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SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE

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#7

THE EVIL
DEAD

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CANDARIAN DEMONOLOGY 101



THE DUAL NATURE OF THE EVIL DEAD

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BY FLYNN COOK

It's hard to think of many things that can be interpreted in as many ways as film. A visual medium is truly understood through the eye of its particular beholder, and only so much dialogue and direction can affect how people receive a filmic idea. Case in point, the Evil Dead Trilogy; a series that fundamentally changes genres from one end to the other, and seems to suffer from a mixed identity.

Is it a horror series? A comedy series? Both? Should the series have changed gears, or is that what allowed it to flourish in the first place? How has the shifting tonality of the trilogy affected its spin-offs and its impending remake? Let's chain down our cellar doors and find out.

For the uninitiated: the trilogy in question is a series of films that follow a young adult male named Ash Williams through a few of the worst nights of his life. He and his friends make for a cabin in the woods for a rustic weekend getaway that turns horrific once a host of demons are summoned, resulting in much mayhem over two nights for Ash, and a further adventure back in time.

There is, perhaps, an absurdity to the original film, known only as *The Evil Dead*, but I personally find it to be a straight-up horror film, and one of the few that genuinely frightens. There is a large sector of its fanbase that consider it to be somewhat comedic already, and that's not counting how they view the two sequels! Its



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intensity matched only by its ferocity, Sam Raimi's original classic may be funny to people in a roundabout way; with so much tension that builds, it's only natural that there are moments that, breaking the tension, it becomes inverted and darkly humorous. I don't believe that humorousness was intentional at the time. Though Raimi and star Bruce Campbell have admitted to being heavily inspired by the Three Stooges, I don't think that influence was deliberate in the film.

The subject matter is dark, the tone is dark, there is genuine tension, there's rape, possession and demonic encounters, to say nothing of the implications of the Necronomicon. I find my encounters with those who find it a humorous film are from those who don't see the events of the film for their true meaning or ramifications on the characters. My first time viewing the film was in the company of less horror-oriented friends (in the modern day of jaded film viewers, mind you), who laughed at some of the less than perfect performances and the low budgets. Your environment can influence your way of thinking, believe me. I didn't take the film seriously on my first go, and didn't see what the fuss was about.

Upon viewing the film again in the sanctity of isolation, it got to me. I really understood the drama of the film; I bought into it and empathized with the characters. I got carried away in the narrative and didn't notice irrelevant, superficial trappings. It's not to say that the film is only serious from a certain viewpoint, but it is to say that any film can be taken the wrong way if you don't understand it the way the filmmakers intended. And *The Evil Dead* is the best example of that. As depicted in the film, the situation Ash, Shelley, Scotty and the others find themselves in would leave no one laughing, so why should we? The tone is not poking fun at these events; we are meant to empathize with their plight. It isn't even akin to *RoboCop* with Paul Verhoven's satirical approach to violence. Verhoven was making a social/political statement using violence; thus necessitating a sense of humor. *The Evil Dead* has no such goals to shed any light onto anything except grueling terror. The low budget isn't really even apparent; taking place in the run down cabin the production filmed in was not accidental and is appropriate.

Evil Dead 2, (sometimes subtitled "Dead By Dawn") begins with a shortened recap of the first film (due to an inability to secure footage from it), which strips the story down to just Ash and his girlfriend Linda this time, and starting from the matching shot of Ash being attacked by an unseen 'force,' the film picks up where the original left off. 2 clearly has a

deliberate sense of humor this time, outside of Sam Raimi's usual goofy use of tension.

