

PROCRASTINATIONS SIX BRAAINS...

Procrastinations is edited by John Coxon.
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Last issue, I asked whether I could describe *Procrastinations* as 'venerable' after almost two years of publishing. Well, I had this pretty spectacularly answered for me by a phonecall I received from James Bacon, whilst I was on a train from Leicester to Peterborough, informing me that I had won a FAAN award for 'Best New Fan'. I was extremely flattered and the award is currently waiting to be put on my wall. The artwork is nifty and it's got a frame and it's probably one of the coolest things I've ever won.

This issue, I want to say thank you especially to Steve Green – Steve got me into the fanzine scene (via a conversation on LiveJournal) and it was almost entirely his fault that I wrote the first issue of this fanzine in the summer of 2006. He also very kindly consented to write me an article this issue with three days' notice, and gave me a bucketload of images, so that also deserves a special mention. Enjoy the zine!

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Day of the Undead.

By John Coxon

The first time I really saw a zombie film (except for *Shaun of the Dead*) was with Max, shortly after I started my degree in Leicester. She informed me that Terror4fun were holding an event at the Phoenix Arts Centre entitled 'Day of the Undead' with Zombie Ed as the compère. I hadn't seen Max for a while, so we decided that we'd meet at the train station and then walk to the venue so I could lose my zombie virginity. It is, therefore, important to note that my thoughts on these films are the thoughts of someone who hasn't seen a great deal of related material, but I hope you find them interesting anyway.

Five feature films were being shown over the course of the day, most of which were preceded by a short film. The five main films were *Day of the Dead*, *Dead Meat*, *Versus*, *The Zombie Diaries* and *Braindead* - all of which we watched, except *Versus*. The shorts before the film were, to quote the event's webpage, "*Gasoline Blood* by David Pope, *Zombie Undead* by Rhys Davies, *Slow Rot* by Paul Shrimpton and *Campus of the Living Dead* by Mark 'Wally' Wall." At least one of those short films was shot in Leicester and all were very good indeed.



Day of the Dead was the first film of the day, and it's a classic being the third in George Romero's *Living Dead* series. It is also sampled in the Gorillaz track M1/A1 (from their first album) which drove me

crazy throughout the day since I just could not work out where I'd heard that part of the film before. The setting is simple, there are some soldiers and some scientists trapped in an underground base, whilst zombies roam the surface of the planet.

The film is very clever in the way it makes you feel both almost sympathetic for the zombies and horrified at the level to which the (supposedly) human survivors have sunk. The zombie that the main scientist is training (through Pavlovian conditioning) is arguably more human than the soldiers with whom the other characters are trapped. This interesting juxtaposition vastly

increases the terror that the viewer feels for the people in the base.



The second film was also brilliant. *Dead Meat* is a film funded by the Irish Art Council, and is set in rural Ireland. It is inspired in no small way by the outbreak of BSE in Irish cattle, and poses an interesting question: what if all the cows were infected by something similar to BSE that turned them into zombies? The results are terrifying in a much more

primal way than in *Day of the Dead*, and the film's bleak ending is rather moving.

The third film we saw was the fourth of the day, entitled *The Zombie Diaries*. This one was, frankly, weird. It's told through the medium of a series of video diaries belonging to various people, in which various and shocking revelations are made. The diaries are not presented in chronological order which makes the viewer think and

the full horror of the actions of two of the people featured in the diaries doesn't come through until the very last minutes of the film. This illustration of human inhumanity is extremely disturbing and it's the sort of film that I think would be good for a rewatch with the benefit of the information provided in the ending sequences.

The final film was Peter Jackson's *Braindead*. I could not stop laughing - the zombies are excellent, the quotations are superb (how could anyone dislike a film that features the immortal line, "I kick ass in the name of the Lord!"). The film is the goriest of the films I'd seen that day, but even though I can be squeamish I could not stop laughing, even though I was watching through my hands at points. I highly recommend the film - as a psychological horror, or a terrifying thriller, you may be disappointed, but as a hilarious film it won't fall short.



That day held other brilliant things other than the four films I saw - I won a faceplate for an Xbox and had quite a bit of beer, and it was excellent to see Max - but the films were all really good, and it was very reasonably priced. If they do another one, I'm there.

Thoughts on Zombiecon.

