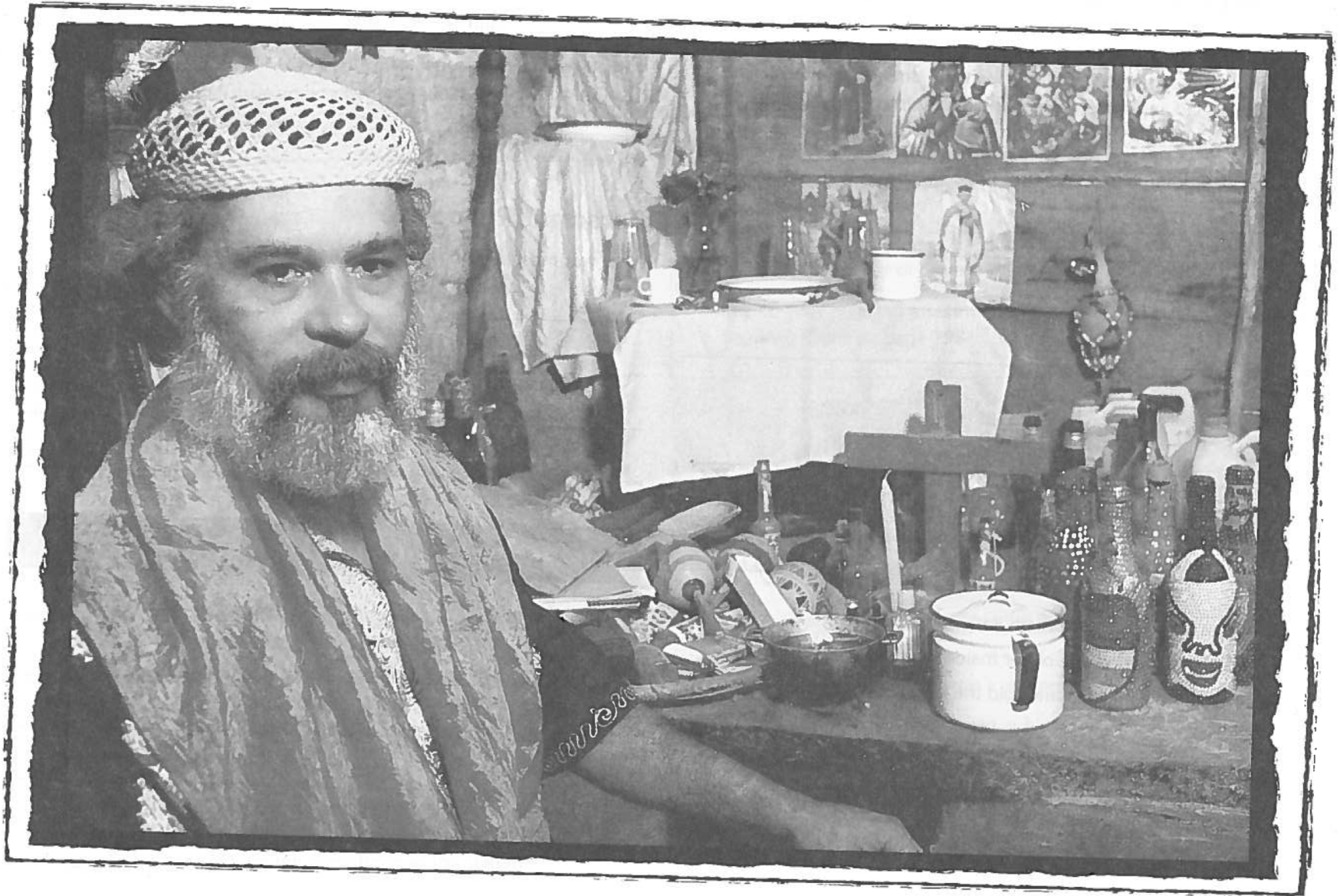


ZOMBIES

The Walking Dead



In Haiti some years ago, a group of girls on a shopping trip stepped into a store. As they looked around, a salesgirl walked over to wait on them. When the girls saw the salesgirl, they recognized her as an old friend. But instead of being happy to meet someone they knew, the girls were terrified. The salesgirl had been dead for three years!

