



THE BEGINNING
The poster that
started the
movement.

The Walking Dead of Wall Street



How a rag-tag group of the dissatisfied are taking on big business - and how it feels a lot like surviving the zombie apocalypse. By Josh Kim

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARIO TAMA

The sky is grey and the weather is cold. Desperate people huddle together and fight for their survival. They realize that banding together is the only way to overcome oppressively large horde of ravenous, insatiable beasts they stand against. The resilient rebels have built makeshift hospitals and are sharing food, but their cooperation seems like losing battle against the insatiable, unfeeling horde they stand united against. And what's worse, many don't know of these brave souls' struggle. It seems they're destined to be devoured by the relentless onslaught of their adversaries, frenzied and all consuming, with no compassion or regard for humanity. Yes, the protesters at Occupy Wall Street seem doomed to defeat, like a small group trying to survive in an apocalyptic wasteland overrun by the undead.

On Saturday, September 17th, 2011, a flood of protesters (at the urging of Canadian anti-consumerist magazine AdBusters and the widespread proliferation of the call to arms echoed by the now infamous Internet group, Anonymous) infiltrated one of the most powerful institution in our country: the big banks of Wall Street. More than a month later, they're still there. Set-up with makeshift "hospitals" and bathing facilities, it looks like the occupation is in it for the long haul. Despite what critics from the opposition might say, there is a strong unified desire underlying the multiplicity of demands the movement is fighting for: survival. And, the longer and longer this struggle continues, the more it starts to look familiar. The movement itself is starting to look a lot like something straight out of Romero movie's script.

JOSH KIM is an English and Creative Writing student at the University of Michigan. He is a writer of fiction and lover of all things zombies. This is his first article for *Tumbling Rock*.

Perhaps the best-known director of the genre he essentially created, George A. Romero and his zombie movies have always been a great Halloween-season staple. Creating a name for himself with *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968, Romero permanently revolutionized the way we think of the zombie. Before Romero, zombie movies were goofy exercises in "popcorn horror" that lacked depth and verged on the ridiculous; zombies were creatures that existed as the effect of an esoteric biological consequence, magic, or even the divine which is rarely, if ever, explained in any film. Before 1968, Zombies were undead and wanted to eat you, and that was that.

But Romero's movies have always been a just little more sophisticated than the blood, and guts splattering, straight forward scare-the-shit-out-

of-you horror movies Hollywood's so keen to provide its patrons anymore. Unlike films such as Sam Raimi's classic *Evil Dead* trilogy, or even Zack Snyder's remake Romero's classic, *Dawn of the Dead* (both good movies, in their own right), George has a special way of inserting wry bits of social commentary and criticism in his movies. Take, for example, what most zombiephiles would agree is his greatest work would be the 1978 classic, *Dawn of the Dead*. In it, a small band of survivors find themselves in the middle of a society that's tearing apart at its seams because some unidentifiable cause is making the recently deceased to reanimate and feed on the living. The four survivors (Peter, Francine, Stephen, and Roger) narrowly escape Philadelphia and find themselves seeking refuge in a (supposedly abandoned) shopping



Dawn of the Dead

Romero's 1978 classic makes use of zombie horror to lampoon society's shallow preoccupation with material goods and consumer culture. Social commentary became a hallmark of Romero's "dead" series.

mall. The mall is, of course, crawling with undead masses, just waiting to sink their teeth in to the survivors. After clearing out the mall of every last zombie and barricading the doors to prevent any other threats from breaking in, the survivors realize they're in an abandoned mall, with no one to stop them from enjoying every single last indulgence they desire, free from material cost or obligation.

Shortly though, they realize just how empty their now "rich" lives are and want nothing more than to escape. At the film's climax, another group of survivors comes to the mall in the form of a rogue biker gang. This gang is loud, abrasive, and reckless; they break in to the mall and, in doing so let the horde that's collected outside in to the sanctuary the focal group of survivors have established. In the end, only Francine and Peter escape, the rest left to feast upon Stephen and the errant biker gang (Roger was bitten and thus, zombified earlier in the movie).

The film is a satirical diatribe against how empty and "dead" consumerist culture is. The survivors are consumers who become enlightened, realizing material goods hold

The observation underscores just how ridiculous it is that goods, which are essentially useless in a survivalist sense of the word, are placed at the center of our cultures motivation. And if the survivors are the victims of consumerism, then the zombies must be the sad souls clinging to it, hopelessly drawn back to the hubs of corporate wealth generation, desperate to feed on the poor, outnumbered survivors, whether they're the heroes or the bikers. No one is safe, everyone's scared, and there aren't many viable options that lead to an agreeable outcome for any of the living.

