

Nights of the Celluloid Dead:
A History of the Zombie Film [to the mid 1990s]

by Robert Hood

Part One: The First Steps of the Walking Dead

1. There's Life in the Old Corpse Yet

Cinematic animated corpses have been a source of fascination ever since the earliest days of film. Though less prolific in literature than their undead cousin, the vampire, zombies and other walking (and frequently murderous) dead have provided some of the most potent visual imagery in horror film history. Continually resurrected, re-imagined and re-invented through the decades, zombies still maintain a respectable presence, as witness the multitude of mainstream living dead films released since 1990, many of them sequels. These include: *Braindead*; *Return of the Living Dead 3*; *Army of Darkness: Evil Dead 3*; *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*; *Maniac Cop 3: Badge of Silence*; *Pet Semetary Two*; *The Crow* and its sequels; the lyrical *Dellamorte Dellamore*; *The Dead Hate the Living*; *Route 666*; *Resident Evil*; and the zombie comedies *Weekend at Bernie's 2*; *Ed and His Dead Mother*; and *Death Becomes Her*. Though the late 1990s ushered in a diminishing of zombie content in mainstream cinema (replaced, interestingly enough, by ghosts, especially post-*The Sixth Sense*), independent filmmakers have remained faithful right through to the new millennium. Their films have included *Shatter Dead*, *Vengeance of the Dead*, Todd Sheet's *Zombie Rampage* and *Zombie Bloodbath* sequences, *Zombie Cop*, *Zombie Cult Massacre*, *The Necro-Files*, *Biker Zombies* and lots more besides. There has also been a horde of living dead coming from Hong Kong and Japan, with films such as *The Magic Cop*, *Bio-Zombie*, *Versus*, *Junk* and *Wild Zero* to the fore. All in all that's a lot of activity -- for dead folk.

One of the fascinating things about this sub-genre is that it has attracted filmmakers of enormous talent and has produced works of considerable originality, while at the same time there is a fair number of cheap, nasty, badly made films that

were spawned in the aftershock of the 'classics'. Some of them are so inept, they are almost impossible to sit through. You haven't seen a bad film until you've seen *The Curse of the Screaming Dead!* Even that oft-quoted pinnacle of bad filmmaking, Wood's classic *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, is about zombies. Aspiring filmmakers, who can always scrape together a bit of enthusiasm and enough money for a few dozen bottles of ketchup and some old sheep entrails, seem drawn to make one. After all, Romero was a novice when he created the influential *Night of the Living Dead*. It was made on a shoestring, and shot at weekends when the actors were available. "If he can do it," the weird guy with the camera and the jar of intestines says, "I can do it too, can't I?" Most often, of course, the answer is no (though occasionally, and significantly, the answer is yes).

Generically, zombie films are, as a matter of course, concerned with mortality. Individual themes are diverse; there is little consistency in explanations made of zombie origin, sex is not a major element throughout, and the zombies' choice of victim seems remarkably egalitarian in terms of social class, gender and political predilection. Yet, where the vampire film might be said to have a dark sexual undercurrent, the 'slasher' film to express a cynical misogynistic malice, and the classic 1950s giant creature film to epitomise nuclear age paranoia, particular attitudes to physical (and spiritual) mortality inform the semantics of the zombie film: death and how society deals with it -- not surprisingly, since zombies are, by definition, dead. That the dead are depicted as mimicking life by refusing (or being forbidden) to lie still must inevitably reflect on attitudes to mortality in the makers and viewers of such films. We shall examine this thematic undercurrent as we proceed.

What counts as a zombie film then? I intend to define the sub-genre widely, to include not simply the acknowledged living dead epics of Romero and Lucio Fulci, but other films that feature the living dead in a less obvious guise -- for example, 'ghost'-vengeance films where the ghost is depicted as corporeal rather than ethereal. The living dead are first and foremost corpses that continue to move around -- against

all reason, manipulated by an outside will or self-driven. They are not manifestations of ectoplasmic fury; they are not undead spirits. Flesh is basic to the concept, albeit decayed. Overall, there is considerable emphasis in zombie films on flesh and blood - rotting bodies and their attendant maggots, as well as the still-warm gore resulting from savage, often cannibalistic attacks upon the living.

It is perhaps worth noting, however, that traditional 'ghosts' -- as they appear in English ballads and folktales and the Norse mythology the ballads draw on -- are often corporeal. Worms and rotting flesh and the coffin in which the cadaver was buried feature prominently in these tales of lost life, lost love and vengeance. The ballads may tell stories about ghosts, but the ghosts are corpses -- they are dead, they rot, they come from the grave, they walk around. Here's an example from a Danish song, *Svend Dyring*:

Out from their chest she stretch'd her bones,
And rent her way through earth and stones.

....

She reach'd her husband's courtyard gate,
And there her eldest daughter sate.

"O daughter mine, why so in tears?
How fare my other little dears?"

"No mother at all art thou of mine,
Thou'rt not like her, though fair and fine;

"My mother's cheeks were white and red,
But thine are pale, and like the dead."

"And how should I be white and red,
So long, my child, as I've been dead?"

....

Whenever hound was heard to bark,
They thought the dead walk'd in the dark.

Whenever hound was heard to howl.
They thought they saw a corpse's cowl.

It is in this tradition that the nature of the modern zombie lies -- despite the fact that the 'zombie' itself is very much a product of those voodoo practices most often associated with Haiti (the word itself coming from the West African 'zumbi' meaning 'fetish'). The trappings of voodoo very rarely occur in zombie movies these days, however; the modern zombie (so-called) is a revenant, an animated corpse, but rarely needs the stimulus of Baron Samedi to get itself moving.

One brand of walking dead that I do not intend to talk about much is the Mummy. Technically speaking, of course, the film mummy is an animated corpse -- but the tradition that developed from Karl Freund's *The Mummy* (1932) through the Hammer films of the fifties and sixties is different from that of the 'zombie' tradition. It would require another article to deal adequately with mummies and I have chosen to leave them out. Interestingly Anne Rice's novel *The Mummy, Or Ramses the Damned* combines the mummy tradition with some of the qualities of the living dead tradition, especially in its depiction of the resurrection of Cleopatra's corpse. Then, a bit further on, Steven Summers' 1999 big-budget adventure film, *The Mummy*, re-invented the sub-genre yet again, making ol' Bandage Bones fast, dangerous and sexy. Before regaining his full complement of life force and fleshing out into the person of Arnold Vosloo, Imhotep's CGI presence is decidedly zombie-like, desiccated flesh and all.

But that's another story.

2. Voodoo Zombies

Like all magic, voodoo is about control, and the essence of the voodoo-created zombie is that he/she is a slave. Soul captured by the *bokor*, or voodoo sorcerer, the victim 'dies' and becomes a mindless automaton, incapable of remembering the past, unable to recognise loved ones and doomed to a life of miserable toil under the will of the zombie master. The term 'zombie' only came into general use in 1929, after the publication of William B. Seabrook's *The Magic Island*. In this book, Seabrook

recounts his experiences on Haiti, including much discussion of the walking dead. He describes the first ‘zombie’ he came across in this way:

“The eyes were the worst. It was not my imagination. They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing. The whole face, for that matter, was bad enough. It was vacant, as if there was nothing behind it. It seemed not only expressionless, but incapable of expression.”

This is a good description of the zombies that appear in the first zombie movie, Victor Halperin’s *White Zombie*, made in 1932 and featuring that emergent horror drawcard, Bela Lugosi. Lugosi plays the zombie master Murder Legendre, whose shuffling, mindless zombie slaves work his mill and intimidate those who oppose him. The story begins when the lovely Madeline comes to ‘the West Indies’ to marry her fiance. All goes well, and the wedding is set to take place, but Madeline is desired by a local landowner, played by Robert Frazer, who hopes that Legendre’s evil powers can transfer Madeline’s love to himself, and to this end administers Legendre’s zombie potion on a rose, ‘killing’ the woman he desires. Madeline’s fiance, after a period of drunken mourning, is guided by a missionary to Legendre’s gothic castle, where all three suitors contend for Madeline’s soul. Finally the landowner, himself turning into a zombie owing to Legendre’s treachery, tosses the sorcerer over the parapets onto the jagged rocks below, before following him into final death. Legendre’s departure causes the zombies to collapse, while love restores Madeline to her former self.

While it is true that the film suffers from a slightly anachronistic feel, an almost fairytale simplicity, with awkward lapses caused by some poor acting and by the insertion of occasional stock horror effects, in the end these things don’t seem to matter much. Its strength lies in its visual qualities, an expressionist super-reality which is reminiscent of Carl Dreyer’s classic *Vampyr* (1931), and in its use of sound to underscore emotions and unsettle the viewer. The best scenes, such as the one in which Frazer comes to Legendre in his mill, where zombies work incessantly to turn

the *Metropolis*-like machinery and the groaning of the wheels provides an unnerving background to discussion over the fate of Madeline's soul, are chilling and skillfully constructed. The black-and-white photography and angled shots, often placing the players behind or against foreground structures or the shuffling legs of the living dead, help to create many potent moments.

If the mill scene provides an image of industrial exploitation ("They work faithfully and are not worried about long hours", says Legendre), the central story of Madeline and her 'suitors' can function as a metaphor for the dehumanisation caused by lust. Madeline's physical beauty remains once she is 'dead', but the landowner who orchestrated her death in order to win her quickly realises that devoid of will she is merely an empty shell. Though he has gained her body, he has in reality lost the better part of her, perhaps destroyed it. Here, and in its grim and often sensual imagery, is where the film's simple qualities work best. Taken as the dark fairytale that it is, *White Zombie* is a satisfying film and its 'old-fashioned' aspects become part of its appeal.

In the early years of Hollywood, zombies were generally atmospheric rather than fearsome, and animated by voodoo. As in *White Zombie*, there was a controller, a sorcerer, one who uses magic and arcane ritual to resurrect and animate the dead, which then go off in pursuit of the master's nefarious business interests or passions. Later the controller took other forms -- usually becoming a scientist once scientific paranoia hit the western world. But in whatever form, the evil is focused in a Machiavellian figure, reflecting perhaps the cult of the 'horror star' as personified by Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. Such evil 'focus' externalised the destructive forces in humanity and at the same time made the sources of fear more vulnerable to social control. Such figures could, after all, be beaten.

Halperin followed up *White Zombie* in 1936 with *Revolt of the Zombies*, in which Dean Jagger turns Cambodian soldiers into mindless slaves with a quasi-magic potion, until, led to see the error of his ways by love, he kills himself -- thus breaking the spell. There is also *King of the Zombies* (1941), where the setting becomes World

War 2, and the zombie master turns into a scientist. These films are largely of historic interest.

Then, in 1943, Jacques Tourneur, perhaps better known for his *Cat People* and *Curse of the Demon*, made a lyrical exploration of zombiedom under the title *I Walked with a Zombie*, a film which must be ranked as one of only three or so pre-*Night of the Living Dead* zombie classics. It is part of a remarkable sequence of horror films produced by Val Lewton for RKO, including *Cat People*, *The Leopard Man*, *Ghost Ship*, *The Body Snatcher*, *Isle of the Dead*, *Bedlam* and *Curse of the Cat People*. Lacking the exploitative qualities RKO had expected when they handed the unwilling Lewton his commission in the first place, the films turned out to be varied and unexpected – and often highly successful at the box office.

The story of *I Walked with a Zombie* is *Jane Eyre*, with zombies. A nurse (Frances Dee) comes to the West Indies to look after a plantation owner's wife, eventually realising that the woman has been turned into a zombie. But that's not all she uncovers. The zombified wife, an expressionless white phantom, becomes a powerful image of emotional emptiness, as the jealousy and bitterness that lies in the past is slowly revealed. The central journey of the nurse and the wife to a voodoo ceremony, in hope of some cure, is an acknowledged masterpiece of the cinema -- Tourneur orchestrates sound and movement, darkness and light, the looming presence of a zombie guardian and the climactic voodoo ceremony in a way that is both frightening and profound.

I Walked With a Zombie is an intelligent and evocative essay into the use of the zombie as a symbol of the past haunting the present -- an emotional barrenness and a guilt that will not lie still. From the early sequence in which Tom Conway (as the husband) seeks to destroy Dee's romantic innocence with the words "There is no beauty -- only death and decay", to the final revelations of love and hate, the film exerts a gentle if irresistible influence over the viewer which has not been replicated elsewhere in the zombie sub-genre.

Voodoo turned up regularly over the next few decades, at least in the titles, even if voodoo elements in the actual story lines are thin. For example, in *Voodoo Man* (1944), Lugosi keeps his living dead wife going by doing nasty things to innocent victims, while *Voodoo Woman* (1957) has a mad scientist turning a woman into an unliving monster to do his bidding. In 1974, there was a *Voodoo Girl*, also known as *Sugar Hill*, which involved a woman taking revenge against the Mob using an assortment of zombies raised from their graves. *Voodoo Dawn* (1989), also known as *Strange Turf*, saw a couple of young men visiting a Louisiana bayou in search of their friend, only to find that he has been turned into a zombie.

There was a smattering of zombie movies over the 1950s, though the formula changed once the Bomb brought science to the forefront of evil prime movers. Many of the living dead come from outer space now (as in the 1952 serial *Zombies of the Stratosphere* or Cahn's *Invisible Invaders*) or are the creations of science (*Creature With the Atom Brain*, *The Gamma People*, *Voodoo Woman*). In *Brain Eaters* (1958), for example, creatures from the centre of the Earth attach themselves to human brains and hence turn victims into mindless automatons. Such space-age zombies are no longer energised by voodoo nonsense; scientific gobbletiegook is what gets them up and running. The scientist, or the cold alien intelligence, is the zombie master. The trend continued into the sixties. There was also a minor diversion into historical zombiedom at this time, as in Mario Bava's *Hercules in the Haunted World* (1961) and *War of the Zombies* (1963), which was set in ancient Rome, but the zombies are peripheral.

In the infamous *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, made on a miniscule budget and with a complete absence of artistic sensibility, aliens invade Earth by animating human corpses as a vanguard army. But that's not the most revealing part of the story. The story behind the story goes like this: director/producer Wood had acquired a few moments of Bela Lugosi on film, just before the actor died, and, in order to construct the film from that snippet, Wood hired his chiropractor (who looked nothing like Lugosi) as a replacement and had him run around for the rest of the picture with his

cowl covering his face. *Plan 9* is generally held to be amusing because of its unintentional humour, thereby transcending 'badness'. I find it simply pathetic and would wish that Lugosi's 'last' film had been something more than pitiful.

Though after 1968 Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* inspired a new type of animated dead, until then, and even after, voodoo zombies managed to get an occasional look in. Hammer Films' excursion into the world of the living dead was John Gilling's effective *Plague of the Zombies* (1966). Here Cornwall has become the centre of a voodoo cult, as the local aristocrat creates zombies to work in his tin mine. At least one scene can be considered classic and has been much copied -- zombies clawing their way up out of the graveyard soil. The film's political agenda too gives it an unusual interest.

At about this time, the living dead found themselves somewhat liberated from restrictions to the depiction of violence and gore by the example of films such as the 'drive-in' gorefests pioneered by Herschell Gordon Lewis, and by changes to governing mores partially orchestrated by Hammer themselves. Gore is present in the awful *Astro-Zombies* (1967) too, though it's pretty mild when compared to what was to come. John Carradine is the zombie master in this turkey, revitalising corpses as super-human agents to aid him in his bloody experiments. Once again, the rationale is pseudo-scientific. 1975's *The Ghoul*, however, reverts to oriental mysticism. Directed by Freddie Francis, it tells of a gauntly tragic Peter Cushing, who hides his violent, flesh-eating son -- zombified into a sort of Indian variant of the basic Haitian model -- in the attic, from whence he emerges at times to kill visitors to the isolated manor. The rationale behind the existence of this particular zombie is unclear and in the end the 'ghoul' is shot (and not in the head), making one think that he wasn't dead at all, just cannibalistic. But it's not a bad film, if rather stilted, and has some effectively chilling moments. John Hurt is interesting as Cushing's loony gardener.

Night of the Sorcerers (1973) was directed by Amando de Ossorio, a Spanish maker of horror films already well-known for a series of stylish living dead tales featuring resurrected Knights Templar. This one, however, is typical low-grade dross.

