starlight has never been there before, and she is delighted by the bustle, and by the different people she meets.





One person in particular is Greenstone Johnson, the son of the current leader of the Johnfolk. Starlight is entranced by his stories of how different his life has been to hers, so, when Greenstone sets sail for the Johnfolk territories, Starlight is at his side. She is ready to dive into this new life, with a handsome man she will be Housewoman to. Handsome *and* rich, as the Johnfolk have discovered how to smelt metal from the greenstone ore. The Metall Age is dawning, and the Johnfolk are at the technological forefront

When Starlight reaches her new world, however, she is shocked at some of the practices she finds. The Johnfolk's wealth is based on the production of this metal (which is never named in the text, so let's call it copper for the moment) and that requires the development of stratified roles within the community. A feudal caste system has been established with the Headman at the top, his warlords just below him, a priestly caste known as Teachers, and below them the menial workers until, right at the bottom, we get the miners. Starlight is expected to slot into the hierarchy as the "ringwearer", the Headman's wife who literally gets to wear Gela's sacred ring.

Starlight doesn't like much of what she sees. By giving us the viewpoint of a woman who grew up in a largely egalitarian tribal setting Beckett holds this civilisation up for us to view. And it's an uncomfortable viewing. New Earth, as John named his settlement, has rigid social divisions – the big folk who are wealthy and powerful, and the small folk who are treated as menials. "Batfaces" (people with cleft palates) and "Claw feet" are cast out of this community.

The role of the Headman's Housewoman is that of the Ringwearer. She is a figure of great symbolic importance to the community as a whole and represents the power of Mother Gela. Starlight is sure that, with the help of Greenstone, she can parlay her spiritual influence into temporal power. As a "small person" herself, she empathises with the small folk's lot in the Johnfolk's "New Earth". The problem is that the society Starlight came from is not stratified at all, so she has no experience of balancing differing factions, of how power is wielded, or of what the consequences of threatening the current power bases are.

While Beckett is still working with religious symbolism

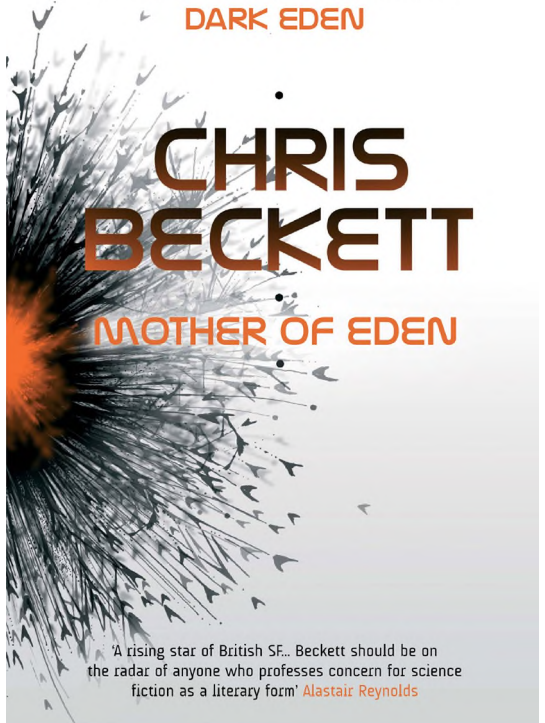
WINNER OF THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD 2013 FOR

DARK EDEN

**CHRIS
BECKETT**

MOTHER OF EDEN

'A rising star of British SF... Beckett should be on the radar of anyone who professes concern for science fiction as a literary form' **Alastair Reynolds**



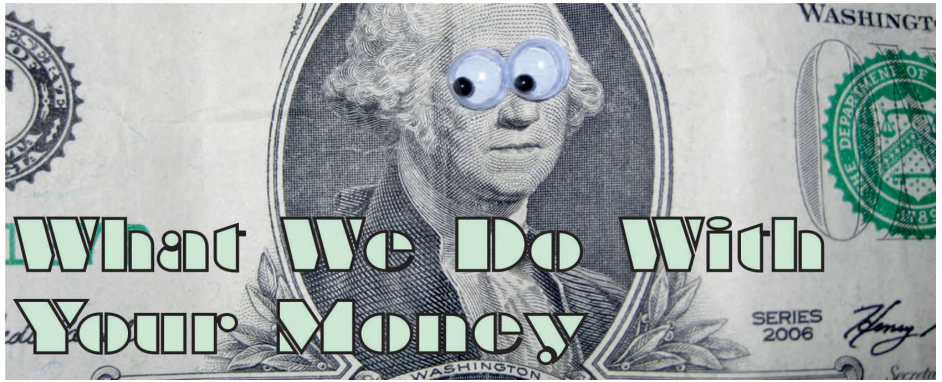
– and Starlight can be viewed as a Christ-like figure – he has broadened his remit to examine the nature of power and economics.

