**Alien. Dawn of the Dead**

**Hi-tech horror**

by Ernest Larsen

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In DAWN OF THE DEAD and ALIEN, the massive technology of the (near or far) future suffers an appalling breakdown in the face of an unexpected and overwhelming threat. In George Romero's DAWN OF THE DEAD, zombies prey like rabid dogs on the flesh of the hapless living, only rabid dogs were never that bad. In Ridley Scott's ALIEN a "near-perfect" but unfortunately ill-tempered organism chews up the crew of the huge mineral-laden space-freighter Nostromo. These tenuous plots recall Fifties "B" monster movies. But while the unabated vividness of their horror, their bleak visions of the future, and more importantly their moments of technical apocalypse refer these films more immediately to the now-gutted disaster genre, the last genre that battened and fattened on mass destruction and wholesale violence.

It's important to set these films firmly beside their predecessors, to make explicit what might otherwise seem like a purely contiguous temporal relationship. A popular return to the horror film — and these films are making money — marks another economic advance for Hollywood, especially when it occurs just as the depiction of slaughter was no longer selling. It seems to me frustrating and misleading always to treat such films as separate ideological artifacts, never to connect them to the larger structure that gives them existence. After putting the two films in a perspective of disaster and discussing them in that light, I'd like in turn to link those economics to the films, to show in specifics Hollywood's capital accumulation through disaster. And then finally to turn that around, to show how that material process of accumulation may itself permeate the ideological status of films like these. (Such thinking if pushed far enough might call itself dialectical.) The direct question — what does it mean to sell entertainment — is seldom answered intelligibly except as an abstraction.

For whatever reason the disaster film met its Armageddon at the box office. It has yet to decamp to the outer reaches of film history and probably won't so long as that feisty robot, Irwin Allen, producer of THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE (1972), BEYOND THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE (1979), THE SWARM (1978), et al., simulates life. Nevertheless, its energies have moved forward to roost comfortably and profitably on the horizon of the future. Philip Kaufman's successful ode to cloning INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS has come and gone. In its wake DEAD and ALIEN stalked the summer drive-ins and multiplexes. These films relocate disaster dead ahead of us. But if the disaster genre depicted the hostility of natural forces — earth, air, fire, and water — these films focus on the malevolence of supernatural force. To this extent, they also vampirishly cop energy from the waning success of occult films. ALIEN and DEAD share ground with the disaster film in their common declaration that these irrational forces reduce human action to a nullity. With these added virulent doses of energy, both occult and disaster, as well as the extraordinary jump in technical realism of special effects since the Fifties, ALIEN and DEAD approach a kind of super horror film.
The DEAD and ALIEN monsters represent a reassessment of the disaster films shopworn theme of Nature's impersonal terror. Without sacrificing the underlying allure of the irrational, monsters give audiences a personal one-on-one relationship with terror, terror with an almost human face. True well-maintained horror, I think, makes disaster more irrefutable. If you don't like earthquakes, move away from the fault line. Try moving away from a monster. In this sense horror subsumes nature in delivering it to the supernatural embrace of disaster. In addition, the relatively epic social canvas of the disaster film — from high-level professionals to low-level proletarians — is drastically abridged in ALIEN and DEAD to an embattled handful of isolated human beings. Oddly enough this double compression of the source and social scale of disaster only tends to increase the films' effectiveness as psychological manipulation. DEAD's varied tone undercuts this manipulation somewhat. It is often funny, despite decapitations, shootings, knifings, flesh-tearings and an occasional evisceration (especially vivid since one of the independently-produced DEAD's backers is a butcher). Not unaccountably, the audience I saw it with in San Diego's Sports Arena Sixplex audibly loved it. ALIEN viciously represses nearly everything except terror in order to terrorize its audience. The audience I saw it with in San Diego's Fashion Valley Four departed grumbling, appearing to loathe it for, I would wager, that very reason.

The disaster films, perhaps with the psychic impetus of Watergate, tended to reflect doubts about the manageability of American society. Typically these doubts were represented in two ways. On the one hand, we witness the incompetence and/or duplicity of the managerial elite. (I am generalizing here basically from the tedious plots of THE TOWERING INFERNO, EARTHQUAKE, and KING KONG, so I could be wrong.) On the other, natural disaster evinces the overweening folly and cupidity of the corporate managers, always up to no good and evoking havoc as a result. ALIEN and DEAD show ideological progress of a sort. Manageability is pretty much a dead letter, as it was in the first place. With Carter in office, who even thinks of it? The crisis lies essentially not in men (the managers) but in their instruments. The two films therefore reflect doubts about the role of technology in American society. They strike at their quarry from opposite sides. DEAD sees the problem from the leisure-consumerist side, ALIEN from the worker-producer side. Together they make a fairly stunning case, to the extent to which they dare to be explicit. I will examine the work side first, then the play side, since that's how most of us lead our lives. Then I will try to show how these films' doubts may have grown out of the process and economics of American commercial filmmaking itself.