By James Bacon

We were sitting in a pub after an Alan Moore talk at the Tate Britain, there were a few of the usual, and we were chatting about doing a convention. To be honest, at that stage I was ramping up for LX and

wasn't that keen on running anything, but was happy to be involved. The lads were looking to arrange another 'fun' convention – I think this would have been before anyone had mentioned Year of the Teledu, so there was nothing on the horizon. We all agreed that it was time to do something that centred on the interests of Stef and Elvis, especially – not that the vague events don't work, but we thought that theming the convention around a subject that both Stef

and Elvis loved (and the rest of us thought was cool) would be a winner.



So, that was the idea – the lads went off and looked about and to be honest it was not very well organised. By July 2007, nothing had really happened. The problem, as always, was venue, and the guys had run into a number of problems, including a bit of apathy, and real life was getting in the way.

At an event in July, Stef and I suggested a pub as a venue. The gents concerned would prefer a hotel, which we thought was fine, but we asked for one to be produced. I had a chat with Stef, and it wasn't really working out. He and I needed to be at the head of this beast and we needed to run the con with everyone else helping out, like a committee but not a committee, as usual. So we talked and looked, and in November, we negotiated an amazing deal with the Walsall Bentley hotel, which is used by Novacon. I found that chairing an Eastercon was not as stressful as I expected and the LX committee were happy for me to have something else on the go, so that was that.

But why Zombies? Well, mostly because it's such a cool genre. It's normally a post-apocalyptic situation where something has gone

astray, and suddenly, we have reanimated beings eating brains. How cool is that?

I think *28 Days Later* was a key movie for me. It was a very mature take on the whole idea and I equally loved *28 Weeks Later* – some scenes in that are beyond me, it's the world event that leads to survival and also the breakdown of social order. The violence is good, too. Of course, it's not really a zombie movie, it's about infection (as those with the rage are infected, and not reanimated), but it fits into that genre that is gore and fear and survival and apocalypse.

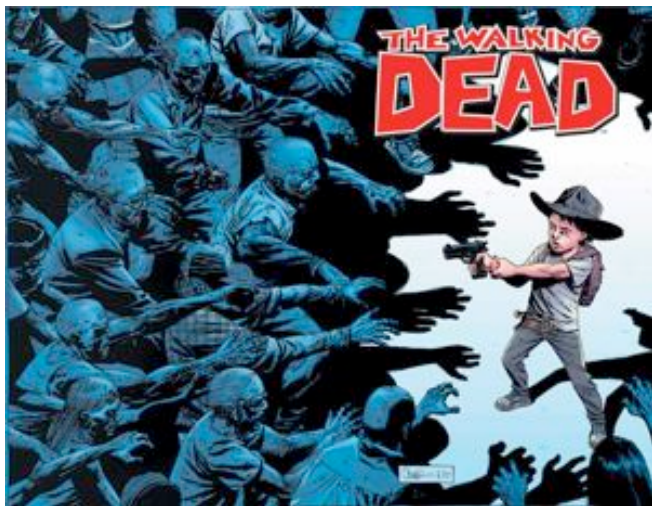
There are many zombie movies in existence. Telos Publishing produced *Zombieman: 80 Movies to Die For*, and it's a great guide, which also lists some 550 other films and about another 100 that were in production at the time. I like some of George Romero's *Living Dead* movies and I liked the 2004 Zack Snyder remake of *Dawn of the Dead*. I like *Braindead* and I also like *I am Legend*. Although the creatures depicted are vampires, the whole plague concept and the post-apocalyptic feeling has gone on to influence the zombie genre (for example, Romero's films) significantly.

I had gone to Zombie Ed's Terror4fun events. He runs these amazing LARPs [*Live Action Roleplays – Ed*] at a scout camp in Milton Keynes. They are very cool and I have gotten into the make up aspect, to the degree where I can do a fairly good wound or bullet hole. I suppose the first time we zombied up for something was a dry run for Worldcon at Paragon 2 and that was in itself quite fun.



I enjoy comics a lot, and I think that Robert Kirkman has been a real star in the genre. He is writing *The Walking Dead*, an ongoing zombie tale, and it's brilliant, mostly because it has huge scope and can continue where movies need to end. It's brilliantly realised and the artist, Charlie Adlard, is a guest at Zombiecon. Kirkman also wrote the hilarious *Marvel Zombies*, and I just loved the slapstick, bucket of blood humour and how well he portrayed the Marvel characters we love so much as zombies.

Zombies have turned up in *2000AD* for years – for instance, *Judgement Day* by Garth Ennis. A magus known as Sabbath raises the dead worldwide and this causes a fourth world war – it's quite a long story, but well worth it. In *Bad Company*, we find the alien Krool have learnt how to reanimate the dead, creating war zombies. In *The City of the Damned* storyline, Dredd travels into the future



and meets a zombie version of himself. It was good fun growing up with that stuff.

