

I Say, Braaaaaains

BY NORM WILNER – 19 JUN 2022 – VIEW ONLINE →



Just out for a stroll, wot wot

Hey, everybody! I want to start with a confession: I'm still figuring out the newsletter format and not, like, a hundred percent sure the one I started with is ideal. Is a 2000-word missive about new physical-media releases ... too nerdy? Not nerdy enough? Too much? Too little?

I've been wondering this myself, and thinking about other ways I might be able to run **Shiny Things** in the weeks to come. I might break it into smaller pieces, each one an individual e-mail about a single title or two, arriving whenever they're ready ... but that pushes against my own need for consistency. I'm good with regular deadlines, without them I get a little twitchy. Which is why I started this newsletter in the first place, actually.

Thoughts? Weekly or whenever? I'll also still be writing about other stuff that interests me here and there, but the release schedule of the discs will inevitably dictate a lot of this. Unless two discs happen to arrive late, and give me the chance to devote an entire edition to old horror movies. Like, um, this one!

Made just eight years apart, and with the same essential motive – *hey, this genre is making money, let's get in on it* – but the results are very, very different.


Blu-ray Disc™

THE LIVING DEAD AT MANCHESTER MORGUE



Let's start with [The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue](#), which is easily the stronger of the pair. Produced in 1974 as a blatant ripoff of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* – zombies rise in an isolated location,

leaving attractive young people and a cranky older man arguing about how best to survive the night.

The setup is as simple as it gets: Boy (Ray Lovelock) meets girl (Christine Galbo), boy accompanies girl to pick up her ailing sister (Jeannine Mestre) and find themselves swept up in a mysterious wave of violent attacks happening in the North, leading a local detective (Arthur Kennedy) to conclude they're somehow responsible for the mayhem. But of course our heroes have nothing to do with the ravenous red-eyed maniacs stalking the countryside: It's the living dead, innit.

Released in various territories as *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie, Don't Open the Window* and, um, *Breakfast at Manchester Morgue, The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* can't quite match the cold, inexorable chill of Romero's original but it gives him a run for his money on allegory and splatter. The screenplay, by Sandro Continenza and Marcello Coscia, is built on a solid eco-horror foundation – the plague is the result of agricultural scientists employing radiation as a pesticide, because it's the '70s and radiation solves everything – and director Jorge Grau and his crew throw gallons of blood and viscera onto the screen.

Romero would reclaim his crown soon enough with Tom Savini's outlandish zombie carnage in *Dawn of the Dead*, but *Manchester Morgue* easily holds its own with the European horror wave spearheaded by Bava, Argento and Fulci. (There's also something subtly unsettling in the way the film shifts between English locations and Spanish sets; it's a necessary compromise that enhances rather than diminishes the aesthetic.)

Released in the U.S. on the bottom half of a double-bill with *Last House on the Left*, it didn't make the same impact on the popular imagination as Wes Craven's brutalizing reworking of *The Virgin Spring*, but I have to say I prefer it; *Last House* is a shocker but *Manchester Morgue* is a creeper, with more measured pacing and a strange sense of despair: Everyone's having a miserable time long before the dead start to walk.