I take it for granted that on any level that counts all sci-fi is about the present not the future. ALIEN's present commences with pans and tracking shots that introduce us to an exclusively technological environment before a single person appears. This emphasis on the dominant role of technology is maintained throughout, a characteristic ALIEN shares with most recent space movies. But Scott's direction of the actors generalizes this dominance. His use of inaudible overlapping dialogue has the effect of spreading anxiety to the audience. We don't know what they're talking about — but it can't be good or they'd be speaking up. Close ups tend to be intercut or crosscut, giving the feeling that the non-star actors are clinging to their anonymity. Tight cutting clips every emotion. Since we are never warned when the monster will strike, it is the environment itself that appears to exude fear.

That environment is a grubby rusted-out factory in the stars. Ruling it and directing the crew is a computer they call Mother. This coy but characteristic reference perpetuates into the hypothetical future an image of the protective mother who, as it turns out later, is a betrayer. A betrayer who is not just motherly, but also a machine — not aberrant like Hal in 2001, but designed to betray its users. Mother awakens the crew, cryogenically suspended in their glassy cocoons, to investigate an alien signal. They set up a chorus of complaints, cross-complaints, and
dutiful compliance. Two of the crew even protest against hunting for the alien on the grounds that it's not in the contract, a claim quickly confuted by the captain. "It's in the fine print." In short, they behave like all union employees are supposed to behave, in the most abrasive, reductive sense, with continual cracks about contracts, shares, overtime, and the Company. These wisecracks never jell enough to give us a sense of workers' shared camaraderie as in THE THING (1951). Instead the bickering bespeaks mutual isolation. The alien hunt, an unexplained quest on an inhospitable planet, quickly abbreviates the too-glib irony of these highly stereotyped social relations extending so far into the future.

The film thereafter becomes a contest among two, perhaps three, forms of rationality. The major contestants are Ash, the crew scientist, and Ripley, the do-it-by-the-book second-in-command, and perhaps the monster. Rationality, in this case, as in all factories, means getting the job done, not thinking about whether the job is worth doing, why do it, or in whose interests it s to do it. That Ripley is played by a woman (believe it or not) is due solely to the box office savvy of Twentieth-Century Fox president Alan Ladd, Jr., who altered the original screenplay conception of an all-male crew. After the alien attacks and plasters itself to a crew member on the hunt, Ripley attempts to refuse him re-entry to the freighter on grounds of contamination. Ash circumvents her rational but obviously one-sided order, at first in the name of Science, but later in the interests of the Company. Except for one other scene, the rest of the film is devoted to a chase between monster and crew.

Unlike Fifties sci-fi movies which always boasted at least one love affair, ALIEN represses nearly every hint of affective relationships. It represses Nature since there is only the factory. It represses both sleep and time since there is always cryogenics. It even represses good food. There is only work. When a question arises, thinking is abjured, the crew runs to Mother. The crew's dependent totally parasitic relationship to their employer turns upside down the actual social relations of worker to capitalist, in which the capitalist is far more dependent on the worker. This repellent backdrop, a totalized environment, factory as home, therefore offers no relief from the horrors of the monster, who somewhat like the monster of 20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH (1957), metamorphoses at an alarming rate, from slimy fetal egg, to parasitic octopus with acid blood, to intestinal viper bursting from a crew man's stomach during dinner, to toothy Jaws-type monster suffering from manic sweats of vaseline, to, in a final appearance, a giant gray-skinned grabby tinkertoy.

As the alien sets about waylaying the increasingly desperate crew in assorted dank corridors of the freighter, all of Ash's scientific suggestions prove valueless. Suspicious, Ripley questions Mother, who refuses aid. As realization dawns that Ash is a saboteur, a fight scene ensues in which the middle-aged middle-sized Ash tosses the formidable Ripley about effortlessly. In the one interesting scene in the film, its dramatic heart in fact, the black crewman Parker to the rescue smashes Ash, Elmer's glue spurting from the scientist's machine-body. Ash turns out to be a robot fraudulently sent as a scientist by the Company to ensure the capture of the alien, the near-perfect organism, for research and development as a weapon. Not only is the Company perfectly happy to dispose of the entire crew if need be in favor of a monster, but unknown to the crew a second monster in their midst, a robot, sabotages their mission at every turn. This scene as played is genuinely surprising, the remaining crew members pathetically, hopelessly dependent on a robot. Once smashed and beheaded, Ash must be rewired while strewn on the floor to speak oracularly to them about their fate and then smashed again with renewed fury.

