

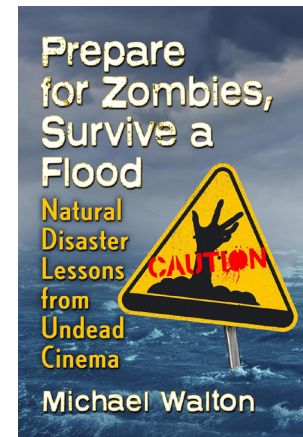
Prepare for Zombies, Survive a Flood: Natural Disaster Lessons from Undead Cinema, by Michael Walton



Emma Austin

Michael Walton. *Prepare for Zombies, Survive a Flood: Natural Disaster Lessons from Undead Cinema*. McFarland, 2023. Paperback. 185 pg. \$ 29.95. ISBN 9781476693866.

Michael Walton begins this book with two personal inspirations: first, his experiences in emergency preparedness, fostered in his rural upbringing and later in volunteering with a Community Emergency Response team; and second his love of zombie films. In this, he follows the established pattern of academic and fan authors setting up the personal stakes in their argument, framed by the understanding that as horror fans we all are happy to share our own “what-if” survival scenarios.



Prepare for Zombies, Survive a Flood: Natural Disaster Lessons from Undead Cinema follows this fan predilection for imagining scenarios by establishing a pattern of chapters following limited ‘zombie’ (read natural disaster) events that occur over defined time periods—up to 72 hours, 2 weeks and 4 weeks. These are matched from specific zombie films such as *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) and *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002) and later the popular television series *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, Mazzara, Gimple, Kang, 2010-2022). These film and television texts are summarised in relation to their scenarios of zombie disaster at the start of the main chapters, to establish Walton’s key concern: preparation for self-reliance during emergency situations. These are framed by an initial chapter overall on preparedness, with an emphasis on access to communication and official emergency warnings, planning ahead as a family/group unit, and storage of important documentation. The final chapter discusses decision-making about travelling or leaving shelter during or after an emergency. A useful checklist at the end of the book also supports the overall key themes of planning and preparation. This is not a scholarly or fictional book: it is a practical guide.

The book is concerned only with a North American context, which makes sense given the author’s own experiences. Interestingly, he is not the first to use the framework of a fictional zombie apocalypse to alert people to the need for preparation. The American federal agencies the CDC (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention) and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) created media releases and documents to help inform the general public on planning and preparation needs. The CDC’s 2011 “Preparedness 101: zombie pandemic” used a comic book format to highlight preparation, while reassuring readers of the CDC’s responsiveness,

while FEMA's 2019 public awareness campaign tied into the release of *Zombieland: Double Tap* (Fleischer, 2019), using footage created by Sony, on the need for emergency planning. Therefore, *Prepare for Zombies* is part of an ongoing preoccupation with using popular fictional templates to attract interest to more practical, real-world concerns.

This is the strongest aspect of Walton's book: offering a coherent building-up of plans and needs for scenarios that may be faced. In each main chapter, he repeats core information from the preceding one and then offers more detail so that aspects which would not perhaps be a core concern in a 72-hour period are then developed for a 4-week period—for example, considerations of hygiene, maintaining shelter integrity, and community. Overall the chapters show that the scale of consideration is mostly limited to immediate areas and social concerns: the neighbourhood, the core family or social group. *Prepare for Zombies* is an inherently domestic, ground-level consideration of factors, with only brief mentions of national or federal agencies. As Walton clearly states, this book is not intended as a 'preppers' guide, for those anticipating the overall collapse of society. Indeed, he makes sure that he reiterates how unlikely zombie apocalyptic scenarios are.

As an analysis of zombie texts, then, the book is quite limited. Apart from the scenarios developed from Walton's summaries of plots, there is little here for the zombie fan or reader interested in a focus on how fictional narratives depict or construct these scenarios and debates over survival. For those interested in speculative fiction dealing with survival and preparedness in a zombie context, the works by Max Brooks such as *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003), which includes some practical preparedness tips along with its imaginative zombie scenario, are worth investigating. For more scholarly discussions of how and why zombie media offer certain interpretations of disaster, and how to survive (and the moral and ethical issues inherent in this), there is a wide variety of academic sources on this - more than can be covered in this review. As a guide to basic preparation and planning however, *Prepare for Zombies*, *Survive a Flood* offers reassurance and skills which are adaptable to many different situations, well beyond the symbolic threat of the zombie masses.

Dr Emma Austin is the Course Leader for Film Studies at the University of Portsmouth, teaching across a variety of subject areas but with particular interests in global popular media and film, particularly horror texts. Her PhD thesis was on zombies in cinematic culture, and her current research projects are on horror texts that move across different media platforms notably in comics, video games and film.