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# 'Dead' revives horror flicks

'Dawn of the Dead' works well as a zombie movie meant to scare audiences

By Ryan Nyburg  
Senior Pulse Reporter

Zombie movies hold a special place in the canon of horror and tend to have an aesthetic quality of their own.

There are numerous reasons for this. One is that zombies are essentially blameless automatons, operating on a simple line of logic without moral considerations. Another reason is that, of all the stock villains in horror films (vampires, werewolves and the like), zombies are the only ones that do not come from European folklore.

Probably the most significant aspect that sets these films apart is the ease with which they can take on serious social issues. This is where George A. Romero and his "Night of the Living Dead" trilogy fits into the picture. In his films, Romero used the horror genre to comment on a wide range of social issues, including materialism, militarism and the ever-present theme of human nature under extreme pressure. It was partly because of Romero's influence that, for a while at least, horror was taken seriously as a form of cinematic expression.

Now we are presented with the second remake of one of the "Dead" films ("Night of the Living Dead" was remade in 1990): Zack Snyder's "Dawn of the Dead." While it would be unfair to expect the remake to be as good as, or to touch on all the same areas as, the original film, the differences between the two are telling. Gone is the sly social commentary about consumer culture, gone is the character development, gone is the sustained sense of dread. What remains is a purely visceral horror film, concerned only with what can scare people moment to moment. But on that level, the film works.

The plot follows the general outline, if not the exact details, of the original film. A plague overtakes the country, causing all of those infected to die and then rise up again as vicious zombies. The infection is spread through bites and soon the whole country, maybe the world, is in shambles. A group of survivors hole up in an abandoned shopping mall and manage to fend off the hordes of undead. The survivors are pretty much just stock characters who exist mostly just to squabble, keep secrets from one another, rescue one another and occasionally kill one another. With the exception of the Sarah Polley character — whose escape from a suburban area provides the film's opening sequence — none of the characters are really explored in any depth.

The lack of character development could have been taken care of if a few characters would have been eliminated with a little more haste, thus giving room to focus on just a few key people. But this would be beside the point, since more characters means more people killed by the zombie horde, which is the sort of visceral thrill the film is aiming for. It's entertaining, if not particularly thoughtful. But unlike the original, this film is not about abstractions or commentary, just pure entertainment. As escapism, it's well worth the ticket price.

That said, there are a few aspects of the film that could have been smoothed out. First are the references to Sept. 11. While the event is never expressly mentioned, the imagery and language make it pretty obvious. The filmmakers seem to be making some statement about survivors in a world rocked by tragedy, but the idea is never fully formed and seems rather beside the point, especially given the nihilistic ending. These references and attitudes should have been made either more or less prominent, rather than left to sit in the film without purpose.

Another area that could have used



Courtesy Sarah Polley and Ving Rhames fight back a horde of zombies in "Dawn of the Dead."

some work is the lack of emphasis on cannibalism among the zombies, something which played so prominently in the Romero films and just about every other zombie film in recent memory. The filmmakers might have been too squeamish to add it (or more likely too worried about trying to get an R rating) but it's the cannibalism that makes zombies such powerful images in the first place, and the symbolic importance of the act could have added some substance to the film.

But this would be imposing symbolism where it is clearly not wanted. If you're looking for something to thrill you for 97 minutes, this is the film to see. Just don't expect it to do anything for you once you get out of the theater. "Dawn of the Dead" is currently playing at Cinemark 17, located at 2900 Gateway St. in the Gateway Mall and at Regal Cinema World, located at 10887 Valley River Way.

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## ARTWORK

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these are the recurring images of the human body. These include disembodied ears and hands, as well as more subtle additions.

"There are groups of balls placed around the piece, 23 black and 23 white," Walsh said. "They represent the two sets of chromosomes in the human genetic structure."

Other objects in the piece address

the subject of AIDS more directly.

"Near the front of the exhibit there is a box that contains 4,000 names of people who have died of AIDS," Walsh said. "I've also written names of AIDS victims on oak leaves hanging on the walls. The idea there is that leaves are objects without identity, much like many victims of AIDS. I've given them an identity by putting names on them."

Walsh says he hopes the exhibit will inform people that AIDS is still

an important problem around the world. "I like how the piece commemorates the victims of AIDS," post-bachelor student Vince Artman said. "Personally though, it's not to my taste."

The Adell McMillan Gallery is located in the EMU. There will be a reception for "Link" in the gallery at 5:30 p.m. tonight.

Contact the senior Pulse reporter at [ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com](mailto:ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com).

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