Darkly indistinct on video, it follows the fortunes of two men and three model-like women (appearing in various stages of undress), who are exploring the African jungle in order to record, on film, the habits of animals in danger of extinction. Ironically, of course, it is the explorers who are most in danger of extinction, as they inadvertently become involved in voodoo rituals, and find themselves being killed off one by one by panther women and zombie sorcerers. The trappings of voodoo are present, but are rather token, being impressionistic rather than detailed. The film as a whole is fairly inept, made as a quickie to cash in on the market.

The Child (1977), also known as *Zombie Child*, has none of the ritual elements of voodooism, but it belongs here because it is so much about *control*. Directed by Robert Voskanian, it is the story of a little girl whose existential bitterness is so great that she has become the centre of a troupe of rotting, but animated, corpses. These zombies arise from a nearby cemetery, where her dead mother lies buried. Perhaps the girl has caused the corpses to rise, perhaps not -- the film never makes this clear. What is clear is that the zombies are her 'friends' and they 'do favours' for her. These favours fulfil her own hatred for those she perceives as being responsible for her mother's death, or who attempt to thwart her in some way. So even her new governess, though innocent of any real connection with the events of the past, is threatened because she tries to take over the dead mother's role. The zombies set about strangling, gouging and mutilating in scenes that often achieve an effective eeriness and violence. It all ends with the governess and the child's brother trapped in a work shed while the zombies claw their way in, à la *Night of the Living Dead*. The governess survives because she kills the girl with an axe -- by mistake, thinking her to be one of the zombies. It's not a bad film (especially if you ignore the janglingly insistent music soundtrack).

Another variant on the voodoo controller, this one otherworldly, is found in *Phantasm* (1979). Released in Australia as *The Never Dead, Phantasm* and its four sequels depict the doings of a mysterious mortician known as the 'Tall Man', who, we finally learn, steals corpses (or kills people off to obtain them), compresses them

into stumpy dwarfs so they can withstand dense gravitational fields, revivifies them and sends them off to work as slaves on another planet. It is a strange premise and produces a strange and eccentric movie, replete with dank and chilly mortuary corridors, a flying metal ball that drills its way into victims' skulls, and an interdimensional portal leading to other worlds. There's no talk of voodoo or zombies, but that's what they are just the same.

Dead and Buried (1981) also gives an interesting spin to the concept of the 'voodoo' master. An effective and at times horrific film, it concerns the exploits of a mad small-town mortician, Mr Dobbs, whose ability to 'remake' the corpses handed into his care extends beyond mere pre-burial make-up to actual re-animation. His dead must destroy others as traumatically as possible -- so that Dobbs' cosmetic efforts are challenged and because only violent death can give him the power to raise the dead. Pictorial self-consciousness is important too: the zombies have an unsettling penchant for photographing their victims' agonies. Dobbs watches flickering images of death -- and listens to nostalgic music on his gramophone -- as he weaves his magic. The pictures flashing on the walls of his morgue act as a sort of fetish. Throughout, Dobbs' 'magic' is given an air of science, but there is much talk of voodoo too, which requires that the heart of the zombie be removed and kept in a safe place. However, as in other 'voodoo' zombie films, real voodoo content is almost non-existent in *Dead and Buried*, though the principle of centralised control is fundamental. It should be noted, nevertheless, that the evil controller remains unchallenged at the end of this film -- it being the cynical eighties. He becomes one of his own creations and offers the hero a final, devastating revelation.

The zombie master depicted in *The Dead Pit* (1989) is a mad scientist, too -- or mad doctor, to be more precise -- but he dies in the first scene. From there on in, he is a supernatural presence, though a demonic ghost rather than a zombie. The living dead of *The Dead Pit* are his many experimental victims, who were mutilated and tossed in a pit beneath the hospital where he worked. When the psychologically unstable heroine arrives on the scene, suffering from amnesia, the doctor is released

from his sleep and the dead follow, heading off on a classic rampage through the hospital corridors and the surrounding countryside. This is a good, fun, zombie film, with many excellent scenes, generally taut direction and a slightly off-beat storyline. I particularly like the moment when the hero and heroine, narrowly escaping from the zombie-ridden hospital, make it out to the parking lot, only to find that the zombies have disabled the cars. "They sure are smart, for dead people," the hero says. Essentially, the film's inspiration comes from Romero and Fulci, so there's lots of zombies and lots of gore.

But sometimes controlling zombies just isn't what it's cracked up to be. In *Zombie Cop* (1991), a Haitian *bokor* named Doctor Death, though shot while chanting his voodoo rituals, manages to kill the titular cop anyway and turn him into a zombie. But when the dead *bokor* rises from his grave (as he inevitably must) and begins a campaign to conquer the world, his 'zombie slave' isn't very helpful. Indeed, the zombie cop teams up, *Dead Heat* fashion, with his ex-partner (still living) to track down the evil Doctor and thwart his wicked plans.

There's a sub-sub-genre identifiable here -- a melding of the zombie and cop film traditions. *Maniac Cop* and *Dead Heat* (both 1988) are better-known examples. Others have come out of Hong Kong, which was a lively centre of zombie activity during the 1990s. Apparently voodoo can raise its ugly head even in Asia. A good example is *Magic Cop* (or *Qumo Jingcha*, 1990), in which a veteran rural cop joins up with a younger, and skeptical, city cop to track down an evil sorceress who uses voodoo-animated zombies as part of an elaborate scheme to smuggle drugs into the country. The movie is humorous and imaginative, very Hong-Kong in its sensibilities and fascinatingly different in approach.

In most voodoo zombie movies, the voodoo content is atmospheric rather than detailed, or, as in *The Dead Pit*, the zombie master is a scientist of some kind. In the same year as *The Dead Pit*, however, director Wes Craven, better known for such dream horrors as *Nightmare on Elm Street*, released *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, perhaps the most effectively detailed examination of the voodoo mythos that the

zombie genre has produced, at least since *I Walked With A Zombie*. Based on an autobiographical book by Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* looks like it was well researched. The backgrounds are authentic (it was filmed in Haiti) and the basic zombie plot-line is effectively interwoven with political intrigue and local militarism. The story concerns an anthropologist who has come to Haiti in order to identify the powder used by *bokors* to create zombies, as this chemical might prove to be of great medical (and financial) benefit. What results is a deadly cat-and-mouse game played between the chief protagonist and a local military tyrant, who is a *bokor* and uses his powers to make slaves of his enemies or to destroy them. The film effectively blurs the line between reality and hallucination, in much the same way as *Nightmare on Elm Street* undermines the distinction between the waking world and the dream world of Freddie Krueger. Some critics are less than impressed by the film's perceived decline into SFX mayhem, but to me it seems a perfectly appropriate climax, especially as the reality/hallucination interface has been explored throughout and Craven never lets the final supernatural conflict become unequivocally 'real'.

Despite Craven's efforts, the mythos of voodoo, replete with the *bokor* and his scientific descendents, has become a secondary strain -- relegated in 1992 to *Weekend at Bernie's 2*, where the incompetent voodoo activation of Bernie's corpse (which allows him to walk only when music is playing) is necessary so that the corpse can lead protagonists and villains alike to the millions he had misappropriated in life. Generally, however, the focus on individual evil control has been minimised in recent times, diminishing along with it the notion of the animated dead as robot-slaves. Even in films like *The Dead Pit*, where there is a 'zombie master', the dead are not so much under his control as an expression of his originating evil, now functioning as an independent menace. The classic post-*Night of the Living Dead* zombie represents something more nihilistic and inevitable than the classic voodoo zombie, perhaps more metaphorically relevant to current views of the human condition. These modern representatives of spiritual death are less easily dealt with because they are part of a wider, spiritual malaise.

3. Romero's Living Dead

In 1968, with the troubled release of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, everything changed. Suddenly not only were the living dead dangerous, but the films in which they appeared were imbued with a modern apocalyptic despair that struck a powerful cord in the hearts of audiences everywhere. Romero, in fact, inspired two waves of zombie films -- one following *Night of the Living Dead* and another more frenzied one after the release of *Dawn of the Dead* in 1979. *Day of the Dead* (1985), the third in his living dead trilogy, was the icing on the gravestone.

Night of the Living Dead (1968), filmed cheaply on ordinary black-and-white stock (very washed out and grainy-looking until the recent DVD release, which was from an immaculate print, digitally enhanced, and looks superb), is one of the great horror films of all time: scary, claustrophobic, innovative and metaphorically potent. It tells the story of a group of people who are trapped in an isolated house when the dead suddenly refuse to lie still and become hungry for living flesh. The film flaunts expectation throughout -- the blonde heroine becomes almost catatonic early on and stays that way for the rest of the picture; the strong, sympathetically drawn hero is black; he makes all the right moves but heroism does not bring success or survival in this world, and in the end he is killed pointlessly and ironically; a sick child dies and then turns on her grieving mother with a cement trowel; a young all-American couple are burnt to death when their truck explodes; they are then eaten by the cannibalistic dead. No satisfactory explanation is offered as to why the dead are walking about and feeding on the living -- except for desperate theories expounded by experts on TV, who put the blame on radiation fallout from an abortive rocket launch. This latter explanation is generally accepted by most film commentators, but to me it has always seemed more like a rationalisation made by the ailing society within the film than Romero's rationale for events. No, like the inexplicable avian attacks in Hitchcock's *The Birds*, the zombie plague in *Night* simply happens and represents a breakdown in the accepted order of things -- the outer representation of modern man's empty spirit.

The end of *Night*, though superficially giving humanity an uneasy control, offers no real hope. Groups of redneck vigilantes are the representatives of order -- and they shoot the hero thinking him one of the dead, without the slightest recognition of the heroic struggle he has gone through and without remorse. As the credits roll, his body is thrown onto a fire and burnt, and the rednecks party on.

(It should be noted that the 30th anniversary edition of *Night of the Living Dead* contained an additional 15 minutes or so of new footage, directed by the original film's co-writer, John Russo. The new scenes are made up of an introductory burial scene, gorier flesh-eating, more gruesomely disfigured zombies, and some business at the end. The film itself was re-edited (Russo had also acted as the 1968 original's editor). Such 'enhancement' was not done with Romero's approval, so far as I can tell, and quite rightly did not meet with much favour among fans -- why Russo thought he could improve on the original classic in this way is anyone's guess. The new scenes are pointless at best. Even the additional gore seems incongruous. Luckily the Region 4 DVD edition of the new version (at least) came with the original theatrical release included as a bonus, digitally re-mastered, thus making the package worth the purchase price.)

Romero reprised *Night* in 1979, with a much bigger budget and much acquired expertise. *Dawn of the Dead* continues the mythos of *Night*, though none of the characters from the earlier film appear (yeah, I know they're all dead, but that never stops anyone, especially in this genre). In *Dawn*, the zombie problem is a step further advanced, the living dead having grown in number and being engaged in reducing human organisation to chaos. Four people escape from the city in a helicopter, finally landing on the roof of a huge shopping mall. They take refuge in this mall, seeing it as a well-stocked fortress, which can be sealed off relatively easily. Unfortunately the complex is full of zombies (which gravitate there because the shopping mall was such an important place for them when they were alive), but this problem can be solved through a process of extermination. What follows is a dazzling combination of satire, adventure and horror, which veers seamlessly through those modes in a unique

display of brilliant make-up effects (by Tom Savini) and adroit direction. It is by turns horrific, funny, gory, poignant and suspenseful. It works so well because the characters are well-conceived and the underlying metaphor is so perfectly realised.

Hope is only marginally more in evidence than in *Night*. Some of the characters escape in the end, though what they are escaping to is hardly a cause for optimism. In *Dawn*, however, the best explanation (though it is a non-explanation) for the 'living dead' phenomenon is given: "When there's no more room in hell, the dead shall walk the earth". There it is in a nutshell -- it makes poetic sense but there's nothing we can do about it. Meaning now can only come through the struggle to remain human (and all that that means), not through the possibility of success.

Occasionally these zombies of Romero's -- and some of those that followed in their wake -- are referred to as 'ghouls', a name suggested by their cannibalistic tendencies. But in folklore, ghouls weren't dead bodies themselves. They were evil spirits (or possessed individuals) that ate the flesh of the dead, generally robbing graves to do so. Romero's creatures are the ones that are dead, and they eat the living. In fact, they don't even eat each other; it is only living flesh that attracts them. Why the dead are so hungry for living flesh is, of course, anybody's guess. Certainly it is not for food in the normal sense. They are dead and cannot digest what they eat. As a slightly potty researcher illustrates (gruesomely) in *Day of the Dead*, the dead do not need to eat -- they reach for live flesh even when they have no mouth or gullet, even when their stomachs have been removed. The impulse is part of their very essence -- a spiritual craving. They are dead, and death wants to consume life. It is an image of insatiable nihilism that is hard to resist.

In fact, in *Day of the Dead*, the only resistance proves to be simple, albeit doomed, flight. Set in a hastily set up scientific establishment, guarded now by a barely controllable military remnant, *Day* charts the failure of conventional effort to provide answers to the zombie dilemma. Experimentation to find the cause of the phenomenon -- and a way to 'control' the dead -- becomes a foolish indulgence, though it succeeds in evoking a display of purposeful and emotive revenge on the part

of one of the living dead, 'Bub'. In fact, by the end of the film, it is the human activity throughout -- scientific, military and interpersonal -- which is seen by the viewer to be most clearly an expression of evil. The zombies' bloody cannibalism is no more immoral than the vicious impulses of a hungry lion, or the ravages of a tornado. It is the living people who still have the capacity for evil.

Finally, there is only one choice: the three surviving characters escape in a helicopter and find temporary refuge -- from killer corpses and the need to maintain civilisation -- on a tropical beach. One of them still keeps a calendar record of time passing -- that's all that is left of human society. It is a bleak but logical end to the series. For me (though not for most of the critics) *Day* brings *Night* to a masterful conclusion, as well as being an excellent film in its own right, despite speculation that it is less than Romero intended, thanks to budgetary limitations. Having read the script of the 'originally intended' version of *Day*, I still prefer what it became.

Rumours of a fourth Living Dead film from Romero (*Afternoon of the Dead* perhaps?), depicting the world under a new living-dead governance, have never borne fruit, though we can still live in hope. Meanwhile, those who are avid for an extension of Romero's living dead mythos can find some imaginative relief in two excellent anthologies, *Book of the Dead* and *Still Dead*. Edited by John Skipp and Craig Spector, these superb anthologies contain original stories by prominent horror writers, all set in the *Night of the Living Dead* universe. I can't recommend them highly enough.

The influence of Romero's trilogy on horror movies in general and the zombie sub-genre in particular was profound. It changed many of our expectations as to what films can, or even should, do, and it gave renewed life to the walking dead. From here on in, random violence and other evidence of a universe out of sympathy with, or indifferent to, humanity tend to dominate the horror film, as they have horror literature in general. Such themes as the nightmarish alienation of our familiar world, impersonal violence and the futility of social struggle lie at the heart of modern horror. Romero's role in this changing perspective is debatable, of course, but he is

there riding the first wave, and popularised the changes in a distinctive way. More certain is his influence over the image of the zombie that now dominates the zombie film. From here on, zombies will tend to be hungrier, bloodier and more primal. Romero's images of white-faced or partially decomposed bodies staggering apocalyptically out of the night, intent on cannibalistic mayhem, provided a template for filmmakers -- and, as technical aspects of SFX make-up improved, the images became more extreme, zombies appearing more and more death-like and decomposed. In the end, even bits of zombies -- arms, heads and, in the case of Jackson's *Braindead*, stomach and intestines -- are able to maintain a 'life' of their own. This is the human body -- our material being -- engaging in an act of sheer rebellion.

In 1990, make-up artist for *Dawn and Day*, Tom Savini, directed a re-make version of *Night of the Living Dead* from Romero's own script. Inevitably, of course, the film has been strongly criticised -- but such criticism is somewhat unfair, I think. The new version is remarkably effective, restrained in terms of gore and technically superior to most other zombie films. At least in its first half it remains faithful to the original, compressing the earlier film and then expanding from that point. Romero and Savini work some interesting changes throughout; the famous first meeting with a zombie in the graveyard, for example, is neatly turned upon the viewer to undermine expectation. Overall, the film is well made and effective -- given the difficulties of re-making such a passionately regarded classic -- and if the first version didn't exist, I think the 1990 re-make would have been warmly greeted. Of course, since the first film does exist, this argument is somewhat spurious. Nevertheless I feel that the re-make is worthy of a sympathetic viewing. The divergent last third of the film ably strengthens the theme that is so strong in Romero's 'Living Dead' sequence -- "they are us".