Of course, comics have always been a fertile ground for zombies. Solomon Grundy is arguably the first comic zombie character and he appeared

in *All-American Comics* #61 in 1944, years before Romero's movies. Grundy has reappeared many times to fight various characters, although over the decades he has changed. The best and most recent depiction of Grundy was in the animated *Batman* series, in which he was created by Gotham's 19th century inhabitants to persecute rich landowners.

As for books, well, I suppose I am a fan of the alternate history or SF that pits people against some sudden event. Steve Niles wrote a book called *Remains* which is pretty cool, and also penned a series of comics set after *28 Days Later*. He has a good understanding of the horror genre. *Dead in the West* was also an awesome book, a zombie novel set in the wild west. I fell in love with Joe R. Lansdale early on in my reading – it's very good, but that's Lansdale.

But what of the actual rules of zombies? Well, Stef is pretty definite about what a zombie is and isn't and this causes some fascinating debate. For me as a conrunner all it does is open more doors and allow some discussions as well as fun stuff to be contemplated. Many things can fall into or be close enough to the genre to be well worth investigating as part of Zombiecon. Who knows? We have loads of ideas and loads of material to play with and our guests are stonking. It shall be weird.



***Zombies!!!* – A Review.**

By John Coxon

Recently, I went back to Leicester to visit some friends from uni. We ate lunch and then wandered into town, and after grabbing a milkshake, we wandered into Pheonix Games, which is the local games store in the city, and a few minutes later had emerged with a board game that goes by the name *Zombies!!!*.

The game itself is very simple – you start out at the Town Square, and each player, as a part of their turn, has to draw and place a new map tile. Thus, the city is built as you play the game, and it is never

the same twice. Zombies shamble through the streets and bullets and lives concealed in buildings aid you in your quest.

The object of the game is either to be the first to collect twenty-five zombies (by killing them and adding them to your stash) or to be the first to reach the centre of the helipad and kill the zombie standing there. This is not nearly as easy as it sounds. The game's mechanic is simple – you roll a six-sided die after playing the map tile, and you can move up to that distance in squares. Any zombies



you encounter on your trip are fought – to win combat, you need a 4+, and you can spend bullets to raise rolls or spend lives to gain rerolls. Running out of lives zaps you back to the beginning, and you can't voluntarily leave combat – you either win, or you die.

There are also more elaborate parts of the game, like the various weapons that can be played in certain buildings to give you advantages, or the fact that at the end of your turn you get to move the zombies about and seriously scupper your friends' plans, but this just adds to the fun, slightly

manic feeling of suspense. Merging it with a bit of roleplaying is also good – describing your character beating down the door of the florist before spitting out his gum, reloading his gun and going at the zombies contained within is so much more fun than making a three-square move and having to spend two bullets to make your rolls.

The one criticism I have of the game is that it's a little too long for such a simple concept. The game doesn't feel much like it has a middle – you go from being in a city with no helipad and thus just messing around to being in a city where everybody's headed towards the helipad – and that kind of hurts the experience, as well

as the slow movement meaning that if the Helipad winds up being a way away from the Town Square, it can be literally reanimated death to get there. The twenty-five-zombie limit is something that I've not yet encountered, either. However, I've only played with a couple of other people, so it might turn out to be a lot more fun with more players.



All in all, this is a very fun game, and the only shortcoming I can really see with it is quite minor if you're with friends and having fun. The artwork on the event cards is really good, the concept is also brilliant, and it's got a sense of humour. And, as I understand it, the first expansion pack adds a military base, the ability to drive around in a Jeep and glow-in-the-dark zombies, which sounds *awesome!*

The Legions of Entropy.

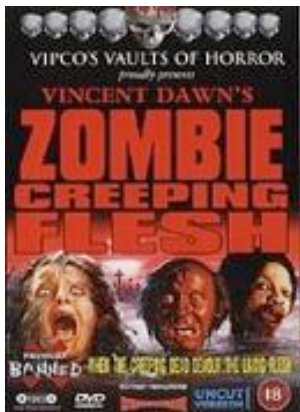
By Steve Green

What exactly is the appeal of the zombie in contemporary cinema? Be they the brain-famished cannibals of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, the shambling lost souls of Tourneur's *I Walked With a Zombie* or the crazed killing machines of Boyle's *28 Days Later*, there seems no end to the march of the resurrected across our cinema screens.

