A Proud and Powerful Line: Women of Color as Zombie Masters

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Entering U.S. culture connected to Haitian Vodou, zombies were racially marked, but early zombie films presented stories centering on white bodies rather than bodies of color. These bodies, if they even appeared in early zombie films, existed in the background—as either slaves or servants—and even those who commanded zombies in these films, the zombie masters, were almost always white. Yet, even as the relationship between Vodou and zombies weakened with the coming of cannibalistic zombies in the late 1960s, the overwhelming majority of zombie films still focused on the survival of white bodies. However, since the 1930s, there have been a handful of films that undermine this formula by employing black female zombie masters and powerful black zombies. In these films, Vodou culture and zombie-making are embraced, and those who align with this culture become empowered to fight and subvert white heteronormative patriarchy.


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