With the discovery of copper smelting, the Johnfolk are undergoing an Industrial Revolution in miniature. The metal has made them rich and gives them technological superiority over the Davidfolk. To maintain their wealth they must maintain the supply of copper, and that demands the establishment of a caste who must mine the ore. The control of ore production is concentrated in a small group who become wealthier than the miners they control. On Eden, as on Earth, mining is a dangerous, dirty job that nobody really wants to do meaning that, if the ore supply is to be consistent, people must be forced to undertake that role. The compulsion may be economic – the poorest smallfolk must do it in order to feed themselves – or it may be literal with the establishment of slavery. Beckett is illustrating how whole societies are forced to evolve a stratified class system in order to maintain the production that keeps the minority rich. Now this isn't a new observation – it's straight out of Marx and Engels – but, with our view of this filtered through Starlight, who has never experienced a class system, Beckett is able to hold a deeply discomfiting mirror up to how Western Capitalism works.

Beckett's main concern, as in *Dark Eden*, is to show how the stories we tell shape our understanding of the world. Stories tell us who we are and what to think, so, naturally, the rulers of society will seek to control the stories being told, and the meanings assigned to them. This means that "rogue stories – stories that don't support the particular worldview that keeps the 1% wealthy and powerful at the top – must be rigidly controlled. The secret "women's story" that Edenite women pass down to their daughters is one such story. This "story" originated with Gela herself, and it explicitly challenges the Johnfolk's patriarchal culture. As such, it must be eradicated, and the women talking of it must be removed from society. There are faint echoes of the Church and witch hunts, here. Of course, Starlight herself had the words handed down from her Mother, but she cannot reveal this.

If stories are used by the ruling class to justify and maintain the status quo, they are also restrictive. The rulers must obey the roles assigned to them by the stories. If they do not, they will probably no longer be rulers. This is the problem Starlight and Greenstone run into. As a symbol of Mother Gela, Starlight cannot step out of her religious role, without forfeiting any power she has. All the members of New Earth are locked into their assigned roles by their culture's stories. Those who rebel are swiftly and permanently silenced.

Beckett uses New Earth to reflect many things – politics, capitalism, patriarchy, environmental destruction, how we are controlled by our cultural beliefs (the stories we tell) and how these things are tied together. I would have liked some of these things to be explored in more depth – such as how patriarchy came to be adopted by society that was originally egalitarian. Patriarchy is seen as underpinning the rest of these societal traits – and Beckett needs a patriarchal society to mirror our own society – but I would have liked a greater justification and examination of how this all got started. Having said that, *Mother of Eden*, is a fascinating and thought provoking read.



Every year, the convention raises money through various auctions and going through your pockets when you are passed out drunk in the bar - we don't keep it! We donate it to **RNIB** for the books they publish, and give some additional amount from the **Novacon** itself. In the early years, we used to be able to ask specifically for sf/fantasy, but nowadays it requires too much money. Hence, last year we did not pay them the money collected - £500. We'll put it with the money collected from you this year and hopefully we'll have enough money to be able to specify the type of book we'd like published.

The **RNIB** has been supporting people with sight loss since they were founded, in October 1868, as **The British And Foreign Blind Association For Improving The Embossed Literature Of The Blind**. In 1914 it changed its name to **The National Institute for the Blind**, or **NIB** (which was, presumably, easier to get on a t-shirt). In 1949, it received the Royal Charter, and changed its name to the **Royal National Institute Of Blind People**.

