

ZOMBIE ANTS

The kingdom of fungi is known as **Fungi**. This kingdom includes a huge variety of organisms, from the mushrooms we eat to molds and yeasts. They are a very interesting and special group. Even though they might look like plants, they are not, because they don't do photosynthesis. Instead, they get their food by breaking down dead organic matter, like fallen leaves, wood, or even dead organisms.

There are many types of fungi, and many of them are very useful for people. Some fungi are used for food, like mushrooms, yeast, and the ones used to make cheese. But there are also many other types of fungi, and not all of them are good.

There are also **parasitic fungi**. These fungi need a host—another organism—to grow and reproduce. This often causes changes in the host. For example, the **Cordyceps** fungus can turn certain insects into “zombies.” Cordyceps infects insects like ants, grasshoppers, and spiders. Slowly, the fungus takes over their bodies and finally reaches their brains. Once it's in the brain, it starts controlling their movements. It's like the insect is possessed by the fungus! The fungus forces the insect to climb to a high place, like a branch. There, the fungus grows into a stalk that comes out of the insect's body. From that high spot, it releases more spores to infect nearby insects.

Luckily, Cordyceps doesn't affect humans. This is because our bodies are much more complex than those of insects, and the fungus cannot survive inside us. However, it inspired the famous story of "**The Last of Us**," which imagines what the world would be like if Cordyceps could infect humans.

PHOTO

VIDEO

QUESTIONS

1. Cordyceps belongs to this kingdom:

- a) Plants
- b) Fungi
- c) Animals
- d) Insects

2. Fungi feed on:

- a) Mineral salts
- b) Sugar
- c) Sunlight
- d) Decaying organisms

3. Parasitic fungi need:

- a) A host
- b) Sunlight
- c) Lots of water
- d) Heat

4. Cordyceps releases its spores in:

- a) Humid places
- b) High places
- c) Dark places
- d) Underground places

5. Cordyceps CANNOT infect:

- a) Spiders
- b) Ants
- c) Humans
- d) Grasshoppers