Part Two: Descendants of the Dead

Over the decades from its voodoo beginnings as a cadaverous automaton under the control of a sorcerer or mad scientist, to George Romero's spectacularly effective modern re-working of the concept, the zombie on film has moved more and more into the forefront of horror film imagery, never as glamorous as the vampire, as sympathetic as Frankenstein's monster, or as energetic as the werewolf, but perhaps more profoundly and disturbingly resonant. After 1968, with the release of *Night of the Living Dead*, there came a plethora of living dead movies from filmmakers worldwide. Since then, the sub-genre has been characterised (in general, accurately) as gory and horrific -- in many ways an epitome of the modern horror film ethos. But while Romero, with his 'Living Dead' series, inspired the whole movement, it was the Europeans, to whom Romero had many affinities, who took the zombie film to its ghastliest extreme.

4. Flesh and the Single Ghoul

The immediate spawn of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* include Bob Clark's *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* (1973), *The Child* (the final scene with its protagonists besieged in a shed by the titular character's dead friends being particularly reminiscent of *Night*), Ken Wiederhorn's enjoyable *Shock Waves* (1977), the quietly effective *Dead of Night* (1972), and the Knights Templar series by Spanish director Amando de Ossorio: *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971), *The Return of the Evil Dead* (1973), *Horror of the Zombies* (1974) and *Night of the Death Cult* (1975). These latter, as a result of their strong atmosphere and imaginative extension of Romero's living dead imagery, became cult favourites. The first in the series, *Tombs of the Blind Dead*, set the tone. It seems that the sadistic and cruel Templars, a brotherhood of knights left over from the 13th Century Crusades, were executed at the hands of villagers outraged by the Templars' indulgence in blood sacrifice and satanic practices. The Templar corpses were left exposed in the fields and crows pecked out their eyes, so that when they arise, in the present, they are blind and can

therefore be eluded if you are very quiet. Screams and frantic breathing, however, attract them like moths to flame. A number of young people, embroiled in a sexual tangle, become the target of the living dead Templars, which shamble in grim detail through fog and darkness, draining their victims of blood. Effective scenes -- such as the mouldering dead clawing out of their tombs, or groping around buildings in search of terrified victims -- make up for some clumsiness in the acting and the story itself. The film's sexual subtext has often been remarked upon; it is as though the dead Templars have been awakened as a punishment for sexual desire. In the end, they emerge from the train on which the sole remaining protagonist has taken refuge, "to spread the scourge of puritanism across the rest of the world", as Phil Hardy puts it.

Where the action of the first film is concentrated around the site of the Templar's demise -- an abandoned settlement -- and on the hapless souls who stumble into it, the sequel, *Return of the Evil Dead*, widens somewhat, as the Templar zombies attack a nearby village and systematically slaughter its inhabitants. There is more death and less lyricism, but the basic effects are the same, as the Templar's move about slowly, people scream and draw their attention, and the inevitable bloodshed takes place. Both are entertaining and often suspenseful. Two more sequels followed.

One the best known of the immediate post-*Night* zombie films is *The Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue* (1974), made by Jorge Grau and filmed on location in England. It features a scientifically induced zombie plague and ups the ante on gore and paranoia. The police become more threatening villains than the living dead, and the film places audience sympathy with the zombies in the person of the main protagonist, who becomes one of them after he is shot by a vengeful cop. This is a competent and effective thriller, which has become something of a cult favourite.

It was, however, *Dawn of the Dead* that brought on the most spectacular zombie craze, with an army of cannibalistic living dead coming out of Italy, trailing grue and violence at an unprecedented level. Though not for everyone, Lucio Fulci's

films are the best of them; they were very popular, despite censorship regimes that often turned his gruesomely explicit scenes into incomprehensible non-sequiturs. Even in the face of such artistic interference, Fulci became known as the 'zombie king' and the films, already owing much to Romero, themselves inspired many imitations. Despite their obvious derivation, Fulci's films cannot simply be dismissed as rip-offs of Romero. They have a definite style and ambience of their own.

The first was *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979). Known as well as *Zombie 2 (Dawn of the Dead)* being sometimes known as *Zombie*, *Zombie Flesh Eaters* begins with an atmospheric sequence in which an apparently deserted yacht enters New York Harbour. Police investigate and find themselves under attack by a bloodied, cannibalistic zombie. One thing leads to another and soon the daughter of the yacht's owner (Tia Farrow) and a journalist after a story (David Warbeck) arrive on a south sea island in search of answers. There they and a helpful American couple meet a doctor engaged in studying a strange malady that causes the newly dead to rise from their graves and kill the living. Menaced by a growing number of the living dead, the group fights for survival, some of them in the end escaping back to New York. Unfortunately, when they get there, they find that the original zombie from the first scene has infected others and now the Big Apple is completely overrun. There is a final scene in which we see a large number of shambling dead heading along the Brooklyn Bridge toward, presumably, fresh meat.

There are many excellent scenes in this film. As well as the opening sequence, highlights include an underwater fracas between a zombie and a shark, that infamous moment when the doctor's wife has her eye impaled on a splinter of wood (censored out in most available copies), several wonderful images of the dead staggering through deserted village streets, whipped by wind and flying sand, and the protagonists' final bloody stand in the hospital. Sometimes acting and/or dubbing become clumsy and it is hard to tell whether illogical plot glitches are faults of the original script or products of the censor's careless scissors (the film was heavily cut and in general only this badly scarred version has been available, though current

DVD releases have rectified this problem). Seen in widescreen and in a less butchered version, the clumsiness and awkwardness largely disappears, and *Zombie Flesh Eaters* can be appreciated as a stylish and visually fascinating exploration of the living dead themes begun by Romero, exploiting its exotic locations and energetic SFX well and reveling in visceral horror. It remains a fascinating introduction to the blood-and-guts wonders of the Italian zombie film.

City of the Living Dead followed in 1980. Fulci's style is at its peak here, in a tale that begins with a priest whose suicide opens the gates of hell, releasing the dead upon the earth. Again, Fulci's almost lyrical Grand Guignol imagery lingers longest in the mind, its effect more important to the film than the logic of plot. A girl, mesmerised, vomits up her own guts; another victim has his skull drilled -- in one side out the other; in one remarkable scene a door is blown open and the protagonists are covered by a cloud of maggots. Such examples indicate the level of physical tolerance required to watch this film. But Fulci's creation of intense visual imagery and his use of a sort of modern gothic intensity make *City of the Living Dead* and *Zombie Flesh Eaters* horror classics.

The final two films in Fulci's zombie sequence were released in 1981. *The Beyond* is set in Louisiana and centres around a woman who has inherited an old hotel, which she plans to renovate and re-open to the public. Unfortunately for her, the hotel happens to house one of the gates of hell and things get very nasty -- with masses of zombies running rampant through hospital corridors and dark cellars -- before the end places the main characters (including veteran Fulci zombie hunter David Warbeck), and the viewer, in the landscape of hell itself. Again, *The Beyond* is a determinedly visual, illogical and frequently gruesome experience, and takes the viewer along paths where filmmakers are usually loathe to tread.

The House By the Cemetery is different from Fulci's other zombie epics -- closer, more intimate, in many ways more traditional. There is only one zombie, and it inhabits a tomb beneath an old haunted house. The first half of the film is rather like a ghost story, full of a combined Italian-American gothic with overtones of Lovecraft.

But the second half is pure Fulci -- gruesome murders, violent action and a superbly designed zombie who carves up his victims with almost anatomical precision. The scene where the zombie's stomach is slit open, to spew forth a viscous mixture of blood, guts and maggots, is certainly the genuine Fulci article.

After Fulci, the rest are pretty well anticlimactic, if strident. *Zombi Holocaust* was released in 1980 (it was a popular year for zombies) and is a mediocre effort at best. Some scenes work well and linger in the mind -- most of the film however is awkward and unimaginative, as it spins its tale of zombies in the jungles of wherever the hell it's supposed to be. With its mad doctor (an alternative title is *Dr Butcher M.D.*) and ritualistic trimmings, *Holocaust* plays the older voodoo-zombie themes, but it belongs nevertheless to the post-*Night* strain of living dead films, its zombies being bloody, cannibalistic and the heralds of an incipient apocalypse.

However, though *Zombi Holocaust* is not a great film, nor even a very good one, it is not the pits. That honour must be left for the likes of *Night of the Zombies* (1981), also known as *Zombie Creeping Flesh*. This film, directed by Bruno Mattei under the pseudonym Vincent Dawn, is a totally inept, loathsome and mindless effort, redeemed only by the fact that it is so unintentionally funny. It tells of an accident in a secret experimental laboratory in New Guinea. US scientists (we finally discover) are working on a gas which will make native peoples revert to cannibalism, thus providing an answer to problems of overpopulation. Unfortunately, an accidental leakage causes a plague of zombies to overrun the country, the first being, would you believe, a zombie rat. This provokes laughable speeches in an oddly constituted UN, umpteen disembowellings, endless scenes of zombies having their brains blown out ("Shoot for the head!"), incongruous nature-documentary footage, gratuitous nudity, military types (including one who dies at the hands of a zombie after dancing in the besieged supply room in a tutu!), lots of really bad acting, and a climactic scene in which a zombie rips out the heroine's tongue, inserts its fingers in her mouth and, in close-up, pokes out her eyes from the inside. A gross film, and badly done to boot.

People who write articles on zombie movies are surely the only ones who should be required to watch this stuff, in expiation for their sins.

Mind you, the already-mentioned *Curse of the Screaming Dead* (also 1979) makes *Night of the Zombies* look like a masterpiece -- mainly because it's boring, as well as inept. If you don't believe me, watch it sometime, though not if you're feeling at all jaded. It might be the last straw. The big question it raises is: given that someone has been silly enough make such a film, why the hell would anyone bother to bring it out on video?

Fulci himself staged his own anticlimax to *Zombie Flesh Eaters* in 1989 with *Zombie 3* -- though perhaps we should blame Bruno Mattei, who is rumoured to have been the actual director, despite the credits. *Zombie 3* has the usual elements: bacteriological disaster, the military, exploding heads, blood-and-guts and an apocalyptic undercurrent -- not to mention zombie sea gulls, a zombie head that attacks from within a fridge, and a living dead birth. Fulci has bemoaned the film in interviews.

But thankfully such disasters as these are not the end of the story. One wouldn't want *Night of the Zombies* (or *Curse of the Screaming Dead* or *Erotic Night of the Living Dead* or *Nightmare City* or *Toxic Zombies* or any other of the amateurish atrocities that cost almost nothing, and no expenditure of talent, to make) to be the considered the culmination of the tradition instituted by Romero.

In 2002, Paul Anderson's *Resident Evil* was released to cinemas (which is, in Australia at least, a remarkable feat for a zombie flick). Though no classic and not particularly original, I felt that the German/Canadian co-production was handled with sufficient competence, and generated sufficient energy, to overcome its 'blockbuster' aspirations. Taken on its own terms, it works.

The publicity and upmarket release that *Resident Evil* received were no doubt due to the fact that it was based on a popular computer game. This aspect of its ancestry certainly shows; the plot is minimal, confined largely to a linear journey through the bowels of a vast research facility, as the central character (the player?),

portrayed by Mila Jovovich, tries firstly to survive and then to find out what's going on. What she discovers is a sinister and illegal corporate experiment in genetic tinkering, which has resulted in the release of a deadly virus. This bio-weapon causes the dead to be re-animated, and, once on the move, the dead, of course, are very hungry. Our heroes – a group of military types who have come to 'handle things' – are soon the main course on the menu and the result is a running battle with rapacious dead, a psychotic security AI and the monstrous spawn of an earlier, failed experiment.

Yet though the game aspect of the film dominates its structure, the other side of its ancestry is not hard to fathom. Rumour has it Romero himself was approached in the early developmental stages to direct the movie. He decided not to – but his influence remains. From the first entrance of the dead – shambling, distorted and snarlingly intent on taking a bite out of anything that moves – we know we're in Romero territory, and as the story continues and the zombies amass, the film takes us on a rollercoaster ride that manages to successfully fuse modern action-film aesthetics with Romeroesque imagery.

The loud and insistent heavy metal soundtrack, millennial technobabble and dynamic cinematography aside, *Resident Evil* is familiar living dead material, but not unwelcome for all that. The zombie business is handled well, some intriguing complications are added, and the characters (albeit two-dimensional) are sufficiently developed to involve us in their plight. On the whole I felt that the cynicism often associated with game-franchise filmmaking was mitigated, at the very least, by the respect for the 'living dead' sub-genre that the film displays. Even the apocalyptic imagery of the ending seems an appropriate homage to the Romero tradition, rather than simply a cynical invitation for us to anticipate an inevitable sequel.

5. The Vengeful Dead

Before venturing to examine the direct descendants of Romero's zombies, there is a tradition we have not yet looked at: the zombie as corporeal ghost. Visions of the

walking dead as instruments of ghostly vengeance date from ancient times and have been fitfully present in the movies, most recently perhaps in the big-budget revenge film, *The Crow* and its sequels. The influence of Romero's living dead lies mainly in the type of violence they commit. These days zombies mutilate their victims horribly and their vengeance is more likely to have a degree of randomness which was not common in early days. But the real influence on these films was not Romero, but Herschell Gordon Lewis.

The tradition began early. In 1933, Boris Karloff starred in *The Ghoul*, playing an eccentric Egyptologist who wants to be buried with a priceless ancient jewel because he believes that he will gain immortality thereby. When the jewel is stolen from his tomb, the Egyptologist returns from the grave to reclaim it (though maybe he was just cataleptic, the script suggests). As the dead Egyptologist, Karloff wears effectively subtle make-up, a staring malevolence and an air that suggests his more famous role as Frankenstein's monster. He finally regains the jewel, mutilates himself before a statue of Anubis (which comes alive to claim the offered jewel), and then dies again.

In *The Walking Dead* (1936), Karloff is required yet again to rise from the dead. This time he plays an ex-convict tried and executed for killing the judge who had originally sent him to prison. But he has been framed by mobsters. A scientist, Frankenstein-like, restores him to life, whereupon, white-faced and spectral, he causes the mobsters who framed him to die (though he doesn't actually kill them himself). Karloff played a similar role in the effective *The Man They Could Not Hang* (1939), though in this one the returned executee is more directly malicious.

Years later, the same theme was still being played out in *Indestructible Man* (1956), again with a 'scientific' rationale attached to the business of raising the dead. Lon Chaney Jr plays an executed murderer (Butcher Benton) who has been betrayed by his fellow criminals. A scientist experiments on his newly dead corpse and inadvertently brings him back to life. Made super-strong and impervious to bullets through the electrical densification of his cellular structure, he seeks vengeance and

the money he'd hidden away before being captured and framed. Here, the returnee's zombie-like invulnerability is given a scientific veneer, though the logic of it is so impenetrable it may as well be voodoo.

Such living dead nurse an understandable resentment toward the living, but typically their vengeance is restricted to those who have violated their sleep or caused their unjust death. Similarly, in one of the stories contained in the anthology movie *Tales from the Crypt* (1972), Peter Cushing plays an eccentric old man who is cruelly driven to his death by a malicious neighbour. He returns in a state of decay, face gaunt and wrinkled, clothes covered in grave-dirt, to express his displeasure in a direct show of violence -- that is, ripping out his tormentor's heart. In *Creepshow* (1985) -- another homage to horror comics -- vengeance becomes even gorier as an angry father, dead, returns in an advanced state of decomposition and ironically creates a designer birthday cake out of his wicked daughter's head.

The zombie of *Dead of Night* (1972), on the other hand, doesn't realise he's dead. His motivations are not vengeful, but he is very like a corporeal spirit, returning plaintively to the place where he once belonged, which now exists for him only as part of another life. An army vet (a Vietnam War victim, no doubt), presumed dead, returns to his family, but grimly changed. He doesn't understand the changes himself, but it soon becomes clear that his insatiable thirst for blood is the only thing that stops him from decaying. In the end, decay occurs and he becomes a ravaging monster. Also known as *Deathdream*, the film is an effective metaphor for the problems of re-adjustment suffered by returning soldiers, and the spiritual impoverishment brought about by war. Moreover, it paints a grim picture of family life, underlining the tensions and deep divisions that were always there.

