

'Dead Zone' for loyal fans

REEL REVIEWS

By WILLIAM CLAIRE

Multiple choice question:
What is The Dead Zone?

- a) a grave yard
- b) a Steven King best seller
- c) a first cousin of The Twilight Zone
- d) A David Cronenberg film
- e) a movie posing a weighty moral dilemma
- f) all of the above

Ready? The answer is (f) all of the above. Allow me to explain.

a) a grave yard. Sitting through most of The Dead Zone is like sitting in a grave yard waiting for the next hearse to arrive. It's pretty slow moving.

The main problem is a lack of cohesive tension to tie together the three of four moments of suspense. Without giving away what seems to be the high point of the movie, by the time you get there, you've forgotten why you came.

Christopher Walken portrays Johnny, the high school teacher who has complete command over his students as he recites poetry from memory, Poe's The Raven, no less (hint, hint). Unfortunately, Johnny has a "bad accident" that puts him in a five year coma.

Doubly unfortunate is that he awakes from that coma thinking he is back in The Deer Hunter, still vacant-eyed after all these years.

Triply unfortunate is the contradiction between the main story line that says the accident gives him a "mysterious power" and an incident prior to the accident which shows him having the same type of headache that precedes this power following the coma.

And for good measure, why does "the love interest" (Brooke Adams), who keeps popping in and out of the film like Mr. Mxyzptlk, wear ear muffs while driving in her car with the windows up, but takes them off when she exits from the auto on a winter's day?

Normally, the latter matter would not be so apparant, but what else can you do when you're sitting in a grave yard for 100 minutes.

(e) a movie posing a weighty dilemma. Well, they try, but by the time the film roots out the problem, you wonder why it wasn't thought of about an hour earlier. The answer to this question would also get us out of the grave yard. Oh, yes; there is some gibberish about the power being either a gift of God or the Devil.

(b) a Steven King bestseller. The Dead Zone was the 1979 link in the New England school teacher's string of smash commercial successes. And some of them made good movies. It's hard to tell who's at fault here, unless the book sold on King's reputation rather than its own merits.

(d) a David Cronenberg film. Well, it was filmed in Niagara-on-the-Lake (disguised as Norman Rockwell, U.S.A.) and it is said Cronenberg was in the Ontario town when the film was being shot, so there must be some connection, because there's very little else to relate this film to his past efforts. (See what happens when you lose creative control, David?)

(c) a first cousin to the Twilight Zone. The Twilight Zone: The Movie, that is. Both films featured stories that might have made it when science fiction took to the tube about 20 years ago, but they're stale now.



Colleen Dewhurst takes aim at police officers who have come to arrest her son on suspicions that he has committed a series of vicious murders in the horror thriller "The Dead Zone."



Emerging from a five-year coma, Christopher Walken is supported by clinic doctor Herbert as he undergoes a supernatural experience of "witnessing" the Nazi invasion of Poland that took place 45 years previously in the chilling "The Dead Zone."

There are people who do have the power Johnny is supposed to have. A documentary on them would have been much more interesting.

Bonuses for those who guessed correctly: (i) Two

good performances. Martin Sheen plays a sleazy politician with gusto; Herbert Lom shows the younger generation he can do something other than portray the nervous wreck of a police commissioner in The Pink Panther movies. (ii)

Ten good minutes -- the first five and the last five. The stuff in between is The Dead Zone.

For ultra-loyal Steven King, David Cronenberg or Christopher Walken fans only.