But there are still many scares to be had. Ash's

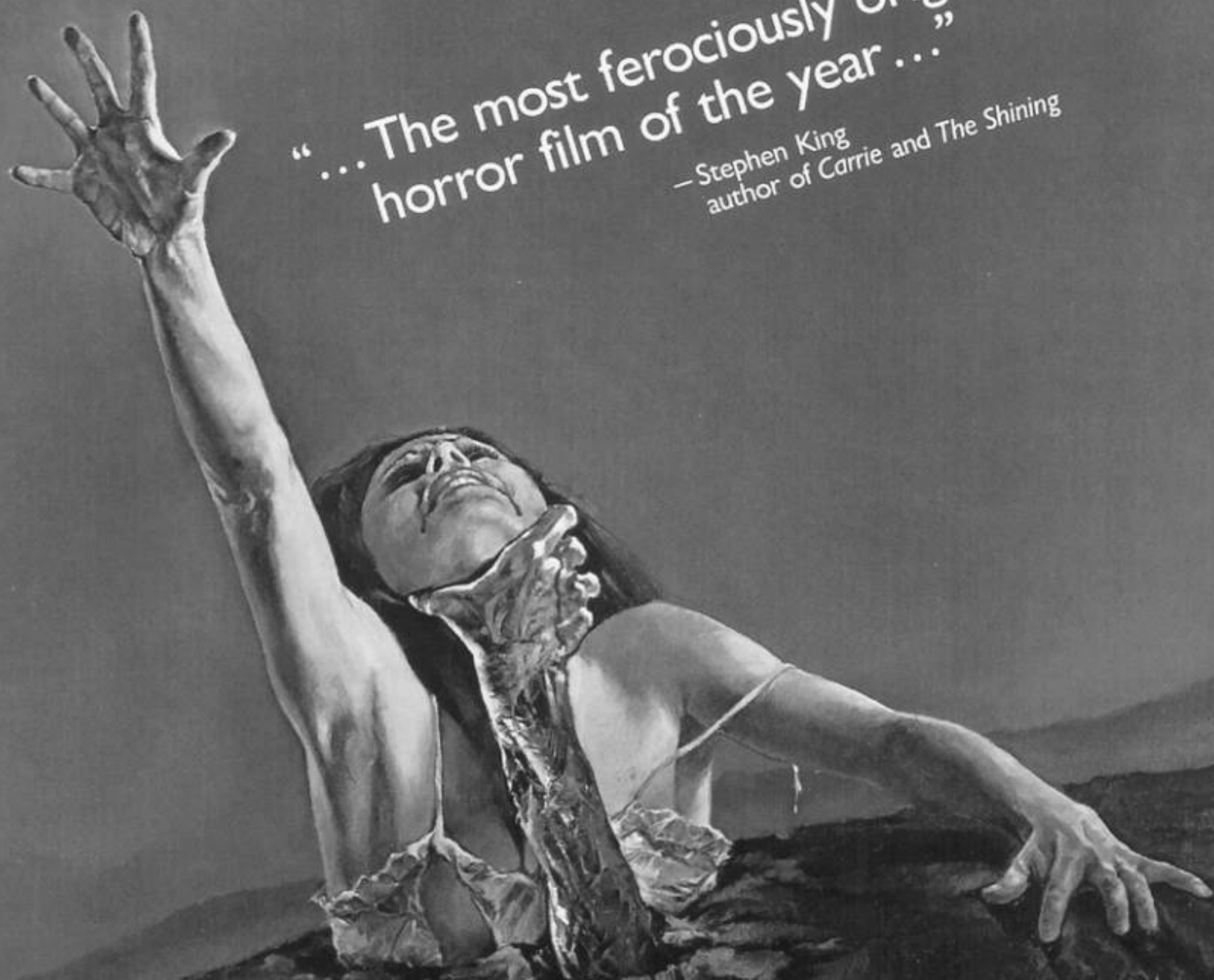


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"...The most ferociously original
horror film of the year..."
—Stephen King
author of Carrie and The Shining



THE EVIL DEAD

Starring BRUCE CAMPBELL ELLEN SANDWEISS HAL DELRICH BETSY BAKER SARAH YORK
Make-up Effects by TOM SULLIVAN Photographic Effects by BART PIERCE Photography by TIM PHILO
Music by JOE LoDUCA Produced by ROBERT G. TAPERT Written and Directed by SAM RAIMI
Color by TECHNICOLOR® Renaissance Pictures Ltd. From **N**EW LINE CINEMA All Rights Reserved

THE PRODUCERS RECOMMEND THAT NO ONE UNDER 17 BE ALLOWED TO SEE THE EVIL DEAD

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moments alone during his second night in the cabin have an element of humor to them, even though you're seeing him go insane. It is truly one of those elements that's shockingly different compared to the first film; even the scary moments are tweaked to have a comedic slant to them. A new cast of characters arrive at the cabin and get caught up in the horror along with Ash, and they too have a rough go of it.

One may argue that there would naturally be a lightening-up of the proceedings considering the fact that Ash goes from being a scared victim to an active entity working against the evil of the Necronomicon. While true, I think it's a lamentable trade off to lose that grueling terror for laughs. Still, *Evil Dead 2* strikes a fair balance between the dark implications and the humorous portrayal of horror.



