



• TECH CULTURE



SFX makeup artist Greg Nicotero applies prosthetics on a zombie.

Dead Ringer

Greg Nicotero sees zombies everywhere—even among the living. In fact, he can't stop pointing them out. "See this tall guy with the glasses?" he asks. "He'd be a great zombie." Five minutes later, he's at it again. "This girl has a long face, nice bone structure. Look at her forehead! Great zombie."

It might seem macabre, but Nicotero has a reason to look for potential ghouls: As the special-effects makeup supervisor on *The Walking Dead*, a new television series about a group of humans trying to survive in the aftermath of the zombie apocalypse, he's tasked with bringing the show's most gruesome characters to life. (*Dead's* first season begins on AMC on Oct. 31.)

The creation of the zombies starts with casting. The series is based on a graphic novel, and Nicotero drew from its depiction of the undead to find tall, slender actors with ideal bone structure. "If you start with someone whose proportions are already thin, it feels organic and realistic when you add prosthetics," he says.

For more involved looks, Nicotero made molds of the actors' heads and bodies and used them to create foam latex prosthetics that mimic rotting anatomy. For the simpler ones, he relied on partial facial prosthetics, dental plates that distort the jaw and 3D prosthetic transfers that create wounds instantly. Contacts and a tongue-blackening stain completed the look. "Every person is a new canvas," Nicotero says. "You go, 'What should I do with you today? I think I'll tear part of your face off!'" Things that can't be done in-camera—removing an arm, for example—happen in post-production. But even without those tweaks, the zombies look eerily real. "Most of the actors have never dealt with this level of prosthetics," Nicotero says. "They'll say, 'Can I touch that? How did you do that?'" — ERIN MCCARTHY

ZOMBIES ACTUALLY EXIST

For hundreds of years, when Caribbean shamans have wanted revenge—or needed a compliant workforce—they've given a person poison derived from the neurotoxin in pufferfish. It paralyzes the victim and slows his heart

until a pulse is undetectable. An antidote can revive him, but the toxin causes severe neural damage. "This explains a victim's inability to run away," says Neil Whitehead, an anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. It

also explains pop culture's depiction of zombies: glassy stares, dragging feet, incomprehensible noises. Key difference: Real zombies don't eat brains. "George Romero's great," Whitehead says, "but not ethnologically accurate."