In a similar vein, Jean Rollin's lyrical and perhaps atypically potent film, *The Living Dead Girl* (1982), has a beautiful young woman return from death without knowing she is dead. Brought back by a toxic spill, she moves zombie-like through the catacombs and then her old home (which is being sold), killing bloodily whomever she comes across and slowly regaining her memory. She eventually

remembers, and meets up with, a childhood friend, who tries to restore her to life. The friend's obsession, in fact, proves as deadly as the dead girl's need for blood. But in the end the girl remembers that she is dead, and unable to resist her own bloody impulses, is inevitably lead toward death once more. The overall tone is one of tragedy, and though the film was cheaply made, its dreamy poetry dominates over the lack of plot and produces an effective piece of cinema.

Jesus Franco's *Virgin Among the Living Dead* (Une Vierge Chez Les Morts Vivants, 1971) is closer to being a ghost story than a zombie story. The living dead inhabiting Montserratt Castle are solid and fleshy enough (especially the women), 'ice-cold' and with peculiar habits, but they do not shamle about and only one, who is described as 'a little mad, that's all' does any killing. Meanwhile they play the piano, smoke, perform various ritualistic acts and 'play' with the main character's virginity. The virgin of the title arrives at her family home after the death of the father she had never met. Once there she is subjected to various oddities, including a visitation from her hanged father, who eventually makes it clear that 'the Queen of Darkness' is after her. In the end she is joined with her dead relatives -- the bloodline closed forever. The film has a strange, surrealist feel, as well as the unselfconscious nudity typical of the director, but little bloodiness (though plenty of suggestive perversity).

In Mario Bava's *Baron Blood* (1972), the titular character is re-called from death by his last-remaining descendant, who foolishly chants magic words from a witch's parchment as part of the playful seduction of a blonde, mini-skirted architect's assistant (played by Bava favourite, Elke Sommer). The semi-decayed Baron, who had a weakness for torture (which was why he was killed in the first place), resumes his favourite occupation, especially targeting developers who are in the process of converting his castle-cum-torture emporium into a hotel for tourists. The film contains several excellent sequences, such as the Baron's relentless pursuit of Ms Sommer through fog-shrouded streets, though on the whole *Baron Blood* is more

conventional, and less atmospherically coherent, than the Italian maestro's best work. Nevertheless, it is an effective thriller.

In the 1960s, exploitation film director Herschell Gordon Lewis laid the groundwork, with films like *Blood Feast* (1963) and *2,000 Maniacs* (1964), for the sub-genre that was to become known as the 'slasher' film. Bloody murder, and lots of it, is the main ingredient of this sub-species. The slaughter is usually perpetrated by a maniac who remains fairly anonymous, but insists on doing very nasty things to anyone at all, but especially nubile young ladies. The tradition began in earnest with Bava's *Bay of Blood* (1971), otherwise known as *Twitch of the Death Nerve* -- the seminal 'slasher' film. 1978 saw the release of the best of the US 'slasher' classics -- *Halloween*, directed by John Carpenter, in which lunatic Michael Myers returns on Halloween night, face covered in a mask, to revenge himself on his relatives (and anyone else who gets in the way). Sequels followed.

In 1980, one of the most prominent (though hardly the best) of these slasher films made a killing at the box-office, proving very popular with the teen set in particular. *Friday the 13th*, directed by Sean S. Cunningham, tells the story of a number of young people in a holiday camp who are slaughtered in various inventively gruesome ways by a mysterious figure, later identified by a hockey mask. This killer turns out to be the mother of Jason Voorhees, who 'drowned' as a child while his teenage guardians made love on the shore. In subsequent movies, however, it is Jason himself who returns to avenge his ill-treatment on new generations of young campers. As the film's phenomenal box-office reception spawned *Friday the 13th II, III, IV, V, VI, VII* and *VIII*, Jason is depicted as a walking, slashing corpse, functioning purely as an engine of malice-driven violence. The need to 'resurrect' a popular villain for sequels seems to be the motivating force that energises Jason's dead flesh (and perhaps rivalry with the more supernatural doings of Freddy Krueger). This phenomenon recurs in other slasher films that became series -- such as the *Halloween* series, in which the real status of Michael Myers, *vis a vis* being alive, became increasingly ambiguous as the movies proliferated. Such 'zombifying' of the murderer

happens even though in essence the slasher film is about human, 'naturalistic' maniacs.

Friday the 13th VI: Jason Lives (1986) is an excellent example of the serial slasher as walking corpse, as well as being, in my opinion, the best of the series. It begins with an obsessed young man returning to Jason's grave, determined to lay his own restless inner ghosts by assuring himself that Jason is in fact dead.

Unfortunately, when he digs up the body (which is rotten and crawling with maggots), a bolt of lightning from the heavens strikes Jason and the corpse rises to once again pursue its career of ripping out hearts, impaling hikers and mutilating young people. Jason stalks relentlessly through the film, unspeaking, violent and single-minded, making a beeline from his grave to the cabins which were the scene of his original distress. In this film, for the first time, he is unambiguously a supernatural being.

Jason remains a vengeful zombie for the next few films, though by the latest and, so they say, last -- *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (1993) -- his 'living dead' status has developed into a ghostly ability to survive even the destruction of his flesh. In the first scene, an FBI hit-squad traps him and blows him to smithereens. But his heart, still pumping away, is compulsively eaten by the coroner, who then 'becomes' the dead maniac: strong, deadly and unkillable -- in short, a zombie. However, the bodies Jason possesses cannot hold him for long or they begin to disintegrate. Mimicking the insect-like alien of *The Hidden* (1987), Jason's heart passes from one mouth to another in a sort of pseudo-sexual act, each new victim becoming a Jason-zombie. Finally Jason himself (tattered clothes and all) is re-born through the corpse of his sister, only to be sent to hell by the one person able to do so -- another Voorhees, in this case his niece. It's all quite bizarre, with spectacular SFX barely hiding the sameness of it all. Much better than most of its predecessors, *Jason Goes To Hell* is a fair end to a very patchy series.

What does it all mean? Well, overall, like Ossorio's Knights Templar films, the message of *Friday the 13th* and its offspring seems to be that sex is bad and you'll die

if you enjoy it. Certainly a high proportion of the victims of Jason Voorhees are engaging in some sort of sexual interaction when they meet their nasty ends. Is this a kind of AIDS metaphor? Probably there's also an underlying message from the resentful adult world that being young might be fun, but as we're past all that ourselves, we're going to make you too nervous to enjoy it!

The *Maniac Cop* films, directed by William Lustig, are also influenced by 'slasher' movies, though the victims are not young people in particular. Like Jason, however, Officer Matt Cordell's desire for revenge goes beyond those individuals responsible for his death, to point up a wider-ranging social responsibility. Cordell is a honest cop whose honesty makes him the target of dishonest cops. He is framed by them and sent to prison. This is virtually a death sentence, of course, as the prisoners turn on him and stab him in the showers. But is he really dead? Suddenly there's a rogue cop on the loose, murdering those the police are sworn to protect; hence, Cordell's vengeance extends to the very concept of law-and-order itself. New York is gripped by panic. Cops die, as well the public, as Cordell's sights are set on the upper echelons of the force. In the first movie, we are merely uncertain whether or not Cordell is alive -- maybe he was not really dead when declared such by the prison mortician. By *Maniac Cop 2*, however, the ambiguity is gone. Cordell is seen as a dead man, out for revenge. Bullets do not stop him and his face becomes more and more death-like. There is much effective satire in the series, as well as some excellent action sequences. The films' offbeat qualities may perhaps be traced to the influence of Larry Cohen (writer/producer), whose own horror films are so effectively bizarre.

Vengeance is also the theme of films such as Armand Mastroianni's *The Supernaturals* (1986) in which the corpses of Confederate soldiers rise up against a modern US army troop out on manoeuvres. Scenes of besieging zombies, this time on the site of an old battlefield, are reminiscent of *Night of the Living Dead*. The zombies lumbering about in the dark in the execrable *Curse of the Screaming Dead* were also dead Confederate soldiers, out for revenge against those who 'stole' their

memorabilia -- though Mastroianni's film is a great improvement, of course, even if no masterpiece.

Shock Waves (1977) concerns the members of an elite Nazi Death Corps, "not dead, not alive, but somewhere in between" -- who rise from their watery grave to kill the SS commander responsible for sending them to the bottom of the sea, as well as a group of tourists who have wandered by at the wrong moment. Don't you hate it when that happens? There are several effective scenes, especially those depicting the first awakening of the zombie corps -- the scuttled battleship appearing through fog and darkness, the dead rising from various bodies of water, faces wrinkled and grey, adorned in dark glasses and SS uniforms. There are some silly plot elements, too, and for a time the film seems to wander indecisively (like its zombies), but over all it is an enjoyable movie, quirky and atmospheric in a B-grade manner.

Shock Waves is one of several Nazi zombie movies, which form a small, independent thread within the sub-genre; others include *The Frozen Dead* (1967), *Lake of the Living Dead* (1980) and *The Treasure of the Living Dead* (1982). Such Nazi zombies carry a similar message to other zombie films where an evil group or individual from the past returns to create havoc in the present, such as those that feature Ossorio's living dead Knights Templar. The zombies are an effective metaphor for Shakespeare's "evil that men do" continuing to torment the living. Even more so, they are a reminder of the consequences of evil, which can afflict generations to follow -- a symbol, then, for psychological trauma.

Not to be left out, Australia has produced its own zombie revenge movie -- *Zombie Brigade* (1987). Aboriginal motifs, Romeroesque bloodlust and European guilt combine in a typical outback township setting, as the war-dead rise in response to developmental violation of the land. Here the zombies are restless Vietnam-war dead (ghoulish, pale-faced, lumbering) and salvation comes when the protagonists evoke the aid of a much less unpleasant class of war-dead, that is, diggers from the Second World War. Good dead (from a good war?) versus bad dead (from a bad war?). Interesting political agenda there, eh?

Toxic Zombies (1980), too, has a revenge motif of sorts -- these zombies are created when a secretive government agency uses an experimental herbicide on a marijuana plantation, and those trying to harvest the illegal crop. The resulting zombie-like creatures take a general revenge -- fairly badly handled -- on anyone in the vicinity. In William Wesley's excellent *Scarecrows* (1988), however, the dead take on the appearance of scarecrows, keeping a modern band of scavengers away from their resting place. The film is dark and vicious, generating considerable suspense despite the unappealing nature of many of the characters. A memorable moment occurs when one of the thieves shambles back into the house in which the whole group has taken refuge, attacks his 'friends' and is disembowelled. We then learn that he is not only dead but has been stuffed with straw.

Interestingly, Wesley returned to undead territory in 2001, with the straight-to-video release *Route 666*. Starring Lou Diamond Phillips as an FBI agent, the film's scenario presents us with a blocked-off section of Route 66, where in the past the members of a chain-gang were brutally murdered and which is now haunted by their murderous corpses. Restricted to walking the bitumen of the road itself (more-or-less), the grey-skinned, scaly chain-gang use their picks and jackhammers to turn various not-so-innocent victims into bloody mush. The film is nowhere near as effective as *Scarecrows*, lacking that film's intensity and focus. Moreover, various over-utilised techniques (such as a jerky, slow-motion cinematography used for violent and undead scenes) tend to keep the viewer at a distance, while the script's logic occasionally falters.

Dawn of the Mummy (1981) has the distinction of being the only 'gorefest' Mummy movie ever produced. It also manages to combine the classic Mummy plot (a mummy, whose tomb is violated, takes revenge on those responsible) with the zombie tradition (as suggested by the title's similarity to that of Romero's second Living Dead film). Murderous (and very statuesque) pharaoh, Safiraman, rises from his tomb, along with the corpses of his retinue, who emerge zombie-like from the sands and proceed to stumble about killing archaeologists, a film crew involved in filming a

fashion layout, and the locals. The Mummy rarely participates in the bloodletting, decapitation and flesheating, but simply orchestrates the slaughter. Though not a classic, *Dawn of the Mummy* is fun, with some telling images of the Mummy appearing in the streets of a nearby village and of his zombie followers going about their bloody business, not to mention some fairly excessive gore.

Similarly, *The Mummy Returns* (2001), sequel to *The Mummy* (1999), has a bunch of zombies attendant upon the cursed Imhotep chasing the heroes of the piece, who are trying to escape on a London bus! This film goes for adventure rather than gore, but what it lacks in bloodiness it makes up for in zombie hybrids, namely Anubis-like zombie dog warriors and a horde of pigmy zombies. You can never have enough, can you?

John Carpenter's classic *The Fog* (1979) has the crew of a scuttled ship return shrouded in fog to seek vengeance on the town that was responsible for their death, 100 years before. The film is atmospheric and often chilling, displaying the superb craftsmanship that is characteristic of the best of Carpenter's work. Its melding of ghost story, sea-dog tale and zombie movie make it particularly appealing. A combination of genres also occurs in two less-successful films from 1988, both of which use Western imagery to variable effect. *Ghost Town* depicts a contemporary sheriff caught up in conflict with a 19th century gunslinger. In *Ghostriders*, a gang of outlaws returns to avenge themselves of the descendants of those who hanged them. They might be ghosts, but they have an extremely physical presence.

Also dating from 1988, Mark Goldblatt's *Dead Heat* is about living dead-style revenge, in a rather unusual sense. A cop is killed but brought back to life by a re-vitalisation machine developed for nefarious purposes by his killers. Now he wants to get the ones who killed him. The film is a zombie remake of the old *D.O.A.* (1949), in which Edmond O'Brien plays a man who has been poisoned and is slowly, incurably dying. In *Dead Heat*, a time limit is imposed by the dead cop's bodily deterioration -- he must find his killers before he goes completely to pieces. Often played for laughs (which only sometimes work), the film has some remarkable zombie sequences --

such as the scene where the contents of a Chinese butcher shop are brought back to life ... plucked chooks, sides of beef, you name it.

Sometimes it seems that just being alive makes you a target for the dead. Indeed, perhaps in the end everything dead wants its revenge against the living -- presenting us with corpses out for revenge against those who still have what they themselves have lost. Ultimate responsibility is not simply moral, but existential. This seems to be a common undercurrent of zombie films.

It is explicit in both the title and the story of *The Dead Hate the Living* (1999). This one involves a bunch of young filmmakers who have broken into an abandoned hospital in order to film their (you guessed it!) zombie opus. What they don't realise is that the hospital has been the site of experiments perpetrated by a Rob Zombie (lead singer and songwriter of the hard rock band *White Zombie*) look-alike, who is driven by bitterness and despairing loss. He has opened a portal to a deathly netherworld, and when the filmmakers inadvertently activate it, they find themselves trapped in a sort of transdimensional space, being mauled by the denizens of their own film scenario. These zombies are consciously malicious. They hate the living and intend to destroy life, thus putting an end to all possibility of loss and sorrow.

The Dead Hate the Living is an enjoyable romp, with generally good acting and excellent make-up effects. It's a film made by horror fans for horror fans, full of references to famous zombie-film personnel and reveling in its own heritage. A car bears the bumper sticker "Fulci Lives". At one point the obsessive director reassures his dubious male lead with the words "Stick with me and I'll make you the next David Warbeck". The lead looks pleased, then frowns. "Who's David Warbeck?" he says.

That such references litter the film's dialogue is no accident. Fulci and his zombies permeate events and influence the imagery throughout. Indeed, the ending, which propels the director and his girlfriend through the portal into a barren landscape of death, is straight from Fulci's *The Beyond*.

In a reversion to the older form of targeted revenge, however, Alex Proyas' otherwise very '90s approach to the return of the dead, *The Crow* (1994), gives us a

zombie consumed by an utterly righteous indignation against specific individuals -- specifically, that is, those individuals who killed him and his fiancée. Brandon Lee, who died tragically during the filming of *The Crow*, plays the supernatural protagonist, rock musician Eric Draven. (In a grim irony, Lee, whose character is shot umpteen times during the film, was killed by a real bullet fired from a prop gun, and the movie completed using computer images, thus giving the usual 'return from the dead' scenario a particular poignancy.) Based on a cult horror comic by James O'Barr, the film was scripted by splatterpunk writers David J. Schow and John Shirley, and this ancestry shows in its grimness, its morality and its unrelenting violence.