Over the years, it has been responsible for adopting and standardizing systems for helping the visually impaired including the introduction of a standardized Braille system in 1870, the first Braille magazine, **Progress**, in 1871 and the first Braille dictionary in 1893. In 1918 their first "Sunshine Home for Blind Babies" (*and if that thought alone doesn't make you donate....*) was opened, and in 1930 the standardized Braille music code was introduced.

They introduced Talking Books in 1935, and it is still one of their flagship services with over 25,000 titles available. Their service is absolutely free and available to all ages and covers a wide range of genres. The books are available in a variety of formats including DAISY CD (one book per disc), USB stick (three books per stick), and Digital Download. They also have a range of titles available to buy from their online shop as well as a selection of large print books and newspapers.

As well as supplying a wide variety of Talking Books for recreation, they also provide educational books to children with sight difficulties, as well as those with Dyslexia.

Thank you for your continued support for our charity.



You Too May Be A

ZOMBIE

...AND OTHER INTERESTING FACTS



Just a quick warning, some of the accounts mentioned in this are probably best not read when you are eating.

Zombies, Zombies, Zombies..... You've got to love those crazy, brain eating, shuffling, dead guys (and gals). They seem to be everywhere these days... Well, obviously not everywhere, that would be a disaster, but you know what I mean. It seems you can't turn on the TV without someone gnawing someone's foot off, and I'm not talking about just to relieve the tedium of yet another *EastEnders* omnibus.

No. Zombies, for some reason, appeal to us. Well, maybe appeal is not the right term, we seem to have a deep-seated fear of such creatures (stand alone in a graveyard after midnight and I dare you not to think about Zombies), yet they feature quite heavily in some of our favourite entertainment.

It seems like only yesterday that Michael Jackson was strutting his stuff to the hit *Thriller*, and George A. Romero's *Zombies* were scaring the crap out of us at the cinema. Now, we have *The Walking Dead* on our TV screens (again, not referring to *EastEnders*), the Podcast Drama *We're Alive* (if you haven't heard this, you should) and books like Max Brooks' *World War Z* (not to be confused with the god-awful film of the same title). Indeed, it seems that Zombies are as popular today as they ever were.

But the modern perception of the Zombie in Hollywood is far removed from the original source material. The modern Zombie seems to be an amalgam of the walking dead, and people who attack and try to munch on other people. These are two very different things which we will come to shortly.

Zombies first came to the attention of a wider world in 1928 when the American writer William Seabrook came face-to-face with a Zombie on a desolate island off the coast of Haiti. "The eyes were the worst," Seabrook would later write in *The Magic Island*, his book about Haitian voodoo culture. "They were in truth the

eyes of a dead man”. The book went on to sell half a million copies and changed popular culture by introducing the Zombie as yet another thing to look for under our beds.



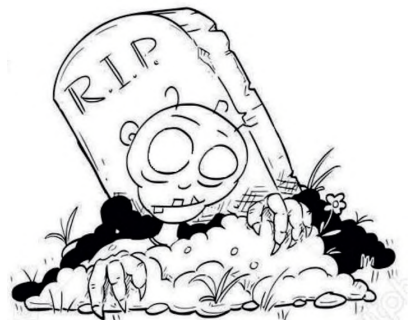
Incidentally, although it probably wasn't the first Zombie fictional story, *Dead Men Kill* by L. Ron Hubbard (1934 **Thrilling Detective**) is the first and probably the most famous use of the phrase "The Walking Dead" (*Wow, what an interesting fact – You*) (*Why thank you – Me*) (*You're so knowledgeable... and handsome – You*) (*Aw shucks – Me*).

The story's hero, Detective Terry Lane, thought he had seen it all until a murder spree occurs in his city. The wealthy, the powerful and the privileged are all being targeted. The evidence all points to the culprits being friends and co-workers: the problem is they are all dead and buried. Hounded by the chief of police for results ("just give me 24 hours chief...", etc.), and pursued by the walking dead, Lane has to think outside of the box, or he knows he'll end up in one... six-foot under.

Hubbards' inspiration for this story came during a mineralogical expedition to the West Indies where he learned of the Voodoo practices of Zombification. Several years later, still intrigued by the idea, he decided it was time to use this information to write a story to scare the willies out of people. This was, of course, long before he created a religion to scare the willies out of people instead (I'm looking at you Tom Cruise).