After all, it's not as if they're imbued with either the tragic alienation of the Frankenstein monster (English literature's first and greatest reanimated cadaver) or the shadowy eroticism of the vampire. Even the mummified adulterer Kharis solicits more sympathy from audiences than these personality-depleted icons of the horror genre.

But that, of course, lies at the unbeating heart of the zombie's mystique. Almost alone in our shared mythology, these creatures are totally devoid of self; they are without motivation or masterplan, the senseless personification of our own mortality. As fast as you run, whatever obstacles you place in their path, you can escape neither their frantic grasp nor the inevitability of your own demise.

The attraction for film-makers is rather more obvious. The restless undead offer a *tabula rasa* upon which virtually any theme can be explored, from a satirical broadside against American consumerism (*Dawn of the Dead*) to quasi-Marxist condemnation of corporate genocide (*Zombie Creeping Flesh*).



In the hands of a gifted writer-director, they can illuminate the darkest recesses of the human mechanism and the social shells we build around ourselves; in a hack's, satiate our animalistic thirst for cheap thrills.

Zombies are the footsoldiers of chaos, the walking embodiment of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. With time, their contagion will spread throughout the globe, whereupon the twisted hunger which drives the corpse army will prove its own undoing. Only then will the dead rest again, and forever.

At the close, all is entropy.

Letters of Comment.

Lee Lavell writes:

I would like to make a few remarks concerning the comments on the original *Star Trek*. I think that you must take it for what it was, and what it was was groundbreaking. It was virtually the first science

fiction television series created for intelligent adults. Previously, all we had had were kiddie programs or mind-numbing idiot series – *Star Trek* presented a positive future (not at all a certain thing in the late sixties, even as now) where problems could be solved peaceably.

Yes, the shows were somewhat heavy-handed, but the fact that they were presented at all is almost a miracle, considering network restrictions. Here was a cast that featured a black woman in a commanding position and a good-guy Russian at the height of the the Cold War. Virtually all of society's problems were showcased throughout the series. Special effects seem prehistoric now but at the time were not only ground-breaking but very expensive for TV.



Sure, *The Next Generation* was a much better series, but it also had the advantage of being in an era of better (and less expensive) special effects. Also, it was a syndicated series and thus did not have the onus of having a network telling them what they could and could not do or tell.

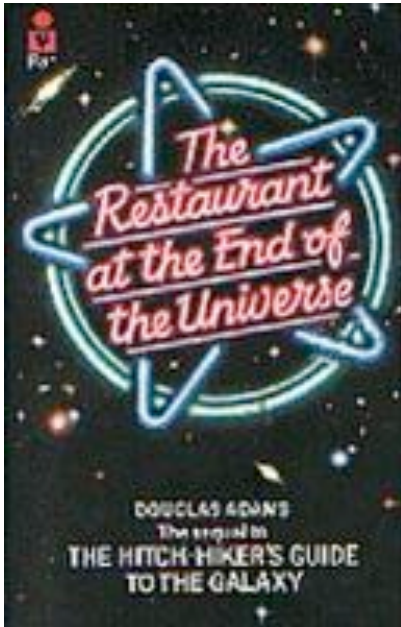
Cheers, Lee Lavell.

On the subject of Star Trek, since the last issue of this fanzine, I have watched a lot more than I had previously encountered, and I confess that I feel that I probably unfairly judged the show with comments made previously. William Shatner's Kirk is brilliant (and I pity Chris Pine trying to fill those shoes) and I really enjoyed the stuff that I'd not seen before. However, The Next Generation is still where it's at for me... Almost purely because of the brilliance of the enemies such as Q and the Borg. Is there an argument for comparing the Borg to zombies, perhaps? Answers on a postcard...

Lloyd Penney writes:

I have been attacking my inbox, trying to clean out the myriad fanzines there, and *Procrastinations* #5 has risen to the top, cream-like. Let's open it, and see how creamy it is...

Years ago, I saw a fanzine that tried to call itself venerable, but got the words a little wrong. The editor used *venereal* several times, and never really got it when we tried to tell him what the word he used really meant. Did you get to run into Chris Garcia at Orbital? I can imagine he cut a swathe through what is usually a fairly quiet convention. The main thing I heard about this Eastercon was its size, and that it was financially successful, a very good thing these days.



I may have told you this before... Yvonne and I met Douglas Adams at a Worldcon long ago, I think the Baltimore Worldcon in 1983. We said hello, and told him we'd just read the second *Hitchhiker's* book. "Oh," he said, "Wasn't very good, was it? The next one will be much better!" It was an odd scene... both Yvonne

and I are under 5'6", and Douglas was 6 foot umpteen. Fun to talk to, and he died far too young. He should still be here with us, writing silly books and entertaining the lot of us.