The Crow is a visually stunning movie, darkly gothic and moody, beautifully photographed, expensive and well acted. This is just as well, as the plotline is fairly basic, straight-down-the-line, vigilante-from-the-netherworld stuff -- wronged young corpse rises from the grave and kills off the bad guys one by one, working his way toward final confrontation with the leader of the pack. There is little suspense. Except for a moment of vulnerability at the end, when the villain disables the crow that is Draven's link with life, you are never in doubt that the already dead hero is invincible nor that he will get his victim, violently and without the interference of ethical considerations. Nor can we care for the villains, because they are purely, almost inhumanly nasty and/or evil. So the film's pleasures are simply cinematographic, though there is a primitive pleasure to be gained from the revenge motif itself, as countless westerns have proven in the past (Clint Eastwood's classic *High Plains Drifter* is a good example, as the vengeful hero in that is arguably dead, too). There were, of course, several *Crow* sequels.

Not really revenge, but certainly ongoing opposition, is the theme of the Japanese zombie film, *Versus* (2000) -- a film which may stand as representative of a new generation of zombie films. Though referring back through the whole gamut of traditional Western zombie films (including Romero), it is imbued by a modern, re-vitalised Japanese sensibility. Gory, violent and stylised -- a sort of *Night of the Living Dead* meets *Lone Wolf* meets *Pulp Fiction* -- it spins a tale of criminals,

supernatural undead and ancient sorcery. The living dead of *Versus* are dismembered by both guns and samurai swords -- pawns in an ancient struggle between two forces of 'good' and 'evil'. In the end, however, the human identity of the two opposing forces is in no way clear. It is the opposition that matters -- hence the title. In this context, life and death are merely weapons to be wielded in an eternal, shifting struggle.

6. Nearly Dead

When is a zombie not a zombie?

There are a number of films and major film cycles in which characters indulge in zombie-like behaviour -- particularly of the *Night of the Living Dead* sort -- but are not really zombies as such. Except in films like the terrible *Zombie Island Massacre* (1984), where the zombies aren't zombies at all, but drug smugglers pretending to be zombies in order to scare off unwanted investigation, most generally these nearly-dead are possessed or diseased; their rationality and usually their wills have been suppressed, and, since they are inevitably going to die, they can be taken as dead. They are zombie-like on a metaphorical level, if not on a literal one.

Romero himself, in the aftermath of *Night* and perhaps in preparation for *Dawn*, made a film in 1976 under the title *The Crazies*. It has a scientific underpinning -- the problem is a virulent disease created by government researchers and accidentally let loose upon a small community -- but the effect is very similar to the zombie plague of *Night*. Victims go crazy, lose their minds and find themselves consumed by an irresistible bloodlust. Moreover, the disease is spread by their attacks and as the film progresses, attempts to contain the infection are put under greater and greater strain. In the end, once again, America is in for trouble on an apocalyptic scale.

In many ways *The Crazies* sees Romero experimenting with themes and situations that will be developed further in his subsequent living dead movies -- particularly as much of it has to do with the response of the military. Yet the film should not be dismissed so lightly. *The Crazies* works in its own right -- being well

directed, lucid and exciting for most of its length -- and the overriding ironies are ones that work effectively in this scenario. The major theme involves the concept of craziness itself. As the military, and indeed the non-infected public, respond to the plague, the line between sanity and madness becomes increasingly blurred. In the end, it is not at all clear who the real crazies are, or at least whether there is any real distinction to be made between the infected crazies and the rest of humanity. Again, as in *Night*, the chief protagonist dies at the hands of the 'sane' people, but this time his death represents a death sentence imposed on mankind as a whole.

Also the products of pseudo-science are the creatures of the New Zealand film *Death Warmed Up* (1984). Here the main protagonist is 'programmed' by a mad doctor to kill his parents, his father being a threat to the continued researches of the villain. Years later, released from psychiatric prison, he finds that the mad doctor has continued his work and now runs a hospital that specialises (covertly) in the production of vicious, unliving mutants. The hero goes to the doctor's island with a couple of friends and the result is vengeful, and often effective, mayhem. The film seems torn between comic exaggeration and real dramatic intent, so the result is not as satisfying as it might have been, though the action sequences are exciting and much of the visualisation nicely eccentric.

Another close cousin of the zombie sub-genre is the cannibal sub-sub-genre, a speciality of several Italian directors in particular. Entries such as *Cannibal ferox* (aka *Make Them Die Slowly*, Umberto Lenzi, 1981), *I Cannibali* (aka *Cannibals*, Franco Prosperi, 1979) and *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980) readily spring to mind. *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1982) probably brings the sub-genre closest to the zombie film, though all of them gained their impetus from the wave of living dead movies that followed on the heels of *Dawn of the Dead*. In *Cannibal Apocalypse* (also known as *Invasion of the Flesh Hunters*), US war vets returning from Vietnam carry a virulent disease that changes them, and anyone they bite, into cannibals. This film, like the others mentioned, is awash with gore and blood and predicated on an attitude to horror that defines it as physical revulsion.

C.H.U.D. (1984) chronicles what happens when unscrupulous officials illegally dump radioactive waste into the sewers of New York. The letters of the title stand for "Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers" (among other things); the ravenous creatures that are spawned by the radioactivity are what has become of derelicts who normally haunt the streets and sleep in the spaces beneath them. Consciously underlying the film is a satire on middle-class attitudes to the problem of the homeless in our big cities, and as well as pursuing its political/ecological agenda, it creates an effectively paranoid image of the consequences of our neglect rising up against us.

Sometimes the zombie-simulating plague comes from outer space. In *Night of the Comet* (1984), a rare astral passing, *Day of the Triffids* fashion, completely reduces onlookers to orange dust, but converts those who were only partially exposed into violent zombies. Survivors -- two Valley Girls -- go shopping in a big way. This is an entertaining and quirky film that is full of a nicely ironic good humour. And do I detect a reference to *Dawn of the Dead*, when a radio announces in the background: "Good luck finding a parking space within hitchhiking distance of a mall -- you know how jammed they can get"?

Also originating from outer space is the menace of *The Night of the Creeps* (1986), directed by Fred Dekker, otherwise known for the humorous monster-movie homage *The Monster Squad* as well as *Robocop 3*. *The Night of the Creeps*, like both these films, pays its respects to horror-fantasy traditions -- in this case in more than just plot: its characters bear the names of famous horror directors. Zombification takes place when victims are infested by alien slug-like creatures, die and then keep walking around, trying to infest others. My favourite line comes when Tom Atkins, as a cop investigating first the suspicious disappearance of a corpse, then a murder, says to girls gathered around in their dorm waiting to go off to the dance: "The good news is, your dates are here ... The bad news is, they're dead!"

Tobe Hooper's much maligned *Lifeforce* (1985) has some visiting, energy-draining aliens causing those they have killed to return to life filled with a desire to

inflict similar injury on other humans. The somewhat eccentric film (which boasts, among other things, a naked space vampire in the person of Mathilda May) is pure B-grade mayhem, done stylishly and with considerable exuberance. The apocalyptic climax, depicting London overrun by zombies intent on sending the life-energy of the populace to the alien mother ship and its load of comatose aliens, is an effective piece of gaudy and oddball SF histrionics. Though it is hardly an accurate visualisation of its source (Colin Wilson's *The Space Vampires*), I can never understand why its critics haven't managed to enjoy it for what it is.

Though the English translation of Mario Bava's SF thriller, *Terror nello Spazio* (1965) -- which inspired several prominent images and plot elements of Ridley Scott's *Alien* -- is given as *Planet of the Vampires*, the film no more contains traditional vampires than does *Lifeforce*. The disembodied entities in Bava's film take over human visitors in an attempt to escape from the planet, and some of these visitors are distinctly dead at the time. A visually beautiful and stylised film, *Planet of the Vampires* creates some wonderful images, including a scene in which dead crew members, draped in polythene, rise from their futuristic tombs.

Then there's the most famous of the re-animated dead. Though in their original form, the innumerable *Frankenstein* films are not living dead movies -- the monster being a new creation, albeit made up of dead bodies -- there is some overlap at times. A good example is Wes Craven's *Deadly Friend* (1986). In this teen thriller, a young electronic genius restores his dead sweetheart to life through a process similar to that involved in his previous creation of a robotic playmate. The film makes its strongest reference to the Frankenstein story, but the revitalised girl (played by Kristy Swanson) acts like a zombie -- stumbling around stiffly and committing acts of violence. It is all fairly sanitised and only marginally successful, but reasonably entertaining nevertheless.

Less sanitised as a version of *Frankenstein* are the Frankenstein films of British horror production house, Hammer. The first, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), almost single-handedly ensured Hammer's future and signalled the beginning of the

modern horror film. This is also the only one of the series that comes close to Mary Shelley's original novel. What director Terence Fisher did, however, with the aid of the wonderful Peter Cushing, was transform Doctor Frankenstein from an essentially well-meaning, if misguided, scientist, into a self-serving, murderous and increasingly monstrous rationalist. Fisher's films form a sequence in their own right (only two of the Hammer Frankenstein films -- *The Evil of Frankenstein*, 1964, and *The Horror of Frankenstein*, 1970 -- were not directed by Fisher, and the latter was the only one that did not star Cushing). Although after the first one, they are no longer Shelley's *Frankenstein*, they represent a complex body of work *inspired by* the original novel: *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1966), *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1969) and *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (1973). In them, there is no one monster -- the films trace Frankenstein's ongoing experiments into re-animation and brain transplantation. Hence, at times, the 'monster' is less a created thing than a re-animated corpse -- and hence can represent a whole class of Frankenstein films in which re-animation of the dead, rather than the creation of life, lies at the heart of the theme. It is a theme which reaches its peak in Stuart Gordon's brilliant zombie opus *Re-Animator* (1985). Again, what we have here are scientifically created zombies.

(There is a class of scientifically revived dead that I haven't mentioned: cyborgs, or human-robot hybrids. The best of the films dealing with this theme is, perhaps, *RoboCop* (1987), directed by Paul Verhoeven -- a wonderful comic-book visualisation full of great energy and excellent SFX. A dedicated cop, Murphy (Peter Weller), is killed savagely on duty, but the company that has recently 'bought' the Detroit police force has been looking for just such an opportunity and scavenges what's left of him in order to create the ultimate law-enforcement aid, the robotic RoboCop. At first RoboCop acts purely according to its programming, but the film spends much of its time exploring the gradual return of Murphy's humanity -- his memories, his need for revenge, his ethics and then his self-determination. The film is SF rather than horror, but the correspondences between this and its supernatural

brethren are fairly clear. Nevertheless, the zombie film as a sub-genre is horror in its approach, despite occasional SF trappings, and so, like the *Mummy* film, I leave this sub-genre otherwise unexplored in this context.)

In Lambert Bava's *Demons* (1986), the zombie plague has a more typical supernatural origin. Patrons at a late-night horror film preview find that demonic images on the screen are being replicated in reality as victims are turned into slaving maniacs, who then infect others. The source of the infection is demonic possession, hence the scene where a horned demon rises bloodily from the torso of its host. But the appearance and the apocalyptic spread of the plague are clearly inspired by Romero, even though *Demons* has a quality and a look that is all its own. Lambert (who is Mario Bava's son) attempted to reprise this look in *Demons 2* (1990) -- it is more of the same, though less intensely focused. *Demoni 3*, directed by Umberto Lenzi in 1991, makes the demons explicitly zombie-like, more so even than the originals.

Sometimes it is the devil himself who creates the living dead. *Fear No Evil* (1981) is a visually effective and unusual 'Omen'-type film, in which Satan is born of a human woman and grows toward the inheritance of full power, only to be challenged by two archangels also manifest in human form. The climax, which takes place during a religious pageant, sees the dead rise and chase bystanders to their death. The film was directed by Frank LaLoggia, who subsequently made the excellent ghost thriller, *The Lady in White* (1988).

Pet Sematary (1989), based on the novel by Stephen King, also features demonic revivification of the dead. Like the novel, the movie explores grief, or more pointedly the inability of the main characters to cope with the death of loved ones. The cat Church, buried in the rocky soil beyond the more innocent 'Pet Sematary' used by local kids to inter their dead animals, returns home apparently alive again. Dr Louis Creed buries his son there too, after the boy is killed by a truck; neither Louis nor his wife Rachel, in their different ways, are effectively able to deal with grief. But the soil of the burial ground is 'sour', possessed of an ancient Indian spirit which is

guiding Louis toward his own destruction. When the son, returned from the grave, kills Rachel, Louis is forced to destroy him, but once again visits the Indian burial ground, this time with his wife's body. She too returns, the spirit that has entered her stronger than ever. As wise old neighbour Jud says: "Sometimes dead is better".

Pet Semetary clearly articulates an aspect of death that is important in all zombie films -- the role of acceptance. Perhaps it is when death is not accepted (either through grief or the desire for vengeance) that the dead are most likely to walk again - or, taken metaphorically, the events of the past will sour life in the present. *Pet Semetary* is not a film that was appreciated by all commentators; but it does present some painful truths effectively and in its seriousness and refusal to follow commercial lines it comes over as a work of some integrity. In my opinion it has been underrated.

Pet Semetary's director, Mary Lambert, recently explored the theme further (or maybe just again) in a sequel, *Pet Semetary Two*. The events of the first film have entered into Castle Rock's folklore, though few lessons have been learnt. *Two* reprises the dead-pet raising of its predecessor, this time using a dog; but very soon the local sheriff, who was slightly crazy when alive, is buried in the cursed ground and returns as a violent, sardonic zombie (zealously and amusingly played by Clancy Brown). Believing that it is merely the man's nature when alive that governs his less-than-desirable behaviour now that he is one of the living dead, the film's protagonist (*Terminator 2's* Edward Furlong) tries the same thing on his dead mother. The result is not nice.

The sequel is much bloodier and nastier than the first film, especially in its climax -- but it is not as serious either. The theme of acceptance, though present, has become less important than the surface action. Nevertheless, it is effective, in a limited fashion, and quite watchable, especially for zombie aficionados.

Part Three: Look Who's Laughing Now

Perhaps because of the physical excesses of the seventies and eighties, many recent living dead films play for comedy. Partly this is the classic *fin de siècle* syndrome of mocking a style that's gone as far as it can go, but I think there are other forces at work as well, some of them basic to understanding why the excesses have proven so popular. That the zombie movie hasn't, in fact, gone as far as it can go seems to be indicated by its continuing ability to produce such wildly inventive films as Peter Jackson's *Braindead* and even the more conventionally bizarre *Death Becomes Her*. Moreover, humour has been present almost from the beginning.

7. The Inhuman Comedy

Perhaps the epitome of the pseudo-zombie cum possession film (as discussed previously) is Sam Raimi's wonderful *Evil Dead* series. The first in this trilogy indulged in a strain of black gore-comedy which was inherent in much that preceded it, but which had rarely, if ever, been so wantonly elaborated. Clearly gaining inspiration from the energy of Romero's living dead films, rather than from the mythos of them, *Evil Dead* (1982) places a limited cast in an isolated cabin, releases ancient demons onto them, then splatters blood from wall-to-wall as each corpse is killed and possessed. In retrospect, this first film is more grimly horrific than those that followed, the humour adding to the overall effect of uncontrollable horror. Bruce Campbell's performance is desperate and edgy and the sheer invention of Raimi's technique, albeit low-budgeted, is astonishingly effective in evoking a sense of ancient and inhuman threat, and in painting that threat with blood and gore.

Evil Dead 2, which appeared in 1987, is actually a remake of the first film, not a sequel. Bruce Campbell's character Ash and his girlfriend arrive at the cabin, without reference to 'previous' events, and the whole thing soon starts up again. This time Raimi has a big budget and the display of energetic special effects he presents us with is exhilarating in its intensity. *Evil Dead 2* is much funnier than the first film and a real *tour de force*; the fact that it is also entertaining and involving is a tribute to his

skill and imagination. It ends with Ash transported to the past, where the evil began, called upon to act as the legendary hero referred to in the Necronomicon. Like the first, this sequel has minimum plot, but maximum style, energy and technique.

Army of Darkness: Evil Dead 3 (1992), a genuine sequel, starts where 2 ended (though with a revisionist tendency), and propels Ash into a struggle against, as the title suggests, an army of animated corpses. These range from the grotesquely decayed to the skeletal and represent an awesome SFX endeavour. But the film is much less horrific than either of the previous films. Horror elements are still there, but generally the terror has been replaced by a sense of fantastic adventure. Humour abounds, as Raimi indulges his avowed passion for the Three Stooges (as, for example, in the scene where the skeletal arms of the awakening dead engage Ash in an eye-poking, face-twisting, slapstick routine). We are far away from Romero's original inspiration here, however good the movie may be in its own right. Despite a plot element which produces Ash's split-off dark side as the main bad guy, the dead in *Army* have become merely fantastical rather than grim and are less a vision of humanity at war with itself than fantasy creatures inhabiting an exotic otherworld.