The Haitian type of Zombie is not to be confused with the Hollywood version. The creature in Haitian Vodou (they spell it this way there) doesn't eat brains and chase you through a shopping mall. He is rather a living person who, after receiving powerful drugs, undergoes a ceremony leading to being animate, but considered dead. The individual is compelled to do the bidding of the boco (the "reviver") which is likely to include heavy manual labour and criminal acts.

You may be unsurprised to learn that this practice is illegal in Haiti. It is considered so real that they had to create an actual law forbidding it.



So, Are Zombies Real?

Surprisingly, according to some scientific studies, the answer is... hmmmmm....errrrm.... well, yes, but not necessarily in the Hollywood style. Our idea of the human Zombie is probably based on a mix and match of several conditions, the dead who have risen from the grave, and people who eat Human flesh and I make the point of them being separate because in the real world the two do not combine.

It is thought that the origin of the word "Zombie" comes from the Congo word "nzambi" which means "spirit of a dead person". In Haitian culture, a Zombie is someone who has annoyed his or her family, and community, to the point that they can no longer stand to live with this person (I think we all know someone like that). They respond by hiring a *Bokor*, a voodoo priest, who practices black magic. Through the application of a *coup poudre* (magic powder) the victim appears to die. They are then buried and the exhumed a few days later. From there on they remain under the *Bokor's* power until the *Bokor* dies. This type of Zombie is the "raising of the dead" variety and there are many documented cases.

In 1982, Harvard graduate Wade Davis, an anthropologist and ethno botanist, travelled to Haiti following reports that two people who were supposedly dead had recently returned to their villages. Both the victims and their relatives attested to the fact that these two had been turned into Zombies. Through his research, Davis succeeded in learning the recipe for *Poudre Zombie* and was present to witness its preparation. His findings were published in his book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* which went on to become a bestseller and a movie.

Another case was observed by researchers in Haiti in 1997. Fi was around 30 years old when she died after a short febrile illness. She was buried by her family the same day in the family tomb next to her house. Three years later she was recognised wandering near the village by a friend. Her mother confirmed her identity by a facial mark, as did her 7-year-old daughter, her siblings, other villagers, her husband, and the local priest. She appeared mute and unable to feed herself. Her parents accused her husband of Zombifying her because she had had an affair. When a local court authorised the opening of her tomb it was found to be full of stones but no body. Her parents were undecided whether to take her home and she was admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Port-au Prince.

Clairvius Narcisse died on May 2, 1962 after admitting himself to the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Deschappelle, a town in the Artibonite Valley of Haiti. He had been suffering from a plethora of ailments, but no direct cause for his death could be determined. He was certified dead by two doctors. Eighteen years later, in 1980, his sister Angelina saw Narcisse in a market place. He recounted the memories of his own "death," including being buried alive. He had been placed into a death-like state by a *bokor*, and, after being dug up was whisked away to a plantation to serve as a zombified labourer. He escaped after two years of slavery, and wandered the Haitian countryside, only willing to return to his village when his brother, whom he believed





to have made the deal with the *bokor* that turned Narcisse into a Zombie, had finally passed away.

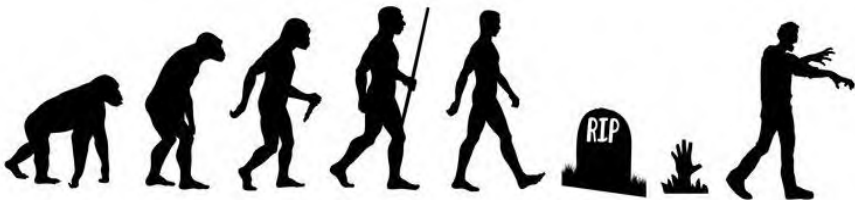
In Uganda, in 2012, a veritable plague swept through northern regions. It was dubbed the nodding disease, given the afflicted children's tendency to nod their head, as though in a trance. However, this nodding was the most innocuous symptom of the disease. Children were reported to be mostly unresponsive, to suffer from seizures, to wander off aimlessly, and, in several cases, start random fires. Parents who attempted to tie their children down were often left with a horrific scene: their young ones snarling and biting at their binds, attempting to free themselves. While nodding disease is not an example of supposed death and resurrection, the behaviour it elicits from those infected sounds very much like Zombification.