I have been reading a lot of Charlie Stross lately, but it hasn't been because I've bought a lot of his books. Almost all of his writing is available for download, and I've been reading them on my Palm. Maybe I should buy one? Hmm? As for Tanith Lee, I also met her years ago, and lovely lady. I must wonder, though how old she is, for in some ways, I am surprised she is still around, and as popular as

she is. So many younger writers have arrived, and she is still able to hold her audience and fan base.

The space programme has lost many astronauts in its development, but don't forget the Russian cosmonauts who also lost their lives in the development of their programme. Check on history.nasa.gov, and that should point you in the right direction for astronaut profiles. <http://www.airsafe.com/events/space/astrofat.htm> is a site that will tell you who was killed on what mission, and also who died while not on a mission. I couldn't find a list of cosmonauts who have died.

How do staples fit on a .pdf? Just wondering... My greetings to Max, with whom I enjoyed a good part of LAcon IV a couple of years ago now, and I guess I'm finished here. Chaos, panic and disorder, my work here is done. I look forward to more very soon.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Well, firstly, this is definitely not a venereal fanzine, except perhaps for Procrastinations #2, and I do pity the editor who used that word to describe his zine. I'd hate to go to all the effort of writing a zine (although six in two years is perhaps not as huge an effort as some editors) and then slap a word like that on it!

Yes, I did meet Chris at Orbital, and again in San Francisco when I holidayed in California this summer.

The man is a walking, fanzine-editing, bear-hug-giving legend and I am glad I got the opportunity to finally put the name to the face. I am looking forward to seeing him at conventions in the future!



Douglas Adams was definitely a huge loss both to the SF community and the world in general. He had so many great ideas and humourous ways of looking at what was happening, and it's a shame that he's no longer here to share such things with us. Regrettably, the producer of the first two radio series of The Hitchhiker's Guide, Geoffrey Perkins, died in a car crash in London a short while ago – such a waste of a young life, he went at 55 as compared to Douglas' 49, but both were taken from us at far too young an age.

*I must confess that I find it extremely difficult to read PDFs, and so I'm a bad person to ask, because in my opinion all books ought to be on paper! But, yes, you should buy one – I am of the opinion that good work deserves reward, in that sense. I hadn't read any of Tanith Lee's stuff before *Orbital*, in a shocking display of being completely crap, but I've since read *Drinking Sapphire Wine*, a supremely good book which*



I'll probably talk about when Procrastinations #7 rolls around.

Thank you for the information about the space programmes – I'm unsurprised that you couldn't find the relevant information about cosmonauts, since

I have never found a good place for information about the RSA, or at least, never nearly as good a place as the ones for NASA that I have found in the past.

Finally, the inclusion of the 'this fanzine is unstapled...' line was actually a mistake caused by the change in the process by which I write Procrastinations as a result of getting a MacBook. The line appears on all hard copies of the fanzine, since the zine remains resolutely unstapled due to editorial laziness (hey, it's my fanzine, I make the rules!).

Closing Remarks.

So, we reach the end of another fanzine. At the time of writing it is around three o'clock in the morning on Tuesday. The zine is due to be printed on Wednesday night due for a Friday publication. So, yes, you all came very close not to getting the fanzine this weekend! This is entirely my fault for getting inconveniently distracted by real life at exactly the wrong moment (not that it wasn't a nice distraction), and so I can't really take any blame for it whatsoever.

Another thing I want to say is that this is the second-shortest issue of Procrastinations I've done so far – pretty much the only reason it isn't joint shortest is because this one has LoCs! The seventh issue will probably be back up to a twenty or twenty-four page publication, I hope. I am currently working on a one-shot fanzine entitled *Seductive Logic*, which will come out at some point, hopefully before Easter. It's a fanzine about my trip to California last year, detailing my trip whilst also talking about random stuff that is tangentially related to the trip. You never know, it might even be stapled if you're all very lucky...

Now might also be a good time to mention that James Bacon, co-chair of LX, the 2009 Eastercon, has asked me to do the LX newsletter, and I've accepted. This is probably the last issue of Procrastinations til Easter, so I figure I should let the people reading this zine know. The newsletter will feature contributions from a bunch of tremendously cool people (I've nabbed four really cool people for columns already, and I'm hoping to get a couple more). It ought to eventually be available on my page on eFanzines, alongside *Seductive Logic* and other issues of Procrastinations.

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