Interestingly, in 1985 Sam Raimi took a young student filmmaker under his wing and encouraged him (with both words and money) to make a feature. The filmmaker was 18-year-old J.R. Bookwalter and the film he ended up making was *The Dead Next Door* (1989).

On a conceptual edge between serious and comic horror similar to that occupied by the first *Evil Dead* film -- though nowhere near as inventive or scary, of course -- is *The Boneyard* (1990). Moreover, this is one of the few zombie films to actually reflect the difference between a zombie and a ghoul (as discussed in the first part of this series), in that some of its creatures are demonic and do actually feed on corpses (ghouls) and some are re-animated corpses (zombies). The idea is subsumed by a more immediate imperative -- getting the zombies to attack the living protagonists -- but it's there at least in the first instance. The plot puts two policemen investigating a murder/child abuse case, a psychic, attendant staff and a revived

suicide victim in a huge soon-to-be-closed-down mortuary along with three ghouls and (eventually) several demonically re-animated corpses. The narrow plot/character range and sense of claustrophobia work well, as they have elsewhere, and some of the carryings-on are bizarrely funny -- though essentially the film plays for suspense rather than laughs (and only occasionally succeeds with either). A big problem is the dodgy, if interesting, make-up FX and the puppet-like nature of the creatures -- too stiff and bug-eyed to be convincing, yet appealing in a way. Phyllis Diller as Poopinplatz, a mortuary overseer, delivers a strung-out version of her standard persona, but it is her poodle, Floofsoms, who steals the show. The dog eats some of the slime left over from the disintegration of a ghoul, gets possessed by the evil spirit that causes the dead to rise, and turns into a gigantic, fluffy, well-groomed poodle-monster, with snarling face and outstretched, zombie-like paws. When the zombie-dog-monster first breaks through the door one of the characters laughs; I can't help thinking that her "you've got to be kidding" gesture was probably, in fact, genuine. Certainly it's a feeling shared by the viewer.

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Living dead humour has produced a range of films from minor spoofs to major horror works such as Raimi's. Tending more to the former are the 'teenage' zombie films: *Teenage Zombies* (1957), *Hard Rock Zombies* (1985), *I Was a Teenage Zombie* (1986) and *Zombie High* (1987). Some of these take themselves more seriously than others, even if the viewer finds it hard to do likewise; *Zombie High*, for example, evokes *The Stepford Wives* (1975) in its depiction of an exclusive, smilingly pleasant school environment that hides a subtle evil -- students who would otherwise bring disgrace to the college are turned into mindless zombies with a will to succeed, in the meantime providing the ageing governors the brain fluid they need to extend their own life beyond its allotted span.

Having satiric intent but lacking much credit even as a spoof is *Hard Rock Zombies*, a weird, but largely ineffectual, dig at small-town bigotry, in which the heroes -- the members of a touring rock band -- are murdered. They are then

resurrected by a young female fan who plays a song based on a voodoo resurrection chant over their grave. The hard rock zombies turn their killers -- Adolf Hitler-in-hiding and some of his henchmen -- into cannibalistic zombies, who spread the effect over half the town. Needless to say, the band performs a final concert and it's a hit with a visiting big-time producer, though unfortunately he gets turned into a zombie too.

Other 'teenage' films variously address specific issues affecting adolescence, such as drugs (as in *I Was a Teenage Zombie*, where the protagonist returns from the dead to wreak vengeance on a drug-pusher who has also been turned into a zombie through the agency of a nuclear spill), but also provide a sort of metaphor for the awkwardness and existential fears of youth. *My Boyfriend's Back* (1993), for example, plays the teenage-romance angst bit and gains most of its humour from the sheer nonchalance of the presentation: that is, when the young hero is killed but returns as a zombie so that he can go to the prom with the girl of his passions, everyone accepts this as a matter of course. His girlfriend, committed to him now because of her 'deathbed' promise to go to the prom with him, is less than enthusiastic, especially as all her friends give her a hard time about it ("Aren't you going out with that dead guy?"). Anyway, how much enthusiasm can you have for a lover whose ear comes off in your mouth when you try to nibble it?

Another film, *Night Life* (1989) is also about teenage zombies -- and is billed as a black comedy, though actually it is a surprisingly effective horror thriller, albeit one with a sense of humour. In it, a group of dead upper crust hoodlums rise from death to harass a young mortuary attendant -- snobbish dead against working-class battler. There are some gruesome bits (for example, the mortician getting blown up -- in both senses -- with an airhose), some effective zombie sequences, an extended chase scene at the climax, and acting and atmosphere that are better than might be expected. The film is little known and undoubtedly minor, but is certainly worth the effort.

Also surprisingly funny is the no-budget 1985 independent film, *Dark Power*. Here a bunch of university students, seeking cheap accommodation, take up residence

in the house of a recently deceased Indian shaman, little realising that until his death, the Indian was keeping four ancient Toltec sorcerers at bay. This foursome, acting under a belief that by burying themselves alive they could return in the future to feast upon the living, successfully arise from their graves to create mayhem, until defeated by the local sheriff (played by a western and rodeo star called Lash LaRue), an expert with the whip. The film is cheap, some of the characterisation annoying, the film stock grainy and the plot conventional, but somehow the cast (especially the Toltec zombies) manage to bring a nice sense of humour to proceedings. Typical is a scene where one of the Toltecs grabs a scantily dressed young woman and holds her while another Toltec (one with a penchant for flashy juggling) prepares to toss his tomahawk at her. He lets loose, she screams, then frowns -- and looks around to observe that the tomahawk tosser has missed and embedded his axe in the chest of his buddy. The two zombies then have a grunted, inarticulate argument about it.

Indeed, looked at with a slight squint, zombies are funny, farcical creatures, clumsy and socially inept. Elements of zombie farce were present as early as 1945, in *Zombies on Broadway*, for example, in which a pair of promoters seek out zombies in order to put on a Broadway musical. Funny-scary comedies of the *Abbot and Costello Meets ...* type and *Ghost Breakers* (1940) sometimes included a zombie or two, and modern farces such as *Weekend at Bernie's 2* (1993) and *Chopper Chicks in Zombie Town* (1989) carry on the tradition. This latter is in the Troma vein of over-the-top horror exploitation flicks, and is about the Cycle Sluts -- biker gals who arrive in town *Wild One* fashion, only the town is dominated by an evil undertaker who creates zombies to work the mines, in a plot device reminiscent of various films from *White Zombie* and *Plague of the Zombies* to *Dead and Buried*. The Sluts proceed to clean the place out. The film is generally well-made (much more appealing than your average Troma release), and even includes a song or two.

But if a zombie musical is what you're after, *Nudist Colony of the Dead* (1991) -- supposed by the blurb on the video case to be in the tradition of *The Little Shop of Horrors* and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* -- is as classy as its title leads you to expect.

A fanatical group of nudists commit suicide when they are driven from their land by the town's religious zealots. But they emerge from their graves whenever their rest is disturbed by the presence of Christian youths on retreat at the camp built on the site, Camp Cutchaguzzout. Though cheap, often static and poorly paced, filmed on lousy stock, with bad jokes and cheesy acting, it does include some jolly songs, some humorous moments and silly gore. Its amateurish qualities and unsophisticated approach to its own tastelessness are part of the ambience of the thing. At heart, it's fairly innocent, as indicated by the fact that, though it's about nudists, the zombies are modestly covered by rags (apart from a bare breast or two). Old-time horror fan guru, Forrest J. Ackerman, plays the judge who rules that the nudists must leave their land. Even allowing for poor film technique, the movie never exploits its own premise, let alone the traditions of the zombie sub-genre. This particular failing is a common one.

Ed and His Dead Mother (1992), though more professional (it's produced by Sean Cunningham, the creator of the *Friday the 13th* series), also suffers from a limitation of vision. It has its moments, however, and does manage an effective nod or two toward traditional zombie themes -- often in a pleasantly bizarre manner. The story goes like this: a year after the event Ed Chilton still can't come to terms with his mother's death. His obsession attracts the attention of the Happy People Corporation, in the person of their top salesman, who offers to give Ed back his mother -- for a price. Re-animation of the dead is a growth industry apparently, with the Japanese already working on "home re-animation software". Anyway, the price is relatively cheap, despite the appalling condition of Ed's mother's corpse. So Ed coughs up the money and soon his mother is fussing around the house again. But all is not well. Soon the household turns weird, there's blood and gore in abundance (depicted in a too-restrained manner, however) and Ed wants his mom dead again. Basically, the film has some fun with the serious *Pet Semetary* business of foolishly wanting the dead back, and combines it with big-business paranoia. But it cops out overall, never going quite as far as it should, let alone too far -- and going too far is, let's face it, one of the primary characteristics of the zombie genre's best works.

The Video Dead (1987), as well as taking a different slant on zombies, is a satire of both zombie films and the influence of television. The story concerns a rather strange television set, which appears to show only one channel and that channel runs only a zombie movie called "Zombie Blood Massacre". Moreover, even unplugging the set won't stop the movie from playing. The film on the TV shows typical Romeroesque zombies shuffling through a wooded area; suddenly one of them turns to the camera and reaches out. Next thing you know four living dead characters have emerged into the real world, where they proceed to cause havoc, often gruesome. The hero, a teenage boy, sets about trying to stop them and the result is severed limbs, chainsaw massacre and much running about screaming. In general the film's approach is one of farce, though there is a dark and often vicerally nasty undercurrent. Typical is a scene where one of the zombies attacks a woman in her kitchen; she grabs the nearest weapon -- in this case an iron -- and slams it into the zombie's skull. Unfortunately this doesn't stop the creature, which looks puzzled for a moment, kills her, then walks around for the rest of the movie with the iron firmly buried in its head.

The *House* movies -- or at least the first two of them -- take a similarly farcical approach to the dead. *House* is generally more gruesome and more effectively scary than its 'sequel' (which isn't a sequel at all, except in spirit, as it were). Here the dead Vietnam vet out for revenge is a wonderfully comic-book creation, with his skeletal and decaying gauntness used to good effect. In *House 2*, the zombies (the hero's great-great grandfather and the man he'd murdered back in the old west) are similarly comic-book, the great-great grandfather more like a dead version of Jed Clappett than anything else. Again the SFX and make-up are very good -- much better than the movie as a whole -- and the scene where the hero blows away the bad guy's head, bit by bit, is nicely done, spoilt only by the somewhat anticlimactic and unconvincing nature of the following scenes.

Also farcical is *C.H.U.D. II: Bud the Chud* (1989), which has nothing to do with the much more horrific *C.H.U.D.* This non-sequel is something of a show-piece

for actor Gerrit Graham. His depiction of the comic zombie, Bud, is often physically hilarious, at its best adroitly slapstick -- though the movie itself is as flat as a tack. Bud's general appearance, the loose, barely-coordinated stumble of his movement and his cannibalistic tendencies are on a direct line from Romero's more fearsome creations.

More recently Robert Zemeckis, of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and *Back to the Future* fame (not to mention *Forrest Gump* and the excellent ghost thriller *What Lies Beneath*), made a quirkily black-hearted, big-budget excursion into living dead territory with *Death Becomes Her* (1992). This 'basic black comedy' does not appear to be a zombie movie at first, but in fact by midway through the movie both the female leads are dead -- the Meryl Streep character from falling downstairs and breaking her neck and Goldie Hawn's thwarted ex-lover from having a hole blown through her stomach with a rifle. Here, mortality in the form of loss of youth is at issue, so that a formula guaranteed to make you young and keep you that way seems like an attractive proposition. Unfortunately, there are consequences. The formula does not regenerate bodily damage after death, so that though the Streep and Hawn characters live on, their bodies become increasingly tatty. In the end they trip down stairs and are smashed to pieces -- though those pieces still want to know where the car is parked. Here Zemeckis addresses the fear of mortality, laughing skeptically at our desire to "screw the natural law". The film is unusual because it is a big budget Hollywood headliner, but still manages to be quite blackly quirky. Some of the SFX are stunning.

Perhaps the most popular, and successful, comic interpretation of the Romero zombie tradition is *Return of the Living Dead* (1985). Written and directed by Dan O'Bannon, *Return*, even in its title, makes obvious reference to Romero's original classic. Canisters containing bodies reputed to have been part of a 'walking dead' scare sometime in the past (one of the characters even makes direct reference to *Night of the Living Dead*) lie in the bowels of a cadaver supply factory. One is accidentally opened and the corpse inside emerges -- along with a gas which revives, grotesquely,

the partial bodies in the factory. There's even half a dog (cut long-ways) which comes alive. The main characters eventually chop up the squirming remains and burn them in the adjacent crematorium. The smoke of their burning rises into the night sky but then falls back to earth when it rains, dribbling into the graves and setting the wheels of zombie revivification in motion. The next thing you know there's corpses rising everywhere, cannibalistically intent on eating the brains of the living, as only thus is the pain of death eased for them. While much of the film is played for laughs, it works too as a straight-on horror movie, with some scary scenes, effective zombie make-up (in all stages of decay) and plenty of suspense.

A sequel (made in 1988 by Ken Wiederhorn, the director of *Shock Waves*) moved even further toward farce, comic elements of the situation taking precedent over the horror ("I'm not into dead guys," says one young woman to her living dead boyfriend). It is an amusing enough film, though considerably less effective than the first, taking too camp an approach to its subject matter to generate any real suspense or thrills.

A second sequel by Brian Yuzna takes a stab at a 'zombie love story'. The 'lead' zombie (Mindy Clarke) is a beautiful, if nihilistic, young woman, who perpetually disfigures herself punk-fashion, as only such simulated pain allows her to fool herself that she is alive. She has been brought back by her boyfriend using the zombie-gas from the first *Return*, which is being used by the military in an experimental complex full of the restless dead. Needless to say, this is not good for their relationship. It is a thoughtfully and skillfully constructed film, well acted and with good SFX.

As an aside, there's a typically splendid *Simpsons* episode which contains a great zombie sequence as part of that season's Halloween special. In a misguided attempt to bring back their dead cat, Bart and Lisa read the wrong incantation and raise the dead instead. As in *Return of the Living Dead*, these zombies want brains. When they break into the Simpsons' house, Homer yells: "Leave my family! Take me instead!", but, after pausing to consider the offer, the zombies stumble past him still

crying “Brains! Brains!”, much to Homer’s annoyance. Or the great moment where Ned Flanders, now dead, comes toward the Simpsons, only to be shot in the head by Homer. “You shot the zombie Ned Flanders!” yells Bart. “He was a zombie?” Homer says in surprise. As usual, the creators of *The Simpsons* show that they understand the object of their satire well. If you can, it’s certainly worth seeking this one out.

Meanwhile, the director of the first *Return of the Living Dead*, Dan O’Bannon, also made *The Resurrected* (1991), a darkly humorous mad scientist opus based on H.P. Lovecraft’s story “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”. It is in the tradition of *Re-Animator* (1985) and *From Beyond* (Stuart Gordon, 1986), full of grotesque humour and visceral imagery. Its monstrosities -- the distorted remains of dead people revitalised through an obscure evolutionary process -- are many and varied, and like many modern living dead movies, the film relies heavily on complex make-up, and prosthetic and animatronic effects.

By way of illustrating the spread of Romero's influence, I might mention the Hong Kong horror comedy, *Bio-Zombie* (1998). This one involves zombies created by biological contaminants (contained in a soft drink) and despite appallingly translated subtitles (on the Hong Kong DVD I have, anyway), manages to be both funny and grimly exciting. It is set in a Hong Kong shopping mall (very different in ambiance from the mega-Mall of *Dawn of the Dead*) and involves a lot of running around, screaming, fighting off the escalating hordes of undead, blood and flesh-eating. Its male heroes are dodgy VCD sellers, which seems sort of appropriate. The fact that the film was inspired by *Dawn* is fairly obvious, even given the cultural variations involved.

Though low-budget, *Blood Diner* (1987) manages to be both amusing and bloodily inventive. Made as a follow-up to H.G. Lewis’ influential *Blood Feast*, *Blood Diner* is actually much gorier and much funnier than its more infamous inspiration, even though (or perhaps because) it replicates many of the earlier film’s ideas. A pair of brothers, worshippers of the goddess of blood and lust, Sheetar, open a diner as a front for their bloody quest to incarnate their goddess in the flesh. Led by

a homicidal relative -- a disembodied brain in a jar, sporting a pair of eyes on stalks and an impatient turn of phrase -- the Brothers butcher young ladies (including a squadron of naked aerobic dancers) in order to prepare a special feast. At the climax, the body they've patched together for Sheetar comes alive, while various members of the crowd eat the soup and turn into zombies. It's excessive, often funny, and delightfully messy.

