

NIGHT OF THE  
KILLER ZOMBIE  
MASTODONS  
FROM  
KALAMAZOO



story & layouts by  
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ONE MILD JANUARY about twenty years back, some construction workers dug up a mastodon skeleton while they were deepening a pond on the Fort Custer Golf Course off Route 94 outside of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The dig had already caused quite a stir amongst the locals, since it just wasn't safe to go digging in the ground anymore after the Black Magic Infestation of '77. And the crew had already found a cave full of vampire bats which had to be beheaded and prayed over one by one. But folks were really afraid of hitting an Indian burial ground or a potter's field, with all the ancient curses that sort of thing might incur. All in all, the dig made for some sleepless nights in Kalamazoo.

It's not like they meant to dig up that mastodon, anyhow. The workers unearthed the skull of the thing thinking it was a boulder, while one of the neighbors called the head of the geology department at the science museum over in Battle Creek.

The head of the geology department came down and took a look for himself, and then got on the phone with a Grand Valley State University professor who ended up taking over the dig. They called in a witch doctor from Lansing too, because that's just the sort of precaution you take when you dig something out of the earth that might at one point have been alive. (That's one lesson the Black Magic Infestation of '77 taught us, among many others I won't detail here.)

But the witch doctor was mostly called in vain – those mastodon bones sat out for days and never stirred, not for a full moon or a harvest moon or any of the other portents that typically bring forth spirits from the Other Side.



But the mayor of Kalamazoo wanted to get his money's worth on the out-of-town shaman, so before he left the witch doctor was asked to subdue a little old undead lady that couldn't stop rising from her grave once a week to feed her cats. The matronly zombie had been an ongoing nuisance - attacking joggers, the kids over up on Yucca Point playing stickball, and even her own brood's kittens.



No one could complain about losing a jogger here and there, and Lord knew those Yucca Point kids caused nothing but trouble, but eating kittens was just unchristian. So the witch doctor did some chanting and sacrificing, the old maid was buried for good, and everyone said thank-you-very-much and went on back where they came from.

That same year but a few months later in April, another mastodon skeleton got dug up when construction workers were digging into another pond in preparation for another golf course - but this one was in Ohio, and although its discovery made the evening news, no one worried too much about it. All hail the Ohio mastodon.

But over at the Battle Creek Kingman Museum, beside the rows of arrowheads and baskets and other Native American artifacts (such as specially-posed skeletons of Native Americans) were the perfectly preserved bones of the Kalamazoo mastodon, laid out on a series of platforms behind plexiglass. And on the first night that those Ohio mastodon bones sat above ground under the moonlight, the bones of our beloved Michigan mastodon rocked in their fossilized slumber.

It was only the next morning that damage could be assessed, and the picture of what had happened was reconstructed. Smashed glass and mastodon fur littered the western wing of the museum, several exhibits were destroyed beyond recognition, and one poor guard had been gored by an ancient tusk that had broken off and held him impaled against a wall near the bathrooms. It was an undignified death, but everyone involved knew what had to happen next.

The witch doctor from Lansing was notified, and that very afternoon he painstakingly dug into the deceased guard's skull through his eye sockets, and scooped out his brains till they were gone. It was the only sure way to de-zombiefy a fresh corpse before they rose from the dead – especially for someone that had been killed by a zombie himself.

And especially for a museum guard that had been killed by a zombie mastodon.

An hour later, the sheriff's department of Battle Creek got an urgent call. The Ohio mastodon skeleton had already come up missing, with a trail of fur and footprints leading westward away from the freshly-excavated golf course in which it had been discovered.



The sheriff assumed the worst: the two beasts were headed toward one another to consummate their freakish prehistoric union.

Even as Battle Creek's boys in blue geared up and drove east, problems were starting to arise in the surrounding townships. In Springfield, a middle-aged mother of two was out folding her washing when a half-decayed Chippewa Indian assaulted her through her best linens. She struggled to fight off the supernatural attack, but quickly became the first Chippewa scalping victim in two hundred years (and the first to be scalped by teeth instead of a tomahawk). All the commotion caused her twin boys to jump out of bed and run downstairs – just in time to become their own mother's first meal as a member of the walking dead.



Over in Augusta, a pair of shambling corpses dressed in museum guard uniforms dragged their groaning bodies into the Barking Frog Pub, and devoured the barkeep during the morning news.

