Zombie bosses or colleagues are everywhere. They hide in plain sight and smile at you, but behind the scenes they are working up a storm to bring you down. They may steal your work or malign your reputation, or worse. Their only intent is to suck the creative life out of you. And as such, they suck to be around.

We've all seen our share of zombie movies, and there is an incredible amount of reliable information in these films that you can use when faced with your own zombie boss or colleague. Let's start with the facts, aggregated from both cinema and reality:

- A zombie’s main objective is to suck the life out of you. This is true in I Am Legend, and it’s true in real life too. They don’t want to live harmoniously with you. They don’t want to work collaboratively with you. A zombie boss or colleague may seem like a normal person but their actions, either behind your back and sometimes right in front of your eyes, are deliberately designed to reduce you and your reputation to shreds. They drain your creativity, your energy and your talent and only want to see you destroyed.
- A zombie thrives on the status quo. They want you to remain nearby. They need to feed off willing souls and without a regular food source, they will perish. The longer you stay, the more fulfilled they are, and the more powerful they become.
- You cannot reason with a zombie. Their form resembles that of a human, but rather they are something far more sinister. They seem like they may be intelligent, but as far as their brain is concerned, it is centered on only one mission: to eat yours. So this is not someone with whom you can negotiate, or try to find common ground. Their idea of common ground is grinding your positivity to a pulp.

You absolutely, unequivocally must get away from this creature and their poisonous ecosystem, for the sake of both your mental and career health.

- Your only option is to escape. You cannot stay. Your life depends on it and I do mean this literally – your desire, attitude, talent and drive are all at stake. Your research outputs and your brand (promise of value) are in peril. And once the zombie gets those, your reputation is next. If the zombie destroys your reputation, it may be very difficult to get another job and to advance in your career. So you have no choice - you absolutely, unequivocally must get away from this creature and their poisonous ecosystem, for the sake of both your mental and career health.
You are not alone. At some point in everyone’s life, you will have to face a zombie. The kind of zombie with whom you interact could be any of the following:

- **“highly dangerous”**: they are physically, emotionally or sexually harassing you and/or are literally lunatics;
- **“creeping or non-obvious zombies”** (also highly dangerous): they slither in the shadows trying to bring you down;
- **“obvious zombies”**: they operate in a spotlight in their quest to quench their thirst for your career blood;
- **“All About Eve zombies”**: mostly seen in colleagues as opposed to bosses, this kind of zombie is looking to supplant you in the most vicious and holistic of ways. For more information, see the film All About Eve.

But no matter what sort of zombie you encounter, know that there are others who have come before you and escaped their clutches. And you can and must do the same.

**The Escape Plan**

Of course, the easiest way to flee a zombie is to have an advanced plan in place if you happen to come across one. With such a contingency strategy thoughtfully woven into your long-term career plan, you will find that when a zombie scenario arises, you have meaningful and available options to escape. This type of plan involves a lot of networking, informational interviews and research, because you have to know what other kinds of jobs and careers you can pursue should a zombie try to squash the career path you are currently on.

Advanced planning against a zombie attack is especially critical in science. Most fields and subfields are attometers wide. If there are only four people on Earth who work in your subfield and a zombie is one of those, what can you do but depart? And what happens if a zombie is the king of your subfield, or worse, your field? This may have been your dream job, but a zombie has now turned it into a nightmare. But you are in luck: as I have written before, as a scientist you have lots of highly-prized skills which can be applied in many, many different sectors. Explore these options early in your career and keep channels open with contacts who have access to other job prospects, in case a zombie threat forces you to take a new professional avenue.

The point in time during which you become aware of the zombie’s existence is also the same exact moment you must begin the plot your escape.

- Begin by reinforcing in your mind that this is actually a zombie attack and you are not imagining this. This is really happening. You must get away or your career will die.
- Document everything the zombie does. Write down dates, times, locations, actions and witnesses. Be specific. This is especially imperative if this is a “highly dangerous zombie” who is sexually harassing you, as you will need this information as evidence in a potential lawsuit against this creature. Store this information away from the office in a secret place.
- Go to someone you can trust. This is where your network of contacts will also come in really handy. Rely on the trusted relationships that...
you have crafted with mentors over the years. Speak in person or on the phone (but definitely away from the zombie or their spies) (and not via email) about the situation and ask for advice about options and ideas. But you must ensure before you go to anyone that they are truly a trusted mentor and not a “creeping zombie” themself.

- Quietly start reaching out to your contacts. Approach your network and ask for informal conversations about collaborating and contributing to their team or organization. Speak in positives, as in “I can add value to your group in X and Y ways”, or “I am very excited about your work in Z and want to move my career in this same direction,” as opposed to “I hate my boss because he/she is a raving lunatic zombie.”

- Quietly apply for jobs elsewhere. Don’t list your zombie boss as a reference. If someone asks why, simply state that your other mentors are more cognizant of the type of value and skill set you can offer this proposed department.

When you have solidified your liberation, you now must face the zombie, hopefully for the last time. If this is not a case of a “highly dangerous zombie”, make an appointment to see the zombie, and while maintaining your professionalism, tell them about your move. Indicate your “gratitude” for their “help” and “support”. Again, talk in positives. Stay professional as much as possible. Shake hands. After you leave, wash your hands. After you leave, wash your hands. After you leave, wash your hands. After you leave, wash your hands.

Take note that if this is a “highly otherwise harassing you, this not only not necessary but not be in a situation where you are