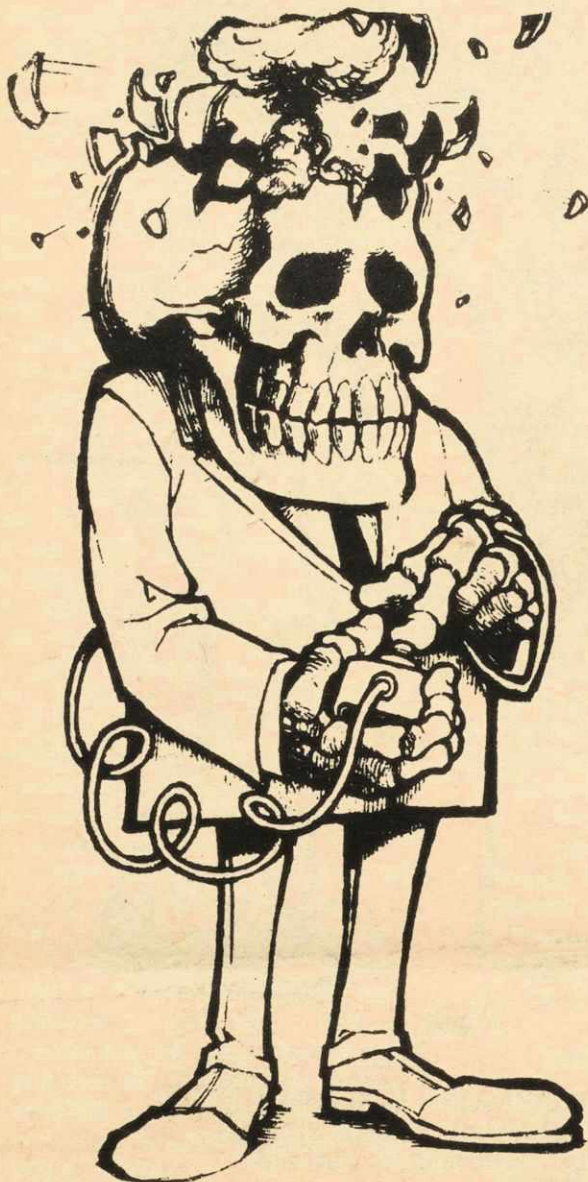


Dawn of the Dead

As the stomach turns



Is there a point to the flood of horror films currently over-running the market? If so, it has been stated most finally and completely by George A. Romero's "Dawn of the Dead". It is difficult to conceive of a movie further filled with things fearsome and repulsive.

A sequel to Romero's earlier cult film "Night of the Living Dead", "Dawn of the Dead" ceaselessly and relentlessly dwells on matters of violent death and gore, disgusting mutilation. There is more carnage in the opening scene than in Sam Peckinpah's entire film output, and its least graphic moments are fifty times more revolting than the you-know-what scene in "Alien". To put it in words of one syllable, yecch, or possibly blah-yecch.

So. It is the most brutal, nauseous and physically shocking movie ever made, due solely to the large proportion of time allotted to bloodletting, and to the loving detail with which it is let. What else is it?

This is a question better answered by stating what it is not. It is not just a formula horror movie with a difference. Romero is not interested in tightening the screws, furthering a love interest or saving the world. Nor is it melo-

dramatic and exciting. Grisly, gruesome and grotesque though much of the action is, the tone is matter-of-fact and

the narration straightforward. The principle characters, as normal and interesting as people you'd see on a bus, are focused on and followed dispassionately. Holed up in the roof of a suburban shopping centre, they alternate their time between battling the zombies and staring moodily at the walls. No explanation is given for the presence of the flesh-eating fiends and no solution is proposed. There is little linear development.

Since it isn't just out for a good time, then, it must be either meaningful or socially significant. An argument for the latter could be drawn from the scenes of the zombies wandering vacantly around the upper and lower malls of the shopping centre. "They come here because they remember it had something they wanted," intones one of the characters in a thoughtful moment, and sure enough, the creatures do resemble a crowd of spaced-out suburbanites. Or, in a more universal reading, the movie could simply be pointing out that the world is going to hell in a hand cart.

The trouble with these theories is that they are too fleeting and general for the amount of gore in which they are cloaked. Christmas shopping is a bummer, and so's the energy crisis, but that doesn't begin to justify this

obscene devotion to brain-splattering, blood-gushing versimilitude, not to mention the eating scenes, of which I do not even care to be reminded. No underlying message could justify this display. Social comment is right out.

Therefore, if there is no hidden meaning, the violence itself must be the meaning. Romero has gone the limit, in terms of piling gross and horrific effect upon gross and horrific effect. He has carried the horror film to its logical extreme: pure, unrelieved horror. There need never be another one made.

I hope, by the way, that all this hasn't aroused anyone's curiosity. If you've always had the sneaking feeling that Jack the Ripper was on to something, than this is the film for you. But I would strongly point out that 95% of everybody will be very sorry, very soon, if they witness "The Dawn of the Dead".

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