This scene epitomizes the film's representation of technology. The ostensible enemy in the film is the unknown, the supernatural monster. The actual enemy is the system, the Company, unseen and unrepresented except by its technology. The managers kicked around in the disaster films have vanished. In their stead the workers scurry...
around helplessly, unaware until too late that they’re under the
domination of a malevolent technology. A cheap irony perhaps, but not
so cheap — since the film itself is a $10 million monster using its
technological force to control its audience. The film does depict
organized attempts to deflect the monster but these are half-hearted
and display reasoning worthy of a six-year-old. The screenwriters are
more anxious to trot out once again the lonely bitter triumph of an
individual American. Instead of John Wayne we get the modern twist:
the resourceful woman defeats the alien in the end. (But not before an
exploitative scene in which Ripley strips before the alien.) The question
is which absolutism is more attractive: 1) the myth of the supernatural,
2) the myth of the lonely hardworking hero, or 3) the myth of the all-
powerful Company? ALIEN torturously balances all three on a fairly
tawdry, highly cynical, but not that experientially inaccurate
interpretation of technology. The crew of the Nostromo consents to be
governed by technology (in the service of the company), and then is
betrayed by it. Isn’t this a daily experience?

DAWN OF THE DEAD begins in the workaday world. Two experts sit in
a TV studio discussing the widespread outbreaks of the flesh-eating
zombies. This pair turns up on screen several times later, on each
each occasion their expertise more ragged and inane until finally they don’t
show up at all. Behind the camera, with panic setting in, a pregnant TV
technician and her pilot husband arrange a later getaway via helicopter.
Cut without explanation to SWAT-team members scouring a black
housing project of the rampaging dead. This ambiguous scene oddly
resembles a fascist purge of undesirables, in this case zombie blacks,
but is so unresolved as to remain unclear. The two SWAT men, one
black and one white, desert, and in the next scene join the technician
and pilot as they prepare to take off. Eventually, after a series of literally
hair-raising episodes in the countryside and low on gas, the helicopter
lands atop a huge abandoned shopping center. Here the “normals” hope
to be on ground high enough to escape total engulfment by the
zombies.

As the remainder of the film unfolds in this consumer paradise, director
Romero garnishes the violence with satire. Led by the fanatically
enterprising SWAT men, whose military training in these dire straits is
absolutely necessary, the four set about depopulating the shopping
center of zombies. While disposing of the twice-dead bodies (with
typical screenwriter’s overestimation of intelligence, only a shot to the
brain or spinal cord can terminate a zombie) the four wonder
breathlessly why the zombies are so attracted to the shopping center.
They conclude that the dead are irresistibly drawn to the place that
meant the most to them when alive. Cut to zombies banging their heads
against the plate glass. The sound has the ring of truth.

Survival, you’d think would be the basic issue in this situation. But you’d
be wrong. The SWAT men are so attracted to the wealth of consumer
products awaiting them outside their little storeroom that they make
forays into the zombies’ midst, braving the most revolting death
imaginable for tape cassettes, fine liqueurs, a jogging suit. They
discover the control room and bring the shopping center to life: lights,
muzak, taped announcements, indoor fountain. Zombies on chaotic
parade through the mall parody the hardly less grotesque behavior of
real shoppers, strutting stiff-limbed through the circus of inert products,
just another sale day. Romero thoughtfully provides a full range of
American stereotyped zombies, including a pink-robed Hare Krishna
devotee indistinguishable from the zombies on the street corners of
every big city. The effect is not subtle but it is certainly kinetic.

Just as the Nostromo freighter totally dominates its crew, so the
shopping center, an environment of approximately equal dimensions,
totally reshapes the lives of the normals in DEAD. In a detailed series of
tableaux, Romero documents a shift from a spartan existence of Spam,
work clothes, and bare storerooms to the best that looting can buy,
“gourmet” foods, off the rack fashions, and department store modern
furnishings. At each transition the normals improve their standard of living, rubbing it in that the best place to live nowadays is right in the shopping center. The lonely normals — the TV no longer broadcasting — undertake a lifestyle of enforced decadence in which the only absolutely useless commodity is money. Finally it's a case of all dressed up and nowhere to go. DEAD makes the unassailable point that once the struggle for survival is won, the American celebration of consumerist leisure leads directly to a struggle to stay awake. The enormity of the technology with which the normals surround themselves is paralleled by the boredom it induces.