What Turns You Into A Zombie?

Wade Davis investigated Narcisse's case, and claimed to have discovered the key to Zombification, namely the use of the datura plant. This contains the hallucinogens atropine and scopolamine, which induces delirium, confusion, psychosis, and complete amnesia (a bit like Stella Artois). It could never be conclusively determined, however, whether or not this substance was actually used on Narcisse.

Krokodil is a drug that rose to prominence in poor areas of Russia because of its potent opioid effects combined with the affordable and easy methods with which it is produced. The drug is now cropping up in the US (quite fitting, given the narcotic was patented in America in 1934). If the potency of krokodil was not alarming enough, its side effects are the stuff of horror movies. The drug gets its name from the gangrenous effect it has on users' skin as it literally eats tissue and flesh from the inside out. This often leads to open sores and wounds on users' flesh which leaves their bones exposed. It can also lead to incoherence, jerking motions, and shuffling or shambling steps (back to Stella Artois again). In other words, krokodil turns you into a Zombie: technically alive, but in many ways, also dead.

Recently the UK has been hit by a new drug known as Zombie, Spice or Black Mamba. This is a synthetic variant of cannabis; technically a synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonist, which puts the user into a mindless trance in which they often shuffle around. The drug can also make it difficult for users to coordinate their movements, and often results in them standing motionless. It doesn't rot the flesh



like Krokodil, but can induce hallucinations. A user high on this attacked a woman with green hair, claiming she was a Jedi Knight. So not only does it turn you into a zombie, it also turns you into a Sith Lord.

So, Where Does The “Flesh Eating” Thing Come From?

Well, there are many cases of people unexplainably just going loopy and eating people. I don't just refer to the criminally insane; I'm talking about people, normal people, who just one day completely lose it, and, in most cases, it just cannot be explained why.

In China in 2012, a rather unsightly incident went down with a drunken Chinese bus driver who was angry about another motorist blocking his path. Rather than patiently wait for the other driver to move, the man began jumping on top of the woman's car hood. When she exited her car, things got particularly nasty, and the drunken man leaped upon her and began to eat her face, which is slightly worse than just giving someone the finger in traffic. The woman survived, but did require major plastic surgery to repair her wounds. Some believed that the bus driver was possessed by *Jiang Shi*, a hopping Zombie-like creature of legend, believed to kill and absorb the *qi* of the living; others thought this was perfectly normal behaviour for a bus driver.

In the same year, again in China, a retired teacher attacked a younger subway rider after a squabble over a seat eventually biting repeatedly at the other man's face. Other passengers reportedly tried to break up the fight but when they saw the man go full flesh-eater, they decided it was more than they were willing to deal with during rush hour, and backed away in terror.

In August 2016, a 19-year-old college student, Austin Harrouf, reportedly stormed away from a restaurant in Jupiter, Florida, where he'd been dining with his parents. He then wandered into a neighbourhood where a couple, Michelle Mischon and John Stevens, sat in their garage, with the door open, enjoying a quiet evening. Harrouf pulled a switchblade on the couple, apparently without provocation. When police arrived, they found Harrouf naked, ripping away chunks of the couple's flesh and eating it. He was also growling, grunting, and making animal noises.

What makes this case especially strange is that, up until this point, Harrouf was a model student. It is reported that he had been hanging out with some of his fraternity brothers prior to joining his parents for dinner, but his toxicology report came back clean. Police were left baffled at Harrouf's behaviour. Just what exactly happened to this man to prompt such a gruesome crime?

Then there was the infamous Miami Cannibal Zombie Attack of 2012, the security footage of which popped up on the internet. It was suspected that Rudy Eugene had spent the day enjoying bath salts (a term for recreational drugs





in the USA before you start worrying) in the Florida sun when he stripped naked and attacked Ronald Poppo, a homeless man, in broad daylight on the MacArthur Causeway, and tried to eat him. Police had to shoot Rudy several times. Ronald Poppo survived the attack, but was sadly left horribly disfigured. As for Rudy Eugene's motives for the attack, toxicology reports only found a trace of marijuana in his system leaving the primary reason he went berserk largely inconclusive. Sadly, he didn't survive the shooting, so couldn't be asked why he went bongo nuts.

