

ENTOMOLOGY

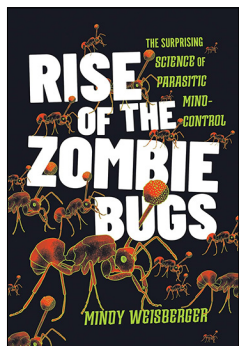
Rise of the Zombie Bugs: the Surprising Science of Parasitic Mind-Control

By Mindy Weisberger. 2025. Johns Hopkins University Press. 296 pages and 13 black and white illustrations, 38.95 CAD, Hardcover. Also available as an E-book.

Most scientists are good writers; it's part of their work. Few are great writers. In addition to writing up their research as reports (so-called 'papers'), some write books as well. These are often well written, and sometimes they're great.

In contrast, there are, by profession, great writers; not all of them can interpret science correctly, though. Mindy Weisberger is one of the savvy writers who does interpret science well, and reading her book instilled a pleasure like working with a perfectly sharpened knife in the kitchen. Weisberger knows how to use the scientific literature and makes frequent references to studies, even telling the reader the nationalities and universities of the researchers. I don't know why, but I found those inclusions satisfying. Perhaps because it suggests that parasites are of worldwide interest and not just restricted to one post-retirement, unshaven, so-called 'evil scientist' in a windowless basement lab somewhere.

Zombies are cool right now and have been for some time. You'll find them in movies, TV shows, and video games. Weisberger takes advantage of this popularity by starting each chapter with a quote from zombie culture and conservatively sprinkling the text with references, too. Chapter 1, though, has many references and uses them to frame the (nearly) mythical human zombie as a precursor to the rest of the book. Fittingly, the book ends with some rare cases of parasites affecting human behaviour (e.g., toxoplasmosis). Omitting



this would have been dreadfully anticlimactic.

The meat of the book is about the insects, fungi, and viruses that find their way into living insects (sometimes other invertebrates, too) and how the parasitoids then control the behaviour of their hosts with the universal goal to procreate. Did you catch my use of the word 'parasitoid'? Weisberger uses 'parasite' instead, and that's not quite correct. A parasite (e.g., Head Lice in humans) rarely kills its host. It would be detrimental to kill your host if it's providing you and your offspring with shelter and food. A parasitoid lives long term on or in its host (resembling what a parasite does) but is eventually responsible for the host's death (although not before completing its own life cycle). This is a small error (one of only a few) and should be insignificant to most readers.

Each humorously titled chapter (e.g., *Zombifying Viruses: the Attack of the Ooze*) deals with one (or a few related) zombie-inducing scenarios. The themes of the chapters are how parasitoids get into their hosts, manipulate their hosts without killing them (for the time being), feed, and reproduce. Most of the book's examples are of insects being used as hosts, although spiders, millipedes, snails, and, finally, humans get zombified, too.

The only small downside in this book are the low-quality photographs. I assume the originals are fine and that the low contrast images are a result of the printing process used. They do add to the content of the book but could have been so much better.

Overall, a great read.

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