Romero himself resorts to one of the worst clichés of Sixties B-films, the marauding motorcycle gang, to rescue his narrative from premature burial. The appearance of the gang leads all too predictably to another overlong but well-edited montage of graphic violence. It does make one point. Those most fit to survive in a civilization of zombies — in modern America in other words — are apt to be either marauding barbarians, a paramilitary outfit, or the military itself. Romero's attack on consumerist technology thus centers on its ability to denude human beings of anything beyond significant motor response. In DEAD the return of the dead tends to signify the revenge of the inert mass of humanly created things, the physical weight of the past, on future life. Leisure in DEAD is an antidote to nothing except time.

Taken as opposite sides of the coin of our existence, work and leisure, ALIEN and DEAD together advance the metallic notion that modern technology is so overwhelming that it tends to obliterate any possibility of its liberatory use. Another way to put it is that modern technology is already far too useful, that science or instrumental reason, far from being value free, has as the handmaiden of capitalism, created an uncontrolled monster. (A remark from Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is of some relevance here: "Natural science has the same structure as a machine: it is controlled by a totalizing thought which enriches it and finds applications for it and, at the same time, the unity of its movement (accumulation) totalizes ensembles and systems of a mechanical order for man (sic).") The problematic nature of modern technology is a matter of intense theoretical dispute on the left. Beyond their ideological status, monster films like these are at least significant for their role in contributing to the sustenance of monster capital in the strictly economic terms of production and distribution. I'd like to describe that role somewhat and then pose one additional question: To what degree are the new horror films distorted reflections of Hollywood's recent economic practice?

Since DEAD is an independent, i.e., non-Hollywood production and I have less information on it, I'd like to begin by making some remarks on ALIEN as a consumer product. Fox president Alan (or is it Alien?) Ladd, Jr., another of Hollywood's hereditary elite, aside from altering the conception of an all-male crew, has made two further contributions. First he drastically upgraded ALIEN's production budget from $2 million to $10 million. Little of this cash went into the pockets of the people who worked on the film. It went into hardware, i.e., sets, i.e., technology. Romero used readymade sets for his film, principally a $50 million shopping center near Pittsburgh and used them with far more imagination than Scott did his tailor-made Nostromo. But Ladd saw that spending more for flash could lift a standard B script to A glory and bring Fox that much more receipts. This incidentally is a considerably crasser procedure than was likely in the mythical old Hollywood, where an A production ordinarily meant an A production, not a good disguise.

Second, Ladd allocated $6 million — or 60% of the film's total cost — for advertising the film. If you escaped an early summer full-page color ad for ALIEN you can be sure your seeing-eye dog didn't. This blitz, another manifestation of the usefulness of technology (if you happen to be Alan Ladd), resulted in instantaneous lines at the lucky theaters showing ALIEN.

Maybe you thought I was just showing off earlier by mentioning in which
theaters I saw ALIEN and DEAD. Not on your life. I wish to use those theaters as a partial example of some technical factors contributing to that boom. Anyone reading Variety regularly could come up with a similar account of the unprecedented box-office sweep. The factor most often cited is the films themselves with reference to the blockbuster phenomenon. That certain films do remarkably well at the box office may have some interesting ideological implications, but it does little to explain the fact that there are always two to six films in distribution which among them gross 30%-60% of the entire box office. Since 1971 the Hollywood studios have directly fostered this pattern. The means the studios use to create this pattern explain half of the monetary success they've had. The other half is explained by a host of technological and labor rationalizing techniques on the levels of distribution and exhibition.

The devoted attentions of studios and exhibitors has meant that box office receipts have more than doubled since '71. Here is a short picture of how it worked. Faced with a long decline ('46-71) in business, studios cut back on the numbers of films produced. Inner-city theaters and drive-ins began to fold. The reduced product number meant that the now multinational and affiliated studios had to devote more money and time to pre-selling techniques as well as to finance research projects into what makes films popular with audiences. For example, a Columbia VP hired a research agency "to figure out how we might affect this process of word of mouth." The pre-sell techniques meant saturation advertising and a new awareness that the box office life of even very popular films was likely to be very short. As theaters dwindled, studios began changing distribution patterns. Instead of a first-run at high ticket prices in a single theater in a city, the studios opened films in a number of theaters in a single city. This meant that patrons who would ordinarily wait for a flick to come to the low-priced "nabe" would now be much more likely to shell out for the first run. Films were kept longer and longer in these key situations, and the smaller theaters found business almost exhausted by the time a hit reached them. Ticket prices rose everywhere with the first-run films.