If just going crazy isn't bad enough, there are some drugs that can have a similar effect. PCP is very bad stuff that you don't want mess with. Rapper "Big Lurch" was sentenced to life in prison after smoking PCP and then attacking his then-roommate Tynisha Ysais, eating quite a bit of her (pizza delivery was apparently slow in the area). When the police finally arrested "Big Lurch", he was naked and covered in blood yelling at the sky in the middle of the street.

Oh, come on... we've all been there.

Zombies in Nature

If you thought Human behaviour could get weird, this is where it gets really creepy. Nature is cruel to the point of being bloody minded about it, and in creating its version of Zombies has gone way, way beyond any horrors we could imagine.

Zombie Ants

You read that right - there are zombie ants out there in nature, afflicted by a parasitic fungus that biologically manipulates the insects into doing their bidding.

Fungi of the genus *Ophiocordyceps* need ants to complete their life cycle. When an ant comes across fungal spores the fungus infects the insect and quickly spreads throughout its body. Fungal cells then release chemicals that hijack the insect's central nervous system. The fungus forces the ant to climb high up in the vegetation and clamp down onto a leaf or twig before killing its hapless drone. It then grows a spore-releasing stalk out of the back of the victim's head (I kid you not) which rain down on other ants below, spreading the contagion far and wide.

In another variation of this, *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, prompts its hosts to end their days perched under a leaf getting those not infected by the falling spores. It is not immediately apparent how a fungus has this surprisingly specific effect on an organism so much more complex than itself.





Zombie Spiders

It may be the most terrifying two words ever put together, but, in reality, the Zombie spider is Zombified by a wasp, proving that wasps are nature's bastards. The tropical wasp species, *Hymenoepimecis Argyraphaga*, using an arsenal of toxins and mind-altering chemicals, is able to turn the spider into both a slave and handy meal, and its web into a safe haven. The female wasp makes the spider an unwilling wet nurse. The insect stings the arachnid into submission, and lays an egg in the spider's abdomen. The larvae hatch and remain inside the spider, using it as its personal buffet (i.e., it drinks spider blood) while the hypnotized arachnid goes about its business.

After a time, the wasp larva needs a cocoon to move on to the next phase of its life cycle. As such, the wasp-in-training injects the spider with a chemical that compels the spider to build a web fit for a wasp cocoon. After this, the spider sits in total compliance as the wasp sucks all of its remaining life, discards the corpse and builds its own cocoon.

Zombie Caterpillars

Swear to God I'm not making this up.

The parasitic wasp *Glyptapanteles*, lays its eggs in the body of caterpillars. When the eggs hatch, the wasp larvae feed on the host caterpillar's bodily fluids before eating their way out, and forming a cocoon nearby. The caterpillar, although injured by this process, is still alive, and remains in position, as a sort of Zombie bouncer, aggressively knocking away beetles that come too near the cocoon.

Zombie Rats

There's a parasite called *Toxoplasma Gondii* that seems to devote its entire existence to out-horrorfying every other parasite. This bug infects rats, but can only breed inside the intestines of a cat. The parasite knows it needs to get the rat inside the cat, so the parasite takes over the rat's brain, and intentionally makes it scurry *toward* where the cats hang out. The rat is being programmed to get itself eaten. Still no one knows how the parasite can do this. It's such an incredibly specific action it doesn't just cause it to run at any predator; the poor rat specifically seeks out cats.

Zombie Frogs

Batrachochytrium Dendrobatidis infects Japanese tree frogs, and has a rather curious effect. It causes them to emit mating calls that are faster and longer than others of their species, making them more attractive to potential mates who then themselves,, during their act of... er... you know, become infected. Oddly, this fungus usually proves fatal in other frog species, but seems to have this non-lethal symbiosis going on with this frog. They are basically sex Zombies.



Zombie Plants

Perhaps one of the most surprising examples of a real-life Zombification in nature is not in animals whose behaviour goes awry – but in plants, where they are transformed into mutant versions of themselves.

