

DEATHLESS IN SEATTLE

2010 ZOMBICON

By Roy Stevenson

TOURISTS AND VISITORS TO THE Seattle Center on the last weekend of October 2010 could well be excused for gathering their children close and avoiding eye contact with some rather disconcerting people. Especially when those people shuffled about with rigor mortis while chewing on bloody dismembered arms and legs.

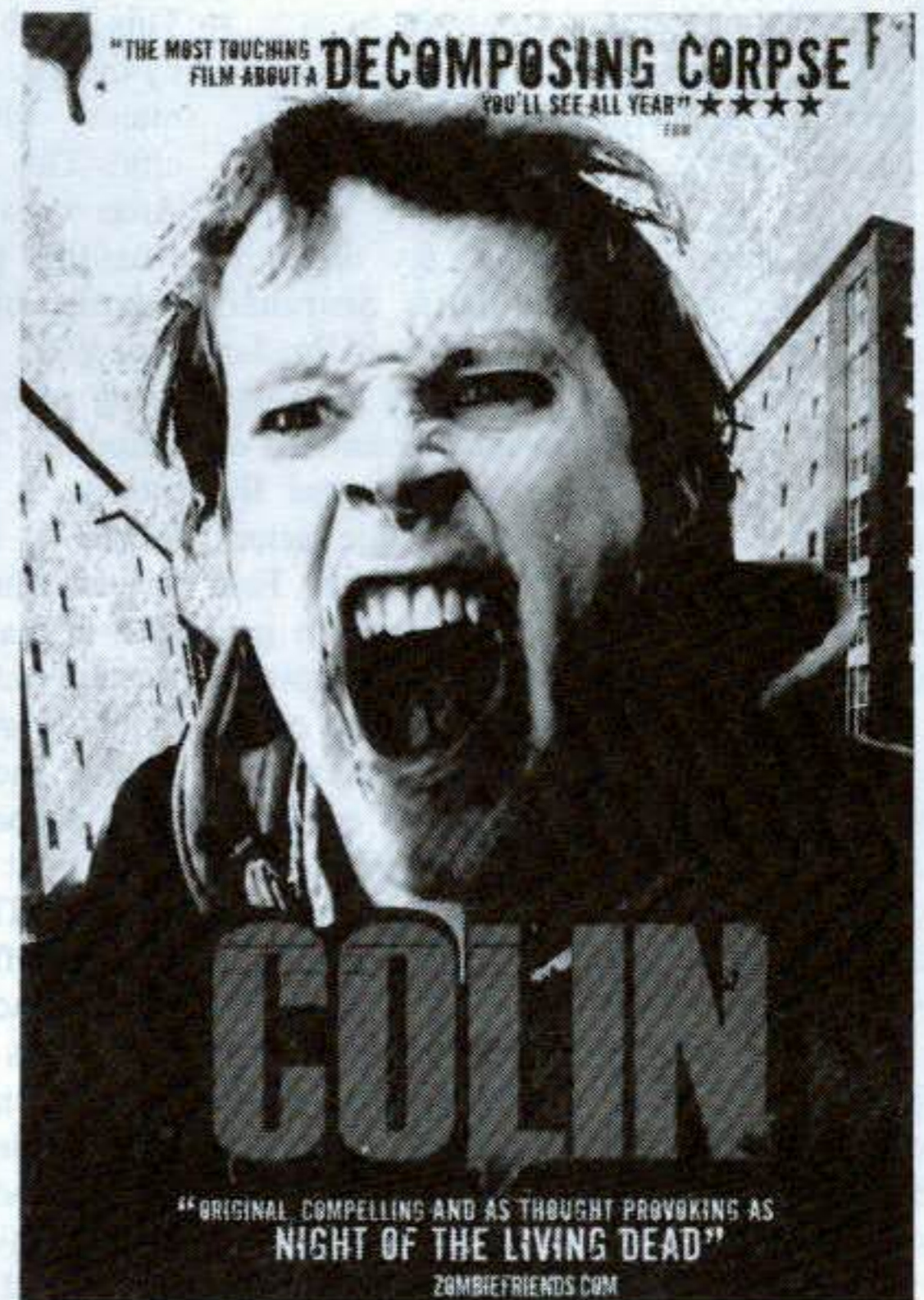
The inaugural Seattle ZomBcon infected several hundred rabid zombie fans at the Seattle Center Exhibition Hall from October 29-31. And there were some big guns there to greet them—famous genre actors and directors, including Bruce Campbell, Malcolm McDowell, author Max Brooks, and the granddaddy of the zombie cult, George Romero. Friday night got off to a great start with Romero introducing the black-and-white 1968 film that started it all: **Night of the Living Dead**. The tall, thin auteur was very modest about his movie and its impact and is, I suspect, more than a little bemused by the cult that this historic film has launched. Romero talked briefly about his film, then left us to it. Although there have been some 600 zombie movies made, **NOTLD** still stands out like a beacon above them all. *This* was where it all started. We watch in awe, even though we've seen this classic many times. Then, at midnight, Malcolm McDowell introduced **A Clockwork Orange** to an excited group of viewers. The next day at the exhibition hall, there was a 50-yard-long line of Romero fans, hamming it up with him as he signed their **NOTLD** posters and posed for photos. On Saturday morning, Bruce Campbell, of **The Evil Dead** trilogy, gave a hilarious presentation on *How to Kill a Zombie*. Later, I sat through a presentation by Dr. Steven Schlozman on Ataxic Neurodegenerative Satiety Deficiency Syndrome, the medical term for zombieism.