Also messy, but less funny, is *Redneck Zombies* (1987), a British-made low budget, filmed-on-video comedy about a bunch of hillbillies who are turned into zombies through the agency of a batch of moonshine contaminated by toxic waste. Often quite humorous, it suffers from a typical failure to keep things moving -- especially when acting, effects and script leave a little to be desired. Its exuberance is winning though; it's just a pity that once again the film promises much more than it delivers, as is too often the way with low-budget gore comedies.

A more-interesting variant on the idea of the restless dead -- and coincidentally an excellent film -- is Michele Soavi's *Dellamorte Dellamore* (1994), otherwise known as *Cemetery Man*. This Italian film, which takes the unusual step of joining a Romero-esque plot scenario with arthouse sensibilities, concerns a cemetery attendant in a small country town whose job involves re-killing the dead when they emerge from their graves as zombies. Rupert Everett's cemetery man is torn between the death and love of the title, until the two states merge into a surreal drive to escape both the violence and the township. The film is funny and gorily violent, constructed with a visual lyricism that is quite hypnotic.

Over the 1990s, independent filmmaker Todd Sheet has been rather prolific in unleashing gore-drenched zombie humour on the world. His two *Zombie Rampage* and three *Zombie Bloodbath* films (the sequels being subtitled *Rage of the Undead* and *Zombie Armageddon* respectively) are funny, yucky and excessive, including over 700 zombies, all in party mode! What can I say?

To date, however, two of the goriest and most successful post-Romero/Fulci zombie films are also two of the most audaciously funny horror movies ever made,

Re-Animator (1985) and *Braindead* (1992). *Re-Animator*, directed by Stuart Gordon, is a fabulous Grand Guignol gorefest based on a story by H.P. Lovecraft, though offering little of Lovecraft's peculiar atmosphere. It chronicles the experiments of medical student Herbert West (Jeffrey Combs) into the re-animation of dead tissue. Complications of love in the life of West's room-mate and accomplice, and jealousy on the part of West's superiors, result in a chaos of revivification, as dead people begin a blood-splattered dance of death through the corridors of the morgue. A favourite scene is the one where West's decapitated enemy, Dr Hill -- holding his head in his outstretched hands -- approaches the naked heroine with lascivious intent, giving new meaning to the phrase 'a head job'. The film is outrageous and audacious and very well done. Its humour, never patronising nor self-mocking, enhances the horror and makes it an unique experience. A sequel (1990), directed by *Re-Animator* producer Brian Yuzna, takes the premise even further, filling the movie with 'doodles in flesh' which West has pieced together in idle moments and re-animated using his magic green substance. This movie, however, owes more to Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* than to Romero, with a dose of *Freaks* thrown in.

No one guessed, given the levels of bloodshed that films like this and those of Romero, Fulci and Gordon had brought to the screen, that anyone could ever take the gore factor much further. Then in 1992 New Zealand director Peter Jackson (known for his outrageously funny alien-invasion film *Bad Taste* -- which also contains zombies -- and the puppet extravaganza *Meet the Feebles*, not to mention his 2001 big-time success with *Lord of the Rings*) released a film he had been struggling to finance for many years. It was going to be 'the ultimate zombie movie' and in the event proved to be just that, at least from some perspectives. *Braindead* (retitled *Dead Alive*, and savagely cut for US distribution) is an unbelievably exuberant flight of zombie fantasy that is so outrageously gory that it makes what preceded it seem rather restrained. The story, set in New Zealand in the 1950s, concerns a monkey-rat, brought into the local zoo, which is infected by a nasty disease that causes death and zombification in those it bites. In fact it bites the somewhat repressed hero's mother,

who then dies -- but not quite. Soon her corpse becomes rather violent, while going to pieces physically, and the hero is forced to lock her up in the cellar. Others follow. Then, about halfway through the film, the zombies are loosed into a huge crowd of people whom the hero's uncle has invited to the house for a party -- and it's all on for young and old. Soon only the hero and his newly acquired girlfriend are still alive, and staying that way becomes a distinct problem. In the end, the hero deals with the zombies using a lawnmower.

The last half hour of the film is an absolute bloodbath and what happens to the zombies takes the concept of zombified flesh to an extreme. All the bits remain alive: the top half of a head which has been sliced off by a spade (in a reference to Romero's *Day of the Dead*) spends the rest of the movie getting kicked around the polished and increasingly bloody floor, blinking wistfully at the goings-on; one character's torso is eaten away, but the rest of the body, connected to the head by its spinal column, still waddles around the room; another zombie, cut in half, spills its guts onto the floor, and those guts then proceed to take on a homicidal life of their own. You get the idea. It's extreme -- but astonishingly well done and hilariously funny too, and Jackson showed considerable bravery in determinedly making a film that was doomed to receive only minor theatrical release, despite a reasonable budget. *Braindead* won several film awards in Europe and received rave reviews everywhere, but Hoyts in Sydney choose to screen it during the day, largely unheralded, for only a week, afterwards relegating it to a short run of midnight showings. When I rang up to find out about it, the person on the desk commented in explanation that the film was excessive and implied that only very sick people would want to see it. The Valhalla (a small 'art' cinema in Glebe) ran the film at a 9 p.m. session for a few weeks. Presumably most people (sick or otherwise) had to wait for the video release.

Braindead is an excellent horror movie, though it isn't in fact very horrifying. Gross, yes, yucky, yes -- but scary? No, not really. This being the case, what exactly does it do? Like many modern horror films, made in an age when advances to SFX technology mean that almost anything can be convincingly recreated on the screen,

Braindead is full of the most outrageous images, and is, as the Hoyts receptionist pointed out, quite gorily excessive. If the purpose of the horror film is to horrify (in the sense of scaring the viewer), then *Braindead* probably fails. Some people, perhaps, would find it horrifying, or at least they would find the concept of making such a film at all horrifying. But there's really little chance that anyone's going to confuse what's happening in *Braindead* with what happens in reality, or relate it to their own experience in any direct way. So what is the main underlying drive of this 'ultimate zombie movie'?

Like many films of its ilk, I think that *Braindead* deals with mortality by mocking mortal flesh. With great irreverence, Jackson in his film subjects the human body to the most undignified and disrespectful treatment, turning it into a grotesque parody of itself. Perhaps thereby he takes the hex off it. We're still going to die, but for a moment, at least, the concept of not dying is too ludicrous to worry about. We may not get the last laugh, but some irreverent fun can be had along the way.

4. The Meaning of the Dead

Having now trampled through living dead territory (up to our armpits in viscera), we can perhaps start to identify the sorts of thematic elements that play into the zombie film.

The sub-genre contains, of course, many and varied themes, depending for their existence and effectiveness on the individual filmmaker. Zombies have provided symbols encapsulating the desire for and consequences of revenge; adolescent angst; puritanism and, equally, sexual excess; the frustration of ambition; the futility or the triumph of violence; the desire for immortality; consumerism; scientific irresponsibility; grief; suburban malaise; the transcendence of love ... and many more.

Within these themes, however, I would isolate four major threads (which are, of course, related):

1. Images of control.

Control and related themes of power and exploitation are basic to the voodoo zombie and its alien-invasion/chemical/mind-control relatives.

For example, scenes in *White Zombie* such as the one in which Frazer comes to Legendre in his mill give a chilling dimension to the theme of exploitation that underlies the film. Zombies work incessantly to turn the *Metropolis*-like machinery and the groaning of the wheels provides an unnerving background to discussion over the fate of the desired Madeline's soul. "They work faithfully and are not worried about long hours," says zombie master Legendre of his creatures, in justification of the capitalist organisation represented by his mill. The black-and-white photography and angled shots, often placing the players behind or against foreground structures or the shuffling legs of the living dead, help to create many potent moments and emphasize the theme -- a theme extended eventually to the 'capturing' of Madeline herself as an unwilling object of desire.

Inevitably, such control destroys life, turning humanity into mindless automatons or violent engines of destruction. This was, perhaps, what many people feared and suspected had already occurred, especially in the 1930s, when the aftermath of war and the fearsome Depression had brought a grim darkness to society and its visions of the future.

2. The erosion of meaningful human qualities of life.

If the mill scene in *White Zombie* provides an image of industrial exploitation, the central story of Madeline and her 'suitors' can function as a metaphor for the dehumanisation caused by exploitation -- the willingness to deny choice to the object of love. In this context, the physical person is seen as more important than their mind and spirit, and the result is emptiness. Madeline's physical beauty remains once she is 'dead', but the landowner who orchestrated her death in order to win her comes to realise that devoid of will she is merely a shell. Though he has gained her body, he has in reality lost the better part of her, perhaps destroyed it forever.

In Romero's zombie trilogy, the flesh-eating dead represent a society lost to the true qualities of living -- whether the source of that loss be violence, hate, bureaucracy or stupidity. The media, the military, science, philosophy are all helpless to provide an answer. The violence and spiritual void of human society feeds upon itself and the result is an apocalypse of the dead.

Clive Barker has commented that, since organised religion is losing its ability to popularly explain the world, Romero's living dead represent the only immortality possible. They are the tyranny of flesh, immortality without a spiritual dimension. And they are implacable. In extreme cases, nothing will stop them, certainly not our usual bulwarks of law, order, love, sex and reason. Zombies, Barker reckons, are the archetypal monster for the latter part of the twentieth century.

3. The tyranny of the past.

I Walked With a Zombie is an intelligent and evocative essay into the use of the zombie as a symbol of the past haunting the present -- an emotional barrenness and a guilt that will not lie still. From the early sequence in which Tom Conway (as the husband) seeks to destroy Dee's romantic innocence with the words "There is no beauty--only death and decay", to the final revelations of love and hate, the film exerts a gentle if irresistible influence over the viewer which has not been replicated as powerfully elsewhere in the zombie sub-genre. The zombified wife, an expressionless white phantom, becomes a powerful image of emotional emptiness, as the jealousy and bitterness that lies in the past is slowly revealed.

More obviously, such films as *Shock Waves* and Ossorio's *Blind Dead* films show the evils of the past returning to haunt the living. Even the common image of chemically induced zombieism apparent in *Return of the Living Dead*, *C.H.U.D.* and many more -- films granting pollution or greed the central role in resurrecting the dead to an inevitably vicious pseudo-life -- belongs here. What we do now, to our society and our world, will return to haunt us in the future.

4. Issues of mortality.

The sort of de-hexing of mortality identified in the discussion of *Braindead*, hidden under a variety of guises, is perhaps what the zombie film as a sub-genre does most of all. Underlying the variety apparent in zombie-film lore is this 'sub-text': Halperin's voodoo zombies, Romero's living dead, Jackson's blood-splattered travesties, all show us the downside of immortality. This is what the natural human desire to transcend the laws of our own biology leads to, and, as *Pet Semetary* would have it, "Sometimes dead is better".

Yet, the modern zombie also represents the insatiable tyranny of mortality, its rotting face and shuffling implacability a potent symbol for the horror (as distinct from the transcendence) of death. Its unspeakable appetite warns us of the fragility of life when faced by the reality of death, and its violence is the revenge of a past which demands guilt and fear of us because we live on in a world it has been denied.

On the other hand, the filmic existence of these living dead also allows us to fight back at death, in our imaginations at least -- to mock it, shoot it in the head or grind it into a mess of blood and bone with our lawnmowers. You can thumb your nose at Death, even as you shudder!

And we can achieve this cathartic release between doing the dishes after dinner and heading off to bed for the night. What more could you ask for?

List of Zombie Films (chronological)

(Note: Titles, alternative titles, directors and dates are as accurate and complete as possible, but different sources often vary in detail. Where there is disagreement, and the film was unavailable for viewing, I have generally followed Phil Hardy from his *Aurum Film Encyclopedia of Horror* or, failing that, information on the Internet Movie Database. Often I haven't included all title variants – in some instances there are just too many, so I stuck to the most common. Also I have generally excluded short films as they are mostly impossible to view and from my sources the actual content obscure. Some films with 'zombie' in the title turn out not to be zombie films at all – if I have inadvertently included any of these, I apologise – I've tried to view everything, but obviously it's not always possible. By the same token if your favourite obscure zombie flick isn't here, let me know and I'll include it in future updates.)

White Zombie (Victor Halperin, 1932-USA)

Ghoul, The (T. Hayes Hunter, 1933-Britain)

Night of Terror (Benjamin Stoloff, 1933-USA)

Ouanga (George Terwilliger, 1935-USA) aka Drums of the Jungle, and Crime of Voodoo

Revolt of the Zombies (Victor Halperin, 1936-USA)

Walking Dead, The (Michael Curtiz, 1936-USA)

Man They Could Not Hang, The (Nick Grinde, 1939-USA)

Ghost Breakers, The (George Marshall, 1940-USA)

King of the Zombies (Jean Yarbrough, 1941-USA)

I Walked with a Zombie (Jacques Tourneur, 1943-USA)

Revenge of the Zombies (Steve Sekely, 1943-USA) aka The Corpse Vanished

Voodoo Man, The (William Beaudine, 1944-USA)

Zombies on Broadway (Gordon Douglas, 1945-USA) aka Loonies on Broadway

Valley of the Zombies (Philip Ford, 1946-USA)

Zombies of the Stratosphere (Fred Bannon, 1952 *serial*) condensed as Satan's Satellites (1958)

Creature With the Atom Brain (Edward L. Cahn, 1955-USA)

Gamma People, The (John Gilling, 1956-USA)

Indestructible Man (Jack Pollexfen, 1956-USA)

Teenage Zombies (Jerry Warren, 1957-USA)
 Voodoo Woman (Edward L. Cahn, 1957-USA)
 Zombies of Mora Tau, The (Edward L. Cahn, 1957-USA)
 Brain Eaters (Bruno de Sota, 1958-USA)
 Invisible Invaders (Edward L. Cahn, 1959-USA)
 Night of the Ghouls (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959-USA) aka Revenge of the Dead
 Plan 9 From Outer Space (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959-USA)
 Doctor Blood's Coffin (Sidney J. Furie, 1960-Britain)
 Marca del Muerto, La (Fernando Cortes, 1960-Mexico) aka Creatures of the Walking
 Dead
 Dead One, The (Barry Mahon, 1961-USA)
 Hercules in the Haunted World (Mario Bava, 1961-Italy) Original title: Ercole al
 Centro della Terra
 Santo contra los zombies (Benito Alazraki, 1961-Mexico)
 Monstrosity (Joseph Mascelli, 1964-USA) aka The Atomic Brain
 War of the Zombies (Giuseppe Vari, 1963-Italy) Original title: Roma contra Roma
 I Eat Your Skin (Del Tenney, 1964-USA) aka Zombie Bloodbath
 Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies
 (Ray Dennis Steckler, 1964-USA)
 Creature of the Walking Dead (Frederic Corte, 1965-USA)
 Plague of the Zombies (John Gilling, 1966-Britain)
 Terror Creatures from the Grave (Massimo Pupillo, 1966-Italy). Original title: Cinque
 Tombe per un Medium
 Frozen Dead, The (Herbert Leder, 1967-Britain)
 Astro-Zombies (Ted V. Mikels, 1968-USA)
 Night of the Living Dead (George Romero, 1968-USA)
 Corpse, The (Viktors Ritelis, 1969-Britain) aka Crucible of Horror, and The Velvet
 House
 I Drink Your Blood (David Dunston, 1970-USA)
 Psychomania (Don Sharp, 1971-UK)
 Tombs of the Blind Dead (Amando de Ossorio, 1971-Spain/Portugal). Original title:
 La Noche del Terror Ciego; aka Night of the Blind Dead, and Tombs of the Blind
 Zombies
 Virgin Among the Living Dead (Jesús Franco, 1971-Spain). Original title: Une
 Vierge Chez Les Morts Vivants, aka Christina, princesse de l'érotisme
 Baron Blood (Mario Bava, 1972-Italy/West Germany). Original title: Gli Orrori del
 Castello di Norimberga; aka Chamber of Tortures, The Blood Baron, Thirst of
 Baron Blood, and The Torture Chamber of Baron Blood

Orgy of the Dead (José Luis Merino, 1972-Spain/Italy). Original title: La Orgia de los Muertos.

