

A Night for Zombie Rights: ZWatch and the Zombie Pride Parade

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Thursday, 29 October 2009 07:41



"This is a big risk even talking to you," said Alexander Iaccarino. "I'm afraid of being prosecuted for this. 'Cause I'm not absolutely sure that any of this is legal."

It was October 16, more than three months after it all started and two weeks before its finale: the Zombie Pride Parade on Halloween night in downtown Davenport.

Looking back with that information, it's easy to see what Iaccarino was up to, and easy to laugh at it.

But when he told me that he was concerned about getting arrested, he sounded sincere and serious. And when he launched ZWatch.org on July 10, things were less cheeky. The Web site talked about a man named Zacharia Furio who was missing, and it alluded to a secretive organization called the QC Department of Biological Sciences.

Iaccarino and a small group of friends then produced videos, photos, and faked documents to tell the story of the H1Z1 virus and a local cover-up, slowly revealing a zombie narrative. The story was supported by some conspirators, such as local author Brian Krans (<http://bit.ly/4erGc>), and missing-persons posters. (Incidentally, the "H1Z1" idea was not original with Iaccarino; the name and concept of an H1N1-related zombie plague showed up several months before ZWatch: [Goog](http://www.google.com/search?q=h1z1)

[le.com/search?q=h1z1](http://www.google.com/search?q=h1z1)

, <http://bit.ly/eiZhp>

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How convincing was it? On August 7, the Rock Island *Argus/Moline Dispatch* ran a [front-page article](#) titled "In Search of Zach: Is Story of Missing Man Just an Internet Hoax?" The story

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(<http://bit.ly/1kq4nV>) certainly suggested that ZWatch and Furio weren't real, but it also allowed for the *possibility* that they were authentic. There remained a seed of doubt, which is all it takes.



"I didn't want it to be in the newspaper," Iaccarino said. "'Cause that's serious. But she [the reporter] went ahead and made a story out of it anyway."

That same day, a blogger was similarly skeptical (<http://bit.ly/4gnwpO>) and similarly equivocal -- and also tied ZWatch to Iaccarino, the closest he ever came to being found out.

"It's obviously fake now," Iaccarino said. "But I just let them realize that on their own."

The inspiration for ZWatch was Orson Welles' famous 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, in which the story was told through news bulletins that convinced some listeners that an alien invasion was actually happening. Another inspiration was the 2002 movie *28 Days Later*, in which a virus turned people into zombies.

"I just banked on the fact that people want what they can't have," Iaccarino said. "It's obviously leading up to something, but nobody knows what it is, who's behind it, what's going on, so they start talking, and they try to figure it out, and they get involved."

The idea, in other words, was to get people invested in the story. At its peaks, the Web site drew as many as roughly 110 unique visitors a day.

"In the beginning, we wanted it to be convincing to grab people's attention," Iaccarino said. The

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realism fell away, he added, as the project progressed and became more of a multimedia horror movie. "We wanted to seem real, but on the other hand, we're ... artists and we wanted to exercise our skills. ... We sacrificed realism for our art."

As for laccarino's worry that he might be charged with something, he said he wonders whether he can be held legally responsible for wasting the time of the Davenport police department -- which he claims fielded calls from people about the missing person and about ZWatch being a hoax -- and whether forging documents for no monetary gain is legal. He noted that it *is* illegal to file a false missing-persons report but also said an official report was never filed.

"People are pissed that we took the approach of starting with a missing person," he said. But he added that those same people "weren't coming forward and lending their help. ... If this was a missing person, they did nothing but sit back and watch it happen. ... I would [feel bad] if people had banded together and tried to find this guy."

laccarino is likely to find his biggest audience at Saturday's Zombie Pride Parade, which will start at the Bucktown Center for the Arts at 7 p.m. and progress to Danceland, site of the MidCoast Fine Arts Deadstock event.

"Plenty of people are going to be viewing whether they want to or not," laccarino said. That's because the Zombie Pride Parade will be sharing the sidewalks with the crowd for Davenport's *official* Halloween parade. Genius.

For more information on the Zombie Pride Parade, visit ZWatch.org or ZombiePride.org.