But how do Romero and his zombies have anything to do with what's happening on Wall Street? It's pretty astonishing how the two line up; all you have to do is substitute character symbolism from the movie with what's going on now. Take the mall, for example. It not only stands to represent the issue being satirized by Romero, but it's also the battleground between the survivors, the zombies, and eventually the biker gang. Sounding familiar yet? Wall Street is the mall. Once the domain of the "dead", then in-

the survivors about five thousand-to-one in a movie or television scenario, and big bank CEOs and the wealthiest of the wealthy really only make up one percent of our population. But the data shows, that this one-percent, though small, controls sixty-percent of the national wealth. The protesters aren't outnumbered, but their resources can't even begin to match that of the Wall Street elite. According to a Business Insider chart created from research done at UC Santa Cruz, the average CEO pay is currently *three-hundred-and-fifty times more than what the average American worker takes home*. The same report shows that CEO pay has increased three-hundred percent in the last twenty-one years. The more there is for the bankers and big business CEOs of America, the less there is for everyone else—kind of like the zombies, and how the more they feed upon the living, the less of the living there are. And, like the undead masses in *Dawn of the Dead*, the institutions being protested against seem to be driven instinctually by one thing and one thing only. Zombies want only to feed, business, to make profits. Neither have much regard for how achieving their goals will affect

“THE AVERAGE CEO PAY IS CURRENTLY THREE-HUNDRED-AND-FIFTY TIMES WHAT THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WORKER TAKES HOME.”

little real value, and the zombies exist only to feed on the consumer. Looking over the ruins of the parking lot from the mall's roof, Francine asks Stephen why the zombies seem to be gathering at the mall. "Some kind of instinct," he says. "Memory, of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives."

filtrated and occupied by the "survivors", it's become the center of the debate; an epicenter of the struggle between the group in power and those disenfranchised by it.

And if the mall is Wall Street, then that makes the big bank CEOs the living dead incarnate. Sure, a zombie horde typically outnumbers

the population they prey on so mercilessly.

But these businesses and companies seem crueler than the zombie horde. A zombie is an empty, soulless shell, wandering aimlessly in search of sustenance it needs to survive; the bankers and CEOs are living, breathing human beings,

who are conscious of how their actions are affecting the country and how everyday they're widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. During the early stages of the protests, bankers and traders could be seen looking down on the movement from bank balconies while sipping champagne. How much clearer a message could they send? They're destroying the people they depend on, consuming them without pausing for a moment to think about the implications of their actions, and they simply don't care. Cannibalism comes to mind, something worse than zombies altogether. Cannibals consume members

cooperation is the only weapon they have. Like the characters that occupy the mall in *Dawn of the Dead*, the Wall Street protesters have seen the effects of greedy consumerism have done to their lives, and realize that, for all the immediate joys material luxuries can bring, they're meaningless when there's a lack of access to necessities.

A common criticism of the movement comes from the conservative right: these people don't know what they want, there's no leadership, there's no unifying demand; they're the perpetually lazy, bored trust-fund babies with nothing better to do, to paraphrase conserva-

idea of when they'll be able to find their next meal. Protesters. Survivors. The line is starting to blur.

Let's not forget though, that Occupy Wall Street protesters aren't the only survivors in this movie. What about the raiders? They're loud, they're brash, and they end up messing up a pretty good thing for themselves and the main cast of the survivors, while also managing to turn the tide of the struggle in favor of the common enemy. When put into these terms, the raiders begin to sound a lot like the Tea Party movement. Both the Occupy Wall Street protesters and the Tea Partiers have been com-

“THEY’RE THE PERPETUALLY LAZY, BORED TRUST-FUND BABIES WITH NOTHING BETTER TO DO.”

of the same species. Zombies aren't people anymore. What's Wall Street's excuse?

So then, where does that leave our survivors, struggling against the masses of the hungry, once-living that want nothing better than to feed on them? Sure, the Wall Street bankers and CEOs only make up an oft-quoted “one-percent” of the population, but they control the majority of the wealth, and thus the majority of the power and the voice in politics. This is what the protestors are struggling against. Without a voice in the government, or even a way for the middle and lower classes, they are literally fighting for their right to exist in the eyes of policy makers. And they're losing.