Dead of Night (John Clark, 1972-Canada) aka Deathdream

Dead People (William Huyck, 1972-USA) aka Messiah of Evil, The Second Coming, Revenge of the Screaming Dead and Return of the Living Dead

Dracula the Terror of the Living Dead (Jose Luis Merino, 1972-Spain/Italy) Original title: La Orgia de los Muertos

Horror Express (Gene Martin, 1972-Spain/Britain) Original title: Panico en el Transiberiano; aka Panic on the Trans-Siberian Train

Horror Rises From the Grave (Carlos Aured, 1972-Spain) Original title: El Espanto Surge de la Tombe

Rebellión de las muertas (Leon Klimovsky, 1972-Spain) aka Vengeance of the Zombies, Revolt of the Dead Ones, and The Rebellion of the Dead Women

Tales From the Crypt (Freddie Francis, 1972-Britain)

Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things (Bob Clark, 1973-USA) aka Things from the Grave, and Zombie Graveyard

Night of the Sorcerers (Amando de Ossorio, 1973-Spain) Original title: La Noche de los Brujos

Return of the Evil Dead, The (Amando de Ossorio, 1973-Spain) Original title: El Ataque de los Muertes sin Ojos

Ghoul, The (Freddie Francis, 1974-Britain)

Horror of the Zombies (Amando de Ossorio, 1974-Spain) Original title: El Buque Maldito; aka The Ghost Ship, and Ship of the Zombies

Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue, The (Jorge Grau, 1974-Spain/Italy). Original title: No Profanar el Sueño de los Muertos; aka Fin de Semana para los Muertos, Breakfast at the Manchester Morgue, Let Sleeping Corpses Lie, and Don't Open the Window

Voodoo Girl (Paul Maslansky, 1974-USA) aka Sugar Hill, and The Zombies of Sugar Hill

Dead Don't Die, The (Curtis Harrington, 1975-USA)

Night of the Death Cult (Amando de Ossorio, 1975-Spain). Original title: La Noche de las Gaviotas; aka Night of the Seagulls

Crazies, The (George Romero, 1976-USA)

Child, The (Robert Voskanian, 1977-USA) aka Zombie Child, and Kill and Go Hide

Monde des Morts-Vivantes, Le (Amando de Ossorio, 1977-France/West Germany)

Shock Waves (Ken Wiederhorn, 1977-USA) aka Death Corps, and Almost Human

Dawn of the Dead (George Romero, 1978-USA) aka Zombies

Raisons de la mort, Les (Jean Rollin, 1978-France) aka Pesticide

Beyond Terror (Tomas Aznar, 1979-Spain). Original title: Mas Alla del Terror; aka Further Than Fear

Curse of the Screaming Dead (Tony Malanowski, 1979-USA) aka Curse of the Cannibal Confederates

Erotic Night of the Living Dead (Joe D'Amato, 1979-Italy)

Fog, The (John Carpenter, 1979-USA)

Phantasm (Don Coscarelli, 1979-USA) aka The Never Dead

Toxic Zombies (Chuck McCrann, 1979-USA) aka Bloodeaters

Zombie Flesh Eaters (Lucio Fulci, 1979-Italy) aka Zombie 2, and Island of the Living Dead

Burial Ground (Andrea Bianchi, 1980-Italy) Original title: Le Notti del Terrore; aka Nights of Terror, Zombie 3, and Zombi Horror

City of the Living Dead (Lucio Fulci, 1980-Italy) Original title: Paura nella Citta dei Morti Viventi; aka The Gates of Hell, The Fear, Fear in the City of the Living Dead, and Twilight of the Dead

Grim Reaper, The (Joe D'Amato, 1980-Italy)

Lake of the Living Dead, The (Jean Rollin, 1980-Spain/France) Original title: El Lago de los Muertos Vivientes; aka Zombie Lake, and Le Lac des Morts Vivants

Nightmare City (Umberto Lenzi, 1980-Italy/Spain) Original title: Incubo sulla Citta Contaminata; aka La Invasión de los zombies atomicos; aka City of the Walking Dead, and Invasion of the Atomic Zombies

Zombi Holocaust (Frank Martin/Marino Girolami, 1980-Italy) Original title: La Regina dei Cannibali; aka Dr Butcher M.D., Queen of the Cannibals, and The Island of the Last Zombies

Beyond, The (Lucio Fulci, 1981-Italy) Original title: ...E Tu Vivrai nel Terrore! L'Aldila; aka L'Aldila, And You'll Live in Terror! The Beyond, and Seven Doors of Death

Dead and Buried (Gary Sherman, 1981-USA)

House By The Cemetery (Lucio Fulci, 1981-Italy). Original title: Quella Villa Accanto al Cimitero

Night of the Zombies (Vincent Dawn/Bruno Mattei, 1981-Italy/Spain) Original title: Inferno dei Morti-Viventi; aka Zombie Creeping Flesh, Apocalipsis Canibal, Cannibal Virus, Virus--L'Inferno dei Morti Viventi, Hell of the Living Death, and Virus Cannibale

Strange Dead Bodies (Kang Bum Koo, 1981-Korea) Original title: Koesi

Cannibal Apocalypse (Anthony M. Dawson, 1982-Italy) aka Invasion of the Flesh Hunters

Evil Dead, The (Sam Raimi, 1982-USA)

I Was a Zombie for the FBI (Marius Penczner, 1982-USA)
 Kung Fu Zombie (I-Jung Hua, 1982-HK) Original title: Wu long tian shi zhao ji gui
 La Morte Vivante (Jean Rollin, 1982-France) aka The Living Dead Girl (See the
 Redemption version which is the original)
 Treasure of the Living Dead, The (Jesús Franco, 1982-Spain/France) Original title:
 La Tumba de los Muertos Vivientes; aka The Grave of the Living Dead, Oasis of
 the Zombies, Le Trésor des Morts Vivants
 Forever Evil (D. Roger Evans, 1983-USA)
 Zeder (Pupi Avati, 1983-Italy) aka Zeder -- Voices from Beyond, and Revenge of the
 Dead
 Hysterical (Chris Beards, 1983-USA)
 One Dark Night (Tom McLoughlin, 1983-USA)
 C.H.U.D. (Douglas Cheek, 1984-USA)
 Death Warmed Up (David Blyth, 1984-New Zealand)
 Night of the Comet (Thom Eberhardt, 1984-USA)
 Spirit Vs Zombie (Feng Pang, 1984-HK) Original title: Jiang shi da nao xi men ding
 Zombie Hunger (Richard Kern, 1984-USA)
 Zombie Hunger 2 (Richard Kern, 1984-USA)
 Zombie Island Massacre (John Carter, 1984-USA)
 Cementerio de terror (Ruben Galindo Jr., 1985-Mexico)
 Creepshow (George Romero, 1985-USA)
 Dark Power (Phil Smoot, 1985-USA)
 Day of the Dead (George Romero, 1985-USA)
 Hard Rock Zombies (Krishna Shah, 1985-USA)
 Lifeforce (Tobe Hooper, 1985-USA)
 Raiders of the Living Dead (Samuel M. Sherman, 1985-USA)
 Re-Animator (Stuart Gordon, 1985-USA)
 Return of the Living Dead (Dan O'Bannon, 1985-USA)
 Spookies (Eugenie Joseph, Thomas Doran, Brendan Faulkner, 1985-USA)
 Trancers (Charles Band, 1985-USA)
 Deadly Friend (Wes Craven, 1986-USA)
 Demons (Lamberto Bava, 1986-Italy) Original title: Demoni
 Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives (Tom McLoughlin, 1986-USA)
 Gore-Met, Zombie Chef from Hell (Don Swan, 1986-USA)
 I was a Teenage Zombie (John Elias Michalakis, 1986-USA)
 Night of the Creeps, The (Fred Dekker, 1986-USA)
 Supernaturals, The (Armand Mastroianni, 1986-USA)
 Zombie Nightmare (Jack Brauman, 1986-USA)

Blood Diner (Jackie Kong, 1987-USA)
 Bloody New Year (Norman J. Warren, 1987-USA)
 Dark Tower (Ken Barnett [Ken Wiederhorn, Freddie Francis], 1987-USA/Spain)
 Evil Dead 2: Dead By Dawn (Sam Raimi, 1987-USA)
 Redneck Zombies (Pericles Lewnes, 1987-Britain)
 Rest in Pieces (Joseph Braunstein, 1987-US/Spain)
 Video Dead, The (Robert Scott, 1987-USA)
 Zombie Brigade (Barrie Pattison, 1987-Australia) aka The Bodycounters, Night
 Crawl
 Zombie 3 (Lucio Fulci credited, though in fact Bruno Mattei, 1987-Italy)
 Zombie High (Ron Link, 1987-USA)
 Zombie Vs Ninja (Godfrey Ho, 1987-HK) aka Zombie Revival: Ninja Master
 After Death (Claudio Fragasso, 1988-Italy) Original title: Oltre la morte, aka Zombie
 4: After Death
 Bad Taste (Peter Jackson, 1988-NZ)
 Dead Heat (Mark Goldblatt, 1988-USA)
 Dead Mate (Straw Weisman, 1988-USA)
 Flesh Eating Mothers (James Aviles Martin, 1988-USA)
 Ghost Town (Richard Governor, 1988-USA)
 Ghostriders (Alan Stewart, 1988-USA)
 Maniac Cop (William Lustig, 1988-USA)
 Phantasm II (Don Coscarelli, 1988-USA)
 Return of the Living Dead Part 2 (Ken Wiederhorn, 1988-USA)
 Revenge of the Living Zombies (Bill Hinzman, 1988-USA) aka Flesheater
 Scarecrows (William Wesley, 1988-USA)
 C.H.U.D. II: Bud the Chud (David Irving, 1989-USA)
 Dead Next Door, The (J.R. Bookwalter, 1989-USA)
 Dead Pit, The (Brett Leonard, 1989-USA)
 Night Life (David Acomba, 1989-USA) aka Grave Misdemeanours
 Pet Semetary (Mary Lambert, 1989-USA)
 Rabid Grannies (Emmanuel Kervyn, 1989-Belgium)
 Serpent and the Rainbow, The (Wes Craven, 1989-USA)
 Voodoo Dawn (Stephen Fierberg, 1989-USA) aka Strange Turf
 Zombie Rampage (Todd Sheet, 1989-USA)
 Boneyard, The (Charles B. Pierce, 1990-USA)
 Bride of Re-Animator: Re-Animator 2 (Brian Yuzna, 1990-USA)
 Chopper Chicks in Zombietown (Dan Hoskins, 1990-USA)
 Demons 2 (Lamberto Bava, 1990-Italy)

Magic Cop (Dung Wai, 1990-HK) Original title: Qumo Jingcha
 Maniac Cop 2 (William Lustig, 1990-USA)
 Night of the Living Dead (Tom Savini, 1990-USA *remake*)
 Two Evil Eyes (George Romero, Dario Argento, 1990-Italy) Original title: Due Occhi Diabolici
 Zombie '90: Extreme Pestilence (Andreas Schnaas, 1990-West Germany)
 Demoni 3 (Umberto Lenzi, 1991-Italy); aka Black Demons
 Grave Secrets (Donald P. Borchers, 1991-USA)
 Nudist Colony of the Dead (Mark Pirro, 1991)
 Resurrected, The (Dan O'Bannon, 1991-Canada)
 Zombie Army, The (Betty Stapleford, 1991-USA)
 Zombie Cop (Lance Randas, 1991-USA)
 Zombie ja Kummitusjuna (Mika Kaurismaki, 1991-Finland) aka The Zombie and the Ghost Train
 Army of Darkness: Evil Dead 3 (Sam Raimi, 1992-USA)
 Braindead (Peter Jackson, 1992-NZ) aka Dead Alive
 Death Becomes Her (Roger Zemeckis, 1992-USA)
 Ed and His Dead Mother (Jonathan Wack, 1992-USA)
 Maniac Cop 3: Badge of Silence (William Lustig, 1992-USA)
 Pet Semetary Two (Mary Lambert, 1992-USA)
 Zombie Rampage 2 (Todd Sheet, 1992-USA)
 Jason Goes To Hell: The Final Friday (Adam Marcus, 1993-USA)
 My Boyfriend's Back (Bob Balaban, 1993-USA)
 Return of the Living Dead Part 3 (Brian Yuzna, 1993-USA)
 Zombie Bloodbath (Todd Sheet, 1993-USA)
 The Crow (Alex Proyas, 1994-USA)
 Dellamorte Dellamore (Michele Soavi, 1994-France/Italy) aka Cemetery Man
 Phantasm III: Lord of the Dead (Don Coscarelli, 1994-USA)
 Shatter Dead (Scooter McCrae, 1994-USA)
 Living a Zombie Dream (Tod Reynolds, 1996-USA)
 Zombie Bloodbath II: Rage of the Undead (Todd Sheet, 1996-USA)
 Plaga Zombie (Pablo Pares, Hernán Sáez, 1997-Argentina)
 Zombie Cult Massacre (Jeff Dunn, 1997-USA)
 Zombie Ninja Gangbangers (Jeff Emralino, 1997-USA) aka The Zombie Ninja
 Bio-Zombie (Wilson Yip, 1998-HK) Original title: Sang dut sau shut
 I, Zombie: A Chronicle of Pain (Andrew Parkinson, 1998-USA)
 Necro Files, The (Matt Jaissle, 1998-USA) aka Psycho Zombie Love Butcher
 Dead Hate the Living, The (Dave Parker, 1999-USA)

Junk (Atsushi Muroga, 1999-Japan)
Versus (Ryuhei Kitamura, 2000-Japan)
Wild Zero (Tetsuro Takeuchi, 2000-Japan)
Zombie Bloodbath 3: Zombie Armageddon (Todd Sheet, 2000-USA)
Biker Zombies [from Detroit] (Todd Brunswick, 2001-USA)
Children of the Living Dead (Tor A. Ramsey, 2001-USA)
Mulva: Zombie Ass Kicker (Chris Seaver, 2001-USA)
Plaga Zombie: Zona Mutante (Pablo Pares, Hernán Sáez, 2001-Argentina)
Route 666 (William Wesley, 2001-USA)
Vengeance of the Dead (Don Adams and Harry James Picardi, 2001-USA)
Resident Evil (Paul Anderson, 2002-UK/Germany)
Undead, The (Michael and Peter Spierig, 2002-Aust)

The Ten Best Zombie Films

1. Romero's Living Dead trilogy
2. *I Walked With A Zombie*
3. *White Zombie*
4. Fulci's Zombie series (especially *Zombie Flesh Eaters*)
5. *Evil Dead 1 (and 2)*
6. *Re-Animator*
7. Jackson's *Braindead*
8. *Return of the Living Dead*
9. *Plague of the Zombies*
10. *The Serpent and the Rainbow*

Some Memorable Quotations

1. "When there's no more room in hell, the dead shall walk the earth." (Dawn of the Dead)
2. "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is, your dates are here. The bad news is, they're dead!" (Night of the Creeps)
3. "Brains! Brains!" (Return of the Living Dead)
4. "Why have you disturbed our ancient sleep?" (Evil Dead)
5. "There is no beauty -- only death and decay." (I Walked with a Zombie)
6. "They work faithfully and are not worried about long hours." (White Zombie)
7. "If we re-animate with her brain like this, she'd be good for slobbering and watching *Married With Children*, and that's about it!" (Ed and His Dead Mother)
8. "The TV don't kill nobody. It's what comes out of the TV does the killing." (The Video Dead)
9. "I'm the one who loves you. Let me eat your brains!" (Return of the Living Dead 2)
10. "He [the killer] has been sighted, armed with a meat-cleaver in one hand and his genitals in the other." (Blood Diner)

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In the middle of a zombie apocalypse, a resourceful couple hides out in an isolated abandoned building. The woman is pregnant and the man is infected, slowly transforming into the kind of inhuman monster they are trying to escape. When a small Colorado town is overrun by the flesh hungry dead a small group of survivors try to escape in a last ditch effort to stay alive. Director: Steve Miner | Stars: Mena Suvari, Nick Cannon, Michael Welch, AnnaLynne McCord. Votes: 19 567. Turning the zombie film on its head, this film is an oddball comedy from the perspective of the brain munching monsters themselves. Director: Matthew Kohnen | Stars: Matthew Davis, Julianna Robinson, Michael Grant Terry, Betsy Beutler. Votes: 2 966.