

WAKING THE DEAD

Picnics in the cemetery. Skeletons dancing in the streets. In Mexico, November is a time to greet death—with a party. BY TOD OLSON

In horror movies, one thing is always true: Dead people are scary. Zombies wander the streets looking for dinner. Ghosts come back to haunt the houses where they died. And a cemetery is not a place to be after dark.

You *usually* want the dead to stay dead.

But in Mexico, there's one time of year when everyone tries to keep the dead alive—at least in memory. It's a time when skeletons aren't scary and cemeteries are a place to party. It's the holiday *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead.

Welcoming the Spirits

The Day of the Dead is celebrated from October 31 to November 2. The holiday started in Mexico. It comes from traditions that may be 3,000 years old. Back then, the Aztecs and other native people lived in what is now Mexico. They believed the dead stayed with the living in spirit.

Today, people visit cemeteries on the Day of the Dead. They clean the graves of family members. They build *ofrendas*, or altars, in their homes. On the altars they put things that remind them of their loved ones—like pictures and favorite foods.

The altars are supposed to welcome the dead back to the world of the living. Paths of marigold flowers guide the spirits there—and then back to their graves once the holiday is over.

Dancing With Skeletons

A holiday all about death may sound sad. But the Day of the Dead is a celebration. It's a time to remember the lives of loved ones. It's also a time to accept that death is a natural part of life—and greet it with a party.

Sometimes, the party happens in the



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