The studios increased their market value with pre-sell of yet unreleased films to TV, as well as assorted tie-ins, including novelizations, star scrapbooks, and merchandise. The studios are now on the verge of a whole new era in which they can broaden their methods of distribution of filmed product even more dramatically: the dawning era of pay TV, videotape, video-disc, and satellite transmission. Fewer filmed products means that films more than ever must be an instant success or they disappear. They must appeal either to a very broad audience, which usually means resort to the "lowest common denominator" or to a special interest group, i.e., the film SKATEBOARD.

On the exhibition level, theaters like the San Diego Sports Arena Sixplex are a relatively recent phenomena. The six screens are each roughly the size of a bedspread after laundering. 35mm films accordingly lose their normal scope and 70mm films are impossible. Seats and aisles are narrower so that more patrons can be squeezed in. In days gone by ushers led a dilatory existence. Now at the same minimum wage ushers must be experts in crowd control, herding waiting masses from street to seat and back again. The Sports Arena Sixplex ushers must constantly check color-coded tickets for the six screens. The DEAD showing was deliberately staggered to give the embarrassed kids time to hawk candy and popcorn in the aisles as the restless audience heckled them. When the show did start we were treated to a commercial for the L.A. Times, which was roundly hissed but makes a little more for the chain-owned theaters.

Theaters like this normally hire a single projectionist for the six screens. Since projection equipment has been modernized, this doesn't mean that projectionists necessarily work six times as hard like the ushers. It does mean that faults in projection — bad focus, low sound — are more likely to go unnoticed longer. In other words the more technology advances the less likely you are to see a film the way it was made to be...
With the advent of the recent Christie automated projection system, more projectionists are being put out of work. Who's going to sharpen the focus when there is no one in the booth?

How is this brief economic recital related to the experience represented in ALIEN and DEAD? Could Hollywood, for example, in its inexorable rationalization of labor, in its unceasing march of new technology and up-to-date technical thinking be the Company wiping out anyone in its way—worker, consumer, usher, projectionist, moviegoer? In the postwar years through '71 the film industry was suffering its own disaster. Thus when the industry began making disaster films in '72 it had its own long history of disastrous mismanagement for material upon which to reflect. There was no question about who was to blame either in the industry or in the films — the managers, certainly not the capitalists. Since this public acknowledgement Hollywood has been seeking the near-perfect organism, which from all indications would be the film that everyone would flock to see over and over again for the rest of their lives at first-run prices. These new horror films with their drastic reduction in source and social scale of disaster may represent another acknowledgement on Hollywood's part: the as yet unknown source of economic disaster still stalks the industry but it has been localized, and it no longer terrorizes the whole industry, only parts of it. But it sure is a monster and in a way it is more terrifying than ever.

Maybe the likes of ALIEN and DEAD are Hollywood's revenge on us for this uneasy state of affairs. In both films the struggle against technology is never articulated beyond the most primitive dog-eat-zombie level, which would seem to indicate the industry's contempt for the common ability to struggle. Even in the better of the two films, DAWN OF THE DEAD, in the end the monsters are still alive and well, awaiting the sequel.

Dawn of the Dead is a 2004 American remake of George Romero's 1978 original Dawn of the Dead. The remake and original both depict a handful of human survivors living in a shopping mall surrounded by swarms of Zombies, but the details differ significantly. After finishing a long shift as a nurse, Ana, returns to her suburban Milwaukee neighborhood and her husband, Luis. Caught up in a scheduled date night, the two miss an emergency news bulletin on television. The next morning, a zombified neighborhood Dawn of the Dead Hi-tech horror. by Ernest Larsen. from Jump Cut, no. 21, Nov. 1979, pp. 1, 12, 30 copyright Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media, 1979, 2005. In DAWN OF THE DEAD and ALIEN, the massive technology of the (near or far) future suffers an appalling breakdown in the face of an unexpected and overwhelming threat. In George Romero's DAWN OF THE DEAD, zombies prey like rabid dogs on the flesh of the hapless living, only rabid dogs were never that bad. In Ridley Scott's ALIEN a "near-perfect" but unfortunately ill-tempered organism chews up the crew of the huge Action, Horror, Thriller, USA, Canada, Japan, France, Mall, Nurse, Shopping Mall, Survival, Flesh Eating, Zack Snyder, Sarah Polley, Ving Rhames, Jake Weber, Mekhi Phifer, Ty Burrell. Layarkaca21 Lk21 Dunia21 Page [1]. Download Film Ini Petunjuk Cara Mendownload. Nonton Dawn of the Dead (2004) Film Subtitle Indonesia Streaming Movie Download Gratis OnlineDownload Film BluRay Layarkaca21 Lk21 Dunia21. Kualitas. BluRay.