The “survivors” occupying Wall Street must necessarily band together to stand any chance against the behemoth forces they oppose;

super star, Rush Limbaugh. But, the accusation doesn't seem to hold water, despite containing a glimmer of truth. No, there's no leadership, and yes, many of the protesters seem to be protesting different things: oppressive student loan debt, bonuses for CEOs that are more than what the average American worker makes in a year, predatory loaning practices—the list goes on. The protesters are sick and tired of the government getting into bed with the corporate sector for an extra dollar here and there while it ignores the problems of the people that power it. They're sick of not knowing whether or not they'll have a job from one day to the next. They're sick of being told to go back to work, when for every open position there are four unemployed people to fill the position. They're sick of being eaten alive. Each survivor in an zombie scenario wants something different, whether it's safety for their family, or simply an

pared to each other recently, much to the chagrin of each. In fairness though, and completely separate from their respective political platforms, both stand out as radical movements, the likes of which we haven't seen in our political sphere for quite a bit. While critics have dismissed the Occupy protests as disorganized and lacking a unified goal, let's remind ourselves that the Tea Party has also been widely criticized for being reckless, and extreme. The two are similar. The first paragraph on the Tea Party's official “About Us” page ends saying, “From our founding, the Tea Party represents the voice of the true owners of the United States: WE THE PEOPLE.” Substitute “Tea Party” for “Occupy Wall Street” and it's a sign you'd expect to see being carried around Zucotti Park. .

But the two groups refuse to accept the comparisons between the movements, fearing an association with radicalism. Unfortunately for

So... What is a Zombie?

Zombies have been horror movie fodder for as long as film has been an industry. But the history of the zombie actually stretches back much further. The Oxford English dictionary defines zombies as “a soulless corpse said to have been revived by witchcraft.”

The zombie’s history is rooted in the religious and spiritual beliefs that were prominent in the West Indies and the Caribbean, particularly in Haitian folklore. Voodoo, though familiar to the western world as a cultish practice associated with dark magic, is actually a widely practiced spirituality in Haitian culture from which the English word “zombie” comes. In voodoo, a *zombi* is simply a person who is possessed and typically under the control of a sorcerer. From that term, writers like HP Lovecraft took inspiration from the frightening, voodoo images of the wandering, mindless, once-human-now-undead

shell and began introducing the mythology of the zombie into horror and science fiction stories. These proliferated amongst the masses, beginning the canonization of one of modern horror’s more immediately recognizable icons. Soon thereafter, they began popping up in low-budget horror movies.

The zombie as we know it today—the shambling, rotted corpse of a person, often seen traveling in groups and hungering for brains—can be attributed to no other than George A. Romero. With the release of *Night of the Living Dead* at the end of the 1960’s, Romero transformed the monster into a medium, and created the quintessential zombie movie. Romero revolutionized a genre and is still being refer-

enced by the zombie filmmakers of today, even as he continues to put new entries into his famed “dead” series. His movies have been remade a number of times, perhaps most famously in the 1993 update of *Night of the Living Dead* and in Zack Snyder’s 2004 reboot of arguably the



most important film in the series, *Dawn of the Dead*. Snyder’s interpretation was met with mixed reactions and still acts as the center around which one of the most troubling and contentious debates about zombies amongst the connoisseurs of media involving them continues to rage: just how fast can a zombie move? Romero’s original zombies are by-and-large the most often witnessed form of the creature: slow, dull-witted, and only truly dangerous in groups. Snyder’s remimagined them as jerky, quick moving wads of hungry meat and instinct; a visceral horror that focused on the

the violence of the creature rather than the phenomenon of its existence. But which is the *true* zombie?

There’s still no consensus on what a zombie actually is; no one can say for sure whether it’s a soul possessed by a voodoo priest in some far off place or the result of some terrible scientific experiment gone horribly wrong. Even the most contemporary portrayals of the zombie are at odds with the question. Referred to as “walkers” in the AMC breakout hit, *The Walking Dead*, the zombies still manage to, for the most part, move at a menacing enough pace to have claimed no less than a dozen lives since the show first aired on Halloween last year. No matter the case, one point can be agreed upon: what a zombie is, is hungry, and you look mighty tasty.

each side, the image has already been established. It's understandable to see why Occupy Wall Street would be wary of associating with the extremeness of the Tea Party; how would anyone take the movement seriously? Remember though, that the Tea Party was written off at its inception as a group of fringe conservatives that didn't have enough of a backing to ever make a "real difference." Fast-forward to 2011, and we find ourselves having to face the realization that a Tea Party sympathizer could very well be our next Republican presidential candidate. If Occupy Wall Street would take a cue, perhaps the movement would see that the comparison could potentially work in its favor.