The invading parasites secrete proteins that change molecular processes inside the plants. They alter transcription factors (the plant's own proteins that control the gene expressions that differentiate different parts of the organism) and the flowers on the plant begin to morph into green flowers (they essentially become a leaf). The infection makes them more attractive to certain insects that inadvertently pick up the parasites and carry them to new plant hosts. Zombie plants are a particularly interesting example because the plant itself does not ultimately die as a result of the infection. It is simply transformed into a useful vehicle for furthering the parasite contagion.

Zombie Clowns

Nah, not really. I just made that up to make it worse..... Or did I.

The Zombie Apocalypse And Other Fun Activities

Hollywood has been in love with the idea of a zombie apocalypse for a long time, but when you take science fiction out of the equation, and add real-world science into it, a zombie virus looks a little less far-fetched, and perhaps a little more realistic.

There are already diseases that alter the behaviour of humans. Rabies for one example, and, while it proves fatal, before the end the poor unfortunate is reprogrammed to bite others to spread the infection. Rabies has to incubate inside the body before signs of infection show, which include anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, paralysis, agitation, hyper salivation, difficulty swallowing, and, hydrophobia (fear of water). This incubation period can last anywhere from 10 days to a year. Imagine,, however, if rabies mutated so that it became non-lethal, but left you in the Bite-y stage. Couldn't happen? Who among you has such faith in humanity that they can't imagine a lab somewhere working on this?

But you don't need something as aggressive as rabies to do the trick. If the whole sudden, mindless violence idea seems far-fetched, remember that you are just one brain chemical (serotonin) away from turning into a mindless killing machine (they've tested it by putting rats in cages and watching them turn on each other). All it would take is a disease that destroys the brain's ability to absorb that one chemical, and suddenly it's a real-world *28 Days Later*.

Remember our old friend *Toxoplasmosa Gondii* from rats? It may amaze you to learn that approximately half the human population is infected with it, and don't



know. Most don't show any symptoms, but the few who do simply show those similar to a cold or flu. A very few infected can show signs of a change in their personality. In the worst cases they also have a higher chance of going insane. No one is quite sure why it becomes expressed in some people whilst having no effect on the wider infected population. Researchers have suggested an outside influence, an infection or such that triggers it to become active. It wouldn't take much research to artificially induce this surely? (Again... labs – basically, never trust anyone in a white coat).

Then there's neurogenesis. You know all that controversy about stem cell research? Well, the whole thing with stem cells is that they can also be used to regenerate dead cells. They're already able to re-grow parts of the brains of comatose head trauma patients so they can wake up and walk around again. That sounds great, but there are labs dedicated to "reanimation research". They are working on bringing the dead back to life, you know, those crazy (mostly rich) Californians who had themselves frozen. But there is a problem. The process of dying causes the brain to die off from the outside in (The outside being the cortex - the part of you that makes you, you). That just leaves the part that controls basic motor function and primitive instincts behind. You don't need the cortex to survive; all you need is the stem, and you'll still be able to mindlessly walk and eat (think 2am any city centre on a Saturday night). This is how chickens can keep walking around after they've been beheaded (including one case where the chicken lived for 18 months without a head).

So, you take a brain-dead patient, use these techniques to re-grow the brain stem, and you now have a mindless body shambling around, no thoughts and no personality, nothing but a cloud of base instincts and impulses – Piers Morgan springs to mind for some reason. This isn't going to give you a zombie plague, reanimating people one at a time, but it is creepy and, I can't help thinking, pointless. Unless they need more extras for *EastEnders*.

It seems then, that labs around the world are developing things that, if used unscrupulously, could be used for less than beneficial purposes.

What am I saying? We have a history full of research being used for unscrupulous reasons. From throwing dead cows over a castle's defences, to spread disease within a sieged town, to modern chemical and biological warfare. It's just a matter of who is willing to develop and use them, and there is no shortage of those. I haven't even gotten on to Nanites and Rage Viruses and many other ways it could all go Pete Tong.....Basically..... I'm just surprised it hasn't happened yet, but when it finally does (and it will) I won't look so stupid for buying one of those Zombie protection kits from ebay. Zombies are real, and they are out there. It may get worse, and develop into a plague. It may not.... But it may...

But it may not...

But it may...

Sleep well.