² Most people in that situation might have assumed that the salesgirl simply bore a close resemblance to their dead friend. But the girls were Haitian and, like a good number of people in Haiti, they believed in another explanation. They believed that the salesgirl was a zombie.

³ A zombie is someone who is supposedly not alive but not exactly dead either. Zombies are believed to be people who have died and been buried, but who have later been raised from their graves and turned into slaves. For that reason, they are sometimes referred to as the "walking dead." Their gaze is usually a blank stare, and their movements are slow and mechanical. They can work, but only at simple jobs that don't call for any thought. They do only what they are told to do.

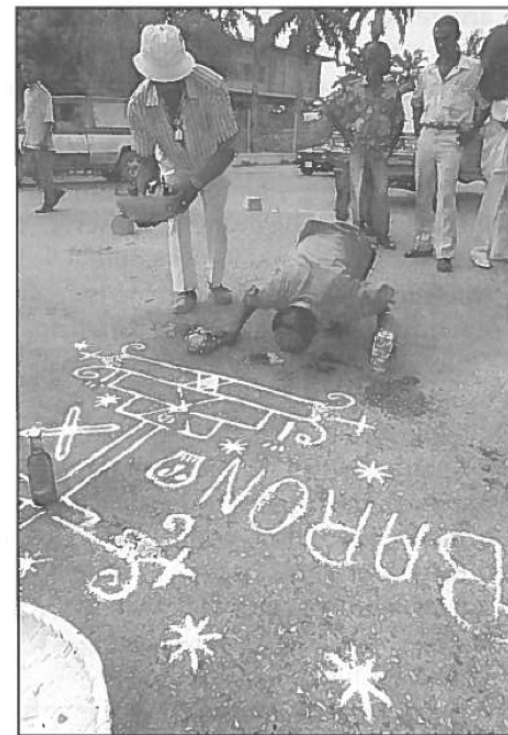
A Haitian voodoo priest sits at an altar surrounded by the tools of his trade.

⁴ Belief in zombies is tied to a belief in voodoo, a religion that developed in Africa. When Africans were brought to the New World as slaves, they brought voodoo with them. Many of those African slaves were taken to the Caribbean island of Haiti, and even today, long after the end of slavery in Haiti, voodoo is practiced on the island. Although voodoo has spread to parts of both North and South America, Haiti remains the center for voodoo.

⁵ The most powerful person in the world of voodoo is the *houngan*, or voodoo priest. Houngans are said to have many powers. Among them is the power to raise the dead. It is the houngan who commands corpses to rise from their graves, and it is he who turns the corpses into zombies. Once a zombie has been created, the houngan has absolute control over him or her. Zombies have no minds of their own; they will do only what the houngan commands them. If he tells them to walk, they will walk. If he orders them to pick sugar cane, that is what they will do. Frequently a houngan uses his zombies to do farm work for him, and occasionally he rents them out to other farmers.

⁶ Most of the stories about zombies come from poor, uneducated people. Skeptics point out that in Haiti people in those circumstances tend to be very

superstitious, and therefore, they are not the most reliable sources. But a well-educated man told the following story of meeting a zombie. The man was driving in the country when his car broke down in front of a house he had never noticed



Voodoo practices are still present in modern-day Haiti. Here people perform a voodoo ceremony in a street of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

before. The owner of the house, a houn gan, invited the man inside. The houn gan explained that he had caused the car to break down because he wanted the man to meet somebody. The houn gan then brought out a zombie. The startled man recognized the zombie as a friend he hadn't seen in a year.

⁷ Another Haitian zombie was seen by many people and was even photographed. Her story is famous. She showed up one day on a farm where people recognized her. The people remembered her as a relative of the owner of the farm. They also remembered that she had died several years earlier. Everyone who had known the woman was sure that it was the same person. The people accused the dead woman's husband of poisoning his wife and then paying a houn gan to turn her into a zombie. The mystery has never been cleared up, and some people continue to believe that voodoo is responsible for this bizarre occurrence. Others, however, have suggested other explanations.