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EVIL DEAD 2

DEAD BY DAWN

RENAISSANCE PICTURES Presents
EVIL DEAD 2

Starring BRUCE CAMPBELL With SARAH BERRY DAN HICKS KASSIE WESLEY RICHARD DOMEIER
Music By JOSEPH LO DUCA Special Makeup Effects MARK SHOSTROM Edited By KAYE DAVIS
Director of Photography PETER DEMING Executive Producers IRVIN SHAPIRO ALEX De BENEDETTI
Written By SAM RAIMI SCOTT SPIEGEL Produced By ROBERT TAPERT Directed By SAM RAIMI

WARNING: THIS FILM CONTAINS SCENES
WHICH MAY BE TOO INTENSE FOR PERSONS
UNDER THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN.



ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE
SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON
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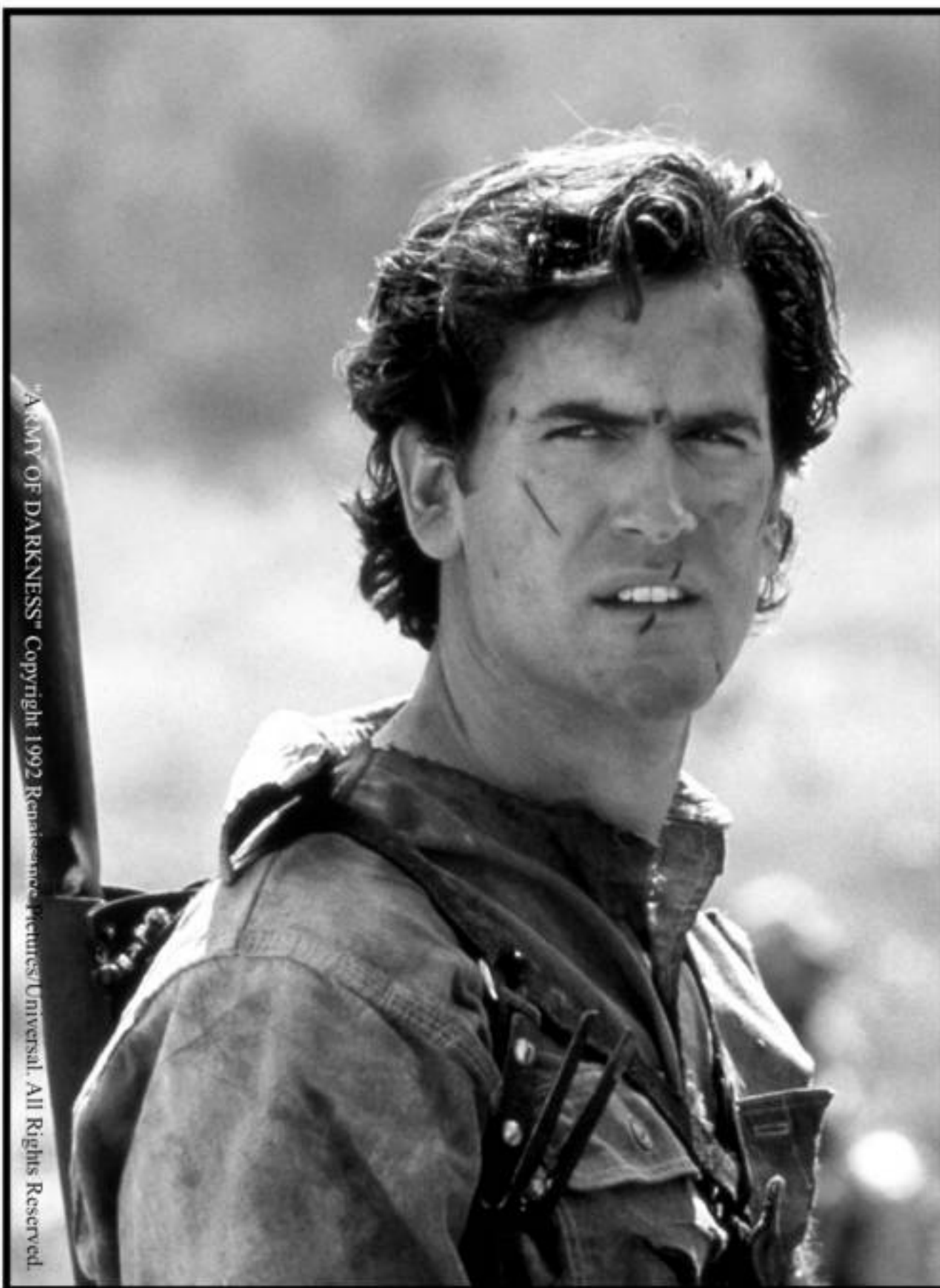


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However, the third entry, 1991's *Army of Darkness* finds us in almost entirely different territory.