NOVACON

MEMBERSHIP LIST JULY 2018

- 1 Chris Beckett
- 2 Adrian Tchaikovsky
- 3 Juliet McKenna
- 4 Dave Hicks
- 5 Tony Berry
- 6 Helena Bowles
- 7 Cat Coast
- 8 Eve Harvey
- 9 John Harvey
- 10 Alice Lawson
- 11 Steve Lawson
- 12 Douglas Spencer
- 13 Richard Standage
- 14 Gary Starr
- 15 Vanessa May
- 16 Luke Smith
- 17 Rob Jackson
- 18 Sally Rowse
- 19 Laura Wheatly
- 20 Barbara-Jane
- 21 Markus Thierstein
- 22 Tim Broadribb
- 23 MEG
- 24 Dave Hardy
- 25 Julia Daly
- 26 James Odell
- 27 Chris Bell
- 28 Vernon Brown
- 29 Pat Brown
- 30 David Carlile
- 31 A C Baker
- 32 Peter Wareham
- 33 Gwen Funnell
- 34 Brian Ameringen
- 35 Emjay Ameringen
- 36 Caroline Mullan
- 37 Charlotte Bulmer
- 38 Neil Summerfield
- 39 Simon Dearn
- 40 Dave Tompkins
- 41 Martin Hoare
- 42 Tim Kirk
- 43 Margaret Austin
- 44 Martin Easterbrook
- 45 Harpal Singh
- 46 Arthur Cruttenden
- 47 Chris Stocks
- 48 Roger Robinson
- 49 Roger Earnshaw
- 50 Jim Walker
- 51 Niall Gordon
- 52 Steve Rogerson
- 53 Claire Brialey
- 54 Mark Plummer
- 55 Anne Woodford
- 56 Alan Woodford
- 57 Steve Dunn
- 58 Sue Edwards
- 59 Steve Jones
- 60 Peter Mabey
- 61 Julian Heathcock
- 62 Adrian Snowdon
- 63 Al Johnston
- 64 Marcus Rowland
- 65 Tim Stannard
- 66 Penny Hicks
- 67 Christine Davidson
- 68 Michael Davidson
- 69 Harry Payne
- 70 Omega
- 71 Hal Payne
- 72 Jodie Payne
- 73 Morag O'Neill
- 74 Stan Nicholls
- 75 Anne Nicholls
- 76 Giulia de Cesare
- 77 Steve Davies
- 78 Anthony Smith
- 79 Wendy Smith
- 80 Gerry Webb
- 81 Mali Perera
- 82 Alan Webb
- 83 Pauline Morgan
- 84 Chris Morgan
- 85 Paul Dormer
- 87 Margaret Croad
- 88 Melica Smith
- 89 Martin Smart
- 90 Michael Abbott
- 91 Anne Wilson
- 92 Hazel Ashworth
- 93 Serena Culfeather
- 94 John Wilson
- 95 Alison Scott
- 96 Steven Cain
- 97 Greg Pickersgill
- 98 Catherine Pickersgill
- 99 John Jarrold
- 100 John Bray
- 101 Henrick Pålsson
- 102 Caroline Humes
- 103 John Richards
- 104 Maerryn Richards
- 105 Dave Lally
- 106 Dave Langford
- 107 George Ternent
- 108 Linda Ternent
- 109 Alice Ternent
- 110 Dominika Klimczak
- 111 Tom Denton
- 112 Venda Denton
- 113 John Dowd
- 114 Fran Dowd
- 115 Pat McMurray
- 116 Julie McMurray
- 117 Ron Gemmell
- 118 Kirsti van Wessel
- 119 Stuart Jenkins
- 120 Dave Brzeski
- 121 Dave Brzeski
- 122 Peter Wilkinson
- 123 Robert Hummerstone
- 124 Tony Rogers
- 125 Jackie Burns
- 126 Tobes Velois
- 127 Bridget Wilkinson
- 128 Ian Whates
- 129 Christina Lake
- 130 Doug Bell
- 131 Colin Fine
- 132 Mike Scott
- 133 Flick
- 134 Sue Mason
- 135 Claire Gamble
- 136 Chris Baker
- 137 Gary Andrews
- 138 Peter Buck
- 139 Alison Buck
- 140 Eira Short
- 141 Smuzz
- 142 Cuil Short
- 143 Clint Wastling
- 144 Ian Maughan
- 145 Helen Gould
- 146 Mike Gould