The problem with the Tea Party though, is that it seems to refuse to align with anyone but the big banks of the private sector. Like the raiders, they've been breaking into the battleground, firing off dissenting opinions and criticism after criticism, without realizing they may actually be screwing themselves in the process. The Michele Bachmanns, and Rick Perrys, and Sarah Palins of this country are entering the fray, left and right, when time after time, they've proven they have little to bring to the table other than loudmouthed opinions and a lack of hard facts. They burst into the arena, guns blazing, ready to burn down everything (and everyone) in their paths for themselves. They don't ever seem to realize that, no matter how much ass they kiss, no matter how voraciously they show they're all for big business, they're just dollar figures, just meat to these companies. Like the raiders, they will be devoured, mercilessly without a second thought, and that will be the end of the story. They're fighting a war against the people they should be working with, while the real threat slowly closes in amid the confusion.

Because in truth, their enemy



Which is Which?

A top-bottom comparison of Occupy Wall Street and a Tea Party rally.

is one in the same. The Tea Party opposes taxation and how much control the government has. On the flip side, Occupy Wall Street has had it with Wall Street seducing Capitol Hill with big bucks in order to favorably influence financial and economic policy. But, if Wall Street is paying off the government in order to have a larger say in the law-making in the legislature, then isn't it Wall Street that actually has the control? The government is a tool of Wall Street's, and Wall Street needs to government to protect its exploitation of the majority of the population. It's a twisted, symbiotic relationship that the tea partiers and the 99-percenters need to come together and start fighting against. Rule #1 of surviving the zombie

apocalypse is that there is strength in numbers; break it, and you'll find yourself becoming a snack to fuel the soulless machines you tried to escape in no time. If only the raiders had worked with the survivors instead of breaking into the mall without forethought, maybe they would have survived instead. Instead they end up quick, easy meal.

The parallels we find ourselves living in are frightening. Romero knew that zombies weren't scary because of their grotesqueness, or because of some kind of quasi-"uncanny valley" effect; zombies are scary because they can represent that which in real life frightens us the most. With many



left wondering what will happen to the Occupy protesters as the movements spreads (like a zombie outbreak) from New York to 70-some-odd major cities across the globe, it gets harder and harder to question the similarities.

Expanding on Romero's myths, Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, a comic series turned television juggernaut thanks to the people at AMC, uses characters much the way Romero does; to create symbolism and harsh, often scathing commentary on the nature of humanity and society. At the end of the fourth volume, the series' protagonist, Rick, makes an impassioned speech, in which he boldly claims, "We **are** the walking dead." The zombies aren't necessarily the bad guys; they're incidental obstacles, incapable of consciously harming anyone. They're empty shells driven by instinct. The real enemies are the living, and what people can do to each other in dire times of need and extreme stress.

A Bold Claim

Rick, of Robert Kirkman's comic series, *The Walking Dead*, realizes the living are, in fact, the real enemy.

One of Romero's latest installments in the "dead" series, *Land of the Dead*, was released in 2005—three years before our most serious economic troubles started. In the movie, a civilization of survivors has penned itself behind a fence, protecting the city they live in. While the majority of the survivors struggle to find food and clean water, a very small portion (perhaps one-percent?) live luxuriously above the plebian masses. From "Fiddler's Green," the towering apartment building to which only the rich are allowed access, the wealth and supplies are controlled and distributed to the rest of the fort's population. In the end though, the zombie horde overcomes the entire city and devours its inhabitants with no regard for rich or poor.

Maybe then, the 400 that control the largest portion of our wealth aren't the zombies after all; maybe the zombie is our social structure. When the divide between the haves and the have-nots of this country becomes too wide to bridge, we all risk falling into the canyon, whether you're a CEO or a college student drowning in loan debt. Eight American banks were recently placed on Financial Stability Board' "Too Big to Fail List," classifying them as such because their "distress or disorderly failure ... would cause significant disruption to the wider financial system and economic activity." And that might be true, but the protestors aren't asking the banks to fail, they just want a fighting chance. They want to be heard. They want to stop getting shut out of the decision making process. And if things continue the way they are, the banks *will* fail, and everyone, whether a part of the 99-percent or not, will find themselves living in a very real apocalyptic wasteland



instead of watching movies about them from the comfort of distance. With everything that's happening in this country, it's hard

The New "Fiddler's Green"?
Is Wall Street going to fulfill a "prophecy" Romero made five years ago?

to not ask questions. What's going to happen to us? Are we living in the land of the dead? **TR**