Army of Darkness is the film that a large majority of people were introduced to the trilogy through. Considering the first two installments were largely unknown to the public-at-large (and owned by different companies), Universal Pictures decided that its name shouldn't have any relation to the previous entries in the series, and indeed, any Universal-brand home video release seems to omit any mention of this being a third installment in a franchise.

I think this being the most well-known entry in the series has affected how people view it as a whole. *Army of Darkness* had ideas that, in the second film, might have been played for horror. Instead, the entire film is played for slapstick comedy and farcical heroism. It has defined Bruce Campbell as an actor in the public's eye far more than either of the first two installments, relegating him to "sarcastic mock hero" roles for years. This is a shame because I find him to be a highly underrated actor on the whole.



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FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "DARKMAN"

Trapped in time.
Surrounded by evil.
Low on gas.



DINO DE LAURENTIIS COMMUNICATIONS PRESENTS A RENAISSANCE PICTURES PRODUCTION BRUCE CAMPBELL "ARMY OF DARKNESS" EMBETH DAVIDTZ
"MARCH OF THE DEAD" THEME BY DANNY ELFMAN MUSIC BY JOSEPH LODUCA EDITED BY BOB MURAWSKI PRODUCTION DESIGNER TONY TREMBLAY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY BILL POPE PRODUCED BY BRUCE CAMPBELL
WRITTEN BY SAM RAIMI & IVAN RAIMI PRODUCED BY ROBERT TAPERT DIRECTED BY SAM RAIMI A UNIVERSAL RELEASE
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The comic book sequels to *Army of Darkness* (titled similarly) continue that humorous tonality. Publisher Dynamite has capitalized on the cult/nerd phenomenon of the underground success of said film and had produced a couple of ongoing books along with several mini-series.

Ironically, the products bearing the original film's title share a different tonality.

Available for the Sega Dreamcast, Sony Playstation and PC, *Evil Dead: Hail to the King* has some of the trademark Ash quips, but is generally a survival-horror game, playing not unlike *Resident Evil*, and with just as screwed-up controls. The game finds Ash years after *Army of Darkness*, haunted now by the things he had seen and done, with a new girlfriend. In a hackneyed idea to get things moving, he ventures back to the cabin with his new girl to prove to himself that it's all over. Once he arrives, though, his old, disembodied hand appears and re-activates Professor Knowby's tape, re-releasing The Evil Dead. Ash's girlfriend is taken, and he must go back into action.

The game takes place in the cabin and the forest around it. Taking you to all manner of creepy spots and against many interesting creatures, the game takes advantage of the vicerality of being interactive, and decides to be more scary than funny, something that would do the original movie proud.