But I'm here to see the movies. I watch Welshman Marc Price's **Colin** (E1 Entertainment), of Cannes Film Festival fame: You know, the zombie film that cost 45 pounds (or \$75) to produce (most of which was spent on tea and coffee for the actors). The story has a twist that separates it from other zombie pics—it's filmed from the perspective of our hero Colin (Alastair Kirton), who is bitten by a zombie, dies, and of course returns from the dead. The story follows Colin as he staggers through suburbia (lensed in Swansea and London) encountering the living and the living dead, stopping here and there to snack on hapless survivors. Although **Colin** is shot

with too much of the jerking, disjointed style that seems popular in indies these days, the story is illustrated with enough violence, gore, chewing of entrails, rending of flesh, etc., to keep your attention. The "zombies crashing the household" scene is a harrowing, nonstop gorefest, worth the price of admission alone. Romero would have been proud. And this scene doesn't have a happy ending as the living succumb one by one to the roomful of hungry, clawing zombies, leaving only one girl to narrowly escape through a window. As the movie progresses, we learn who Colin was and see his distraught sister try to turn him back into a living being, with predictable results. Colin is captured by his sister's friends and strung up to a shower rod while she shows him family photos. Sadly, Colin is by this time well past such therapeutic measures. All in all, a great movie for a first-time director and cast. One wonders what Price could have done with a bigger budget like, say, 250 pounds. A well-deserved 3½ Ro-Man rating for **Colin**.

Next I attend the Northwest Zombie Filmmaker directors' panel and screenings and see three more outstanding zombie indies worthy of ranking alongside **Colin**. Scott Kragelund, Paul Cranefield, and Erik Van Sant's **The Book of Zombie** takes a rather scathing view of Mormons, as a small, sleepy Utah town gets an undead wake-up call when all of the townspeople of Mormon faith suddenly transform into flesh-eating ghouls. A few non-believers unaffected by the mysterious epidemic must band together to survive the night and answer the question: How do you kill a Mormon zombie? David (Brian Ibsen) and Jenny (Larisa Peters), a married couple, escape the zombies by hiding in a store where they find young storekeepers Darwin (Andrew Loviska) and Charlie (Paul Cantu) and chainsaw-wielding Boothe (Bill Johns). Eventually the group makes it to a bar, where some creative gore scenes unfold as the zombie attack heats up. After being bitten, Darwin is trussed up like a suicide bomber with cans of coke taped to him; caffeine is to the zombies what holy water is to vampires. Piper (Adrienne MacLain), the hard-as-nails barkeep, creatively dispatches zombies left, right and center with crossbows and anything else that comes to hand. Kragelund tells us that Mormons who have watched the film absolutely love it. This movie is professionally produced with solid camera work and good acting. The victims play it straight as they quote some ridiculous lines, all to great effect. Kragelund informs me that they used a shotgun with real bullets to blast a dummy head to pieces "seventy percent sure that no one would get hurt."

Patrick Horvath's **DIENER (get it?)** (Osiris Entertainment) is about Ken (Josh Grote), an unassuming sociopathic killer who comes across his own version of the "immovable object" when his



recent victims in an isolated roadside diner, waitress Rose (Maria Olsen) and cook Fred (Jorge Montalvo), return from the cooler where he's dumped their bodies. The only people he can call for help are the local sheriff and an unhappy married couple, the very people he is planning on killing next. The group finds itself stuck in the diner with zombies lurking outside, as the curious killer tries to sort out the mess. There's much high drama (well, as much as you could expect to find in a zombie movie) and good acting. **DIENER (get it?)** rates as another excellent zombie film by one of the most enthusiastic directors I've ever met.

Chris Diani's **Creatures from the Pink Lagoon** (Ariztical Entertainment) is a droll, irreverent, unforgettable black-and-white gay zombie comedy that plays out as a gay male melodrama filtered through the lenses of a 1950s B movie, with a highly entertaining outcome. Think Ed Wood and John Waters collaborating on a gay zombie movie and you might get some idea of this story about a group of gay males at a weekend reunion in a beach vacation house besieged by naughty zombies. Every gay cliché in the book is recycled with hilarious results. There's a cute zombie dance number on the beach, monster mosquitoes, and some great characters in this film. After the viewing, Diani tells us they used turkey meat for the human flesh-eating segments, recounting a scene where zombies are consuming the turkey, then regurgitating it back into a bowl, while other zombies eat the regurgitated food. That's dedicated acting for you.

Hopefully there will be more ZomBcons in Seattle. Certainly the movies, actors, and directors that ZomBcon artistic director Ryan Reiter amassed at the 2010 event were world class. ♂