Farther east in Ceresco, after a bad run-in with a reanimated family of cavemen, a newly-zombified postman proceeded to slaughter, disembowel and otherwise consume every unfortunate soul along his morning route.



And to the south in the aptly-named town of Climax, a flock of undead archaeopteryxes laid waste to the entire staff of the Lawrence Memorial Library.

Southern Michigan was in an uproar, and if the reports coming down the wires from Ohio were any indication, things weren't much better there.

From Ann Arbor to Cleveland, it was an unholy mess in every sense of the phrase. Oracles, seers and clairvoyants were called upon from all over the country to give advice on how the zombie infection had spread from the mastodons to the populace.

Finally, an especially adept voodoo priest from Wyoming and a soothsayer from Savannah were flown in for the occasion.

Meanwhile, like all undead, the mastodons were moving quickly, their muscles and skin and fur regrowing the longer their resurrection lasted. It was simpler to follow their parallel trails of carnage - through uprooted forests, downed power lines and flattened suburban tract homes - than to attempt to locate them through the usual means of divination and ritualistic chanting.

By the time surviving law enforcement converged on the shores of the Great Lakes, the mammoths had disappeared. The voodoo priest analyzed the surrounding foliage and sediment washed ashore, and concluded that the lovestruck beasts had decided to rebury themselves in the muck from whence they came, deep beneath the waters of Lake Erie. The soothsayer's third-eye examination of the lake bottom revealed the specifics: twin mastodon bodies, wrapped round one another beneath the mud, their legs and trunks intertwined.

But the modern world had no room for ancient love. A crew of psychics, warlocks and street magicians manned a new excavation, bringing up the mastodons from the lake floor. As diving teams began their descent into the lake, they were soon waylaid by roving schools of monstrous chinook salmon and northern pike, recently infected with the zombie parasites that had been living in the mastodons' fur and flesh.





The lakewater became so hazardous that a team of helicopters was brought in carrying a submersible crane, which was then plopped down in the lake's murkiest waters. Operated by remote, it was lowered into the depths while the world watched.

After a few tense hours, the crane struck gold.

The mastodons wailed twin wails of sadness as the underwater crane chewed into their rotted hides and lifted them onto a trash barge that had been cleared for the event. As they were dropped unceremoniously onto the platform, their entrails spilled out between their ribs and their matted pelts raised a putrid stench.

Finally, the same exhausted Lansing witch doctor used a silver pitchfork to dig their brains out through their eye sockets, while the strongest of the street magicians held the creatures still.

With his forearms soaked in dark blood and vitreous humor, the medicine man spoke in tongues until the demons that lived inside the mastodons dissipated into the ether.

As the behemoths each died a second time, their fur and muscles dissolved almost immediately.





Across the Great Lakes region, scores of undead civilians and archeological exhibits dropped where they stood. By the time that trash barge docked on the shores of Toledo, all that was left of the entire ordeal were two bleached and gleaming skeletons, ready for delivery to their respective museums.

Today the Kingman Museum's mastodon skeleton is missing one tusk, but the rest is there and perfectly preserved. There's evidence of minor irregularities throughout the skeleton, probably the result of bones that were fractured and broken and then healed. These injuries might have been inflicted by a modern underwater crane, but more likely occurred during a prehistoric battle for territory or food or the love of a good mastodon woman, back when that sort of love was natural and not the result of arcane powers and zombie restlessness.

It's believed that the beast died (the first time around) at the hands of Paleo-Indians, and that those Paleo-Indians helped in the preservation of those bones by keeping them in the pond for cold storage back when there was healthy meat and fur attached to them, and the meat was good eating and the fur could keep you warm.

But who knows? It could be those Paleo-Indians wanted to make a time capsule for us, a sort of message-in-a-bottle sent through the centuries in case we ever lapsed in our respect for our ancient forefathers. Maybe the Black Magic Infestation of '77 wasn't so much a cosmic accident as it was laying the groundwork for a plan that had been hatched a millennia before. On the off-chance that we grew into a society that displayed our ancestors' religious artifacts and sacred totems – hell, even their bones – in museums like carnival amusements, then we might need to be reminded of the consequences for collectively whistling past a graveyard. We might need to be reminded just how powerful the past can really be.

So maybe those ancestors left us one of their most potent prehistoric smart-bombs buried in the muck, waiting to be resurrected.

One last hard lesson to remind us that for most folk, resting in peace...

...ain't peaceful at all.

