

## Zombies take over upstate New York for "Village Invasion"

Written by Brian Solomon

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A bright spotlight illuminates a massive black podium emblazoned with a luminescent biohazard symbol. A mysterious woman in military gear and full zombie makeup ascends. Bullhorn in hand, she addresses her hordes of loyal minions. The evil festivities are about to commence.

“Viva la zombie!” she cries, and the Village Invasion has begun.

There can be no doubt that zombies have invaded our culture, and nowhere is this ghoulish trend more obvious than in the rise of the zombie walk, or crawl. There’s something about the concept of dressing up as the undead and storming your local town that seems to unite people every time. And few zombie walks in recent memory have stirred up the kind of interest as the Village Invasion, which overtook the quaint village of Saugerties, New York on Saturday night, October 16.



Zombie Abe Lincoln, little kid zombies, Marvel zombies, and other undead of every variety converged on the village. Groaning, moaning and stumbling their way down Main and Partition Streets, they stopped mere mortals in their tracks along the way. But before it all began, they gathered ‘round to take their orders from the dynamic mastermind behind this, one of the most elaborate of all zombie crawls, the woman who calls herself, “Captain Cruella” of the Carnivorous Cadavers.

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"This is such a great event for people to showcase what they can do," says Cruella. "And it's a good way they can become one with other like-minded people. They can all dress up, be as crazy as they want to be, and everyone embraces them for their zombiness!"

Zombiness was certainly the order of the evening, as the entire village was literally transformed into a ghoulish wonderland. Through Cruella's pervasive efforts, numerous shops, bars and other establishments were all taking part, making the event so much more than a bunch of costumed people marching up and down the street.

Zombie-themed drinks were served at the local watering holes, including the famous Dutch Alehouse and Dave's Coffee & Wine House. At the Inquiring Minds bookstore, author Will Nixon read samples of his acclaimed zombie poetry anthology, *Love in the City of Grudges*, while patrons sampled the brand new role playing game, *Zombie Cataclysm*; candy shop Lucky Chocolates had a special "chocolate blood fountain" on display; and classic flicks, including *Night of the Living Dead*, were splashed across the sides of buildings to add to the ambience.

More than most zombie-themed events, the Village Invasion used social media to quickly and dramatically establish an online identity, gathering hundreds and hundreds of interested participants along the way. Via her voracious efforts on Facebook, Cruella kicked off the promotional machine in July, and by the time of this weekend, had single-handedly transformed the Village Invasion into the place to be for all local zombie-heads within a 200-mile radius.

"I would never have been able to really get it going the way I have without utilizing social media," she explains. "It helped me organize everything, and make the project a reality. This is completely my own. This zombie crawl means a lot to me. Actually, organizing events like this in general is what I live for. It's something I've always done; it's in my blood."



Photo Courtesy of Del Higgins Fine Art Photography & Photo Art

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A zombie costume contest capped off the evening with vast amounts of awards doled out to the Best Pinup Zombie, Best Celebrity Zombie (won by "Zombie Gaga") and Best Overall Zombie. Among those contributing giveaway prizes were numerous major entities from across the horror universe, such as the ever-popular T-shirt vendor Fright Rags, and the upcoming Hudson Horror Show. The amount of effort put into the costumes on display was impressive indeed, and the enthusiasm was at a level rarely seen at events of this kind. Clearly, the Saugerties Village Invasion is a phenomenon in the making.



"I think this will be just the first one," Cruella enthuses. "I will continue on in my endeavors, and I can only see this getting bigger every year. I've had no trouble getting the entire village, both shops and townsfolk involved; everyone's been completely amazing. They've followed through with every little thing I've asked. This is a fun event that brings commerce to the town. Hopefully this will eventually be an annual event in town, and I won't be the only driving force behind it."

Par for the course for an eclectic and unique place like Saugerties, recently voted one of the top ten coolest towns in America. Zombie crawls have become more and more common in recent years, but anyone looking to organize such events in the future would do well to follow the example of Captain Cruella, who took a vague idea and single-handedly turned it into one of the most impressive and participant-friendly horror-themed events of 2010.

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