⁸ One possibility is that the dead woman's relatives had hired an impostor to pose as the zombie. If they hated the dead woman's husband and wanted to get him in trouble, that was one way to do it. Accusing him of conspiring with a houn gan was a sure way of making trouble for him.

⁹ Another explanation is that the woman had never died, but had been

drugged by the houn gan. In a heavily drugged state, she had been believed dead. A few hours after she was buried, the houn gan dug her up again and made her his slave. He kept her drugged from then on, in order to keep her in his power. Many people who have studied voodoo believe that this is how zombies are made. The houn gans have great power in the eyes of those who believe in voodoo. His followers do not question his ability to raise the dead. They both fear and respect him.

¹⁰ Some zombies have been proved to be fakes. One investigator, for instance, tells of accompanying a houn gan and his assistant to a graveyard to watch them create a zombie. First the assistant dug up a coffin and opened it. The houn gan uttered some magic words over the body and poured a liquid on it. Then the corpse sat up, got out of the coffin and, moving as though in a trance, walked away with the houn gan. The whole thing looked real, but the investigator was suspicious.

¹¹ The next day, the investigator went back to the cemetery for another look at the empty grave. As he looked around, he discovered an air hose leading down to where the coffin had been. When he saw that, he realized that the creation of the zombie had been a trick. The "zombie" had never been dead. Rather, a living person had been lying in the coffin, breathing through the air hose and waiting to be dug up.

¹² Most Haitians don't believe in zombies, but those who do have influenced the country's burial customs. It is said that the families of some dead people take turns guarding the graves of their loved ones. They stand guard for several weeks after the person has been buried. Only then do they feel it is safe to end their vigil. They figure that by then the corpse is too decomposed to be of use to any houn gan who might want to turn it into a slave.

¹³ Is there really such a thing as voodoo magic? Voodoo exists as long as people believe in it. By believing in the houn gans, the people give them power, just as a magician works real magic in the eyes of trusting and innocent children. ●

If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute Table on page 195 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 196.

Reading Time: Lesson 18

_____ : _____
Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea

B—Too Broad

N—Too Narrow

- _____ 1. People who believe in voodoo believe that voodoo priests can create zombies—raise dead people and have power over them.
- _____ 2. Some people believe that zombies are actually people who have been heavily drugged by voodoo priests.
- _____ 3. Zombies, or the “walking dead,” are part of the religion called voodoo.

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

- Houngans frequently use zombies
 - a. to serve as their assistants.
 - b. as robots.
 - c. to work their farms.
- The investigator who saw a houngan dig up a coffin and raise the corpse discovered that
 - a. the “corpse” had never been dead.
 - b. the houngan had drugged the dead man.
 - c. the “corpse” actually came back to life.
- To keep their dead relatives from being turned into zombies, some Haitians
 - a. guard the graves until the corpses have decayed.
 - b. delay burying their dead for several weeks.
 - c. refuse to bury their dead.
- Voodoo originated in
 - a. South America.
 - b. Haiti.
 - c. Africa.
- Most investigators who have studied voodoo believe that houngans
 - a. can truly raise the dead.
 - b. are supernatural beings.
 - c. fool people.

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. What is the author's purpose in writing "Zombies: The Walking Dead"?
 - a. To encourage the reader to believe in zombies
 - b. To tell the reader about zombies and the beliefs surrounding them
 - c. To persuade the reader that zombies don't exist

2. Choose the statement below that is the weakest argument for believing in zombies.
 - a. A well-educated man claimed that a friend of his had been turned into a zombie.
 - b. A woman who had died several years before showed up on a farm where people recognized her.
 - c. Some people claim that hougans drug their victims.

3. What does the author imply by saying "Most of the stories about zombies come from poor, uneducated people"?
 - a. Poor people tend to be more trusting than those with money.
 - b. Poor people are natural storytellers.
 - c. These people do not have the education necessary to question voodoo.

4. The author tells this story mainly by
 - a. telling different stories about people who supposedly have been turned into zombies.
 - b. comparing voodoo to drugs.
 - c. focusing on one man's experience with hougans.