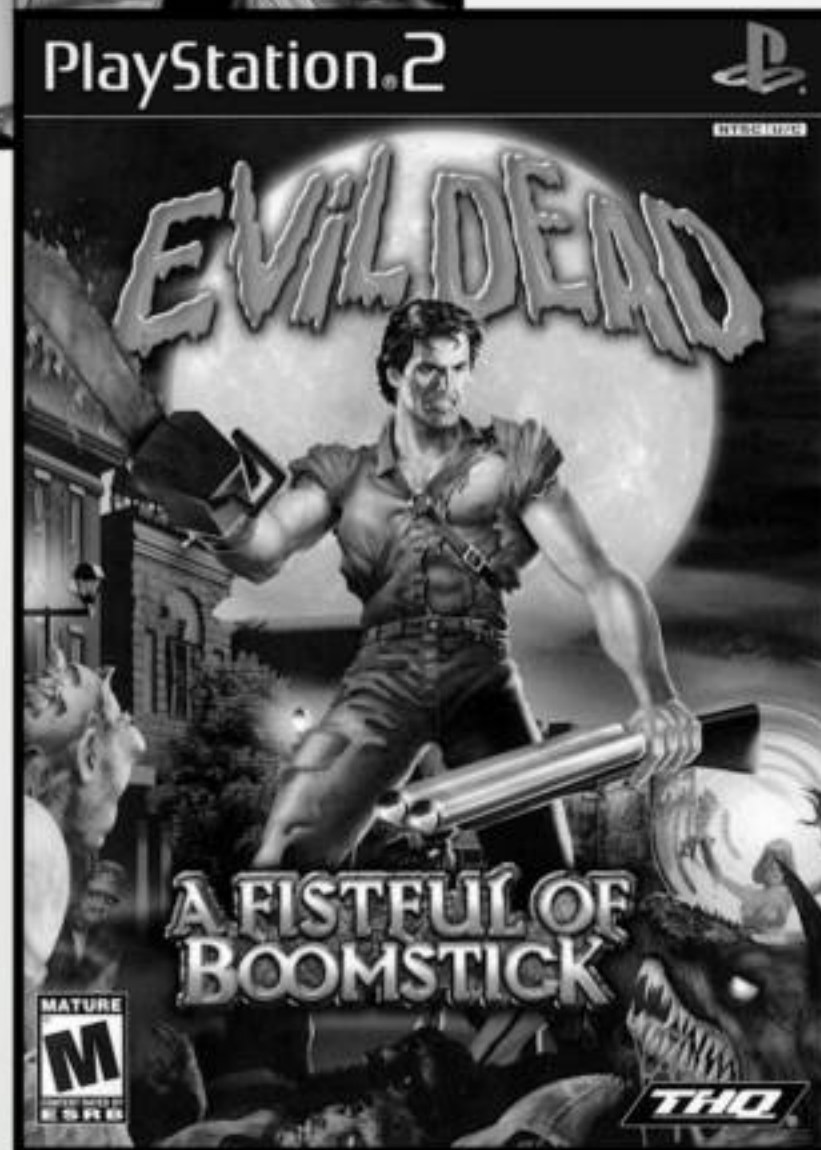
With stiff camera angles and even stiffer controls, the game is not for the uncommitted of gamers. Any Evil Dead fan worth their salt has to tolerate a lot to play it, but I find its tone to be rewarding enough to compensate. It's basically the *Evil Dead 4* we'll never receive.



Happily, there was another game, a sequel to *Hail to the King*, effectively; *Evil Dead 5*. Available for Sony Playstation 2 and Microsoft's Xbox, *Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick* finds Ash after the events of *Hail to the King* as a burnout in his home of Dearborn, MI. A local show about supernatural phenomena has acquired Professor Knowby's tape and Necronomicon pages and, believing it harmless, the guests accidentally unleash it all over again. Ash just can't catch a break!

A different beast than its predecessor, *A Fistful of Boomstick* is a third-person action game with no survival-horror elements. The camera is player-controlled now,

which is a relief. The controls are much repaired from *Hail to the King*, and graphics obviously improved. The game is very clever for its use of the narrative to shape the gameplay. Effectively, it's *Back to the Future Part II* meets *The Evil Dead*. Ash has to travel back and forth through time to different versions of Dearborn to fight the Evil Dead. Even upon returning to



the present at a point in the game, Dearborn is a radically different version of itself.

The game boasts plenty of quips and action, but also, owing to the opportunities of interactivity, the game does have an eerie, spooky vibe. It doesn't reach the scare levels of a *Silent Hill* or a *Resident Evil*, but it's appropriate for the franchise.

One final video game graced us; *Evil Dead: Regeneration*. Interestingly, instead of another sequel, this game is a what-if! The Playstation 2, Xbox and PC game takes place in an alternate timeline in which Ash does not get sucked back in time at the end of *Evil Dead II*, rather, he's put on trial for the murders he



Gameplay is similar to *A Fistful of Boomstick* though improved. The game is much more action orientated, with a sense of speed to the proceedings; a fast paced game of chainsaw hacking and shotgun blasting. More humorous than the previous two games, in a way, it's the *Army of Darkness* of the game trilogy. But an eerie vibe is hard to wipe away.

The best element of this trio of games is the fact that Bruce Campbell returns to voice Ash in all three of them. Hey, if Sam Raimi won't give us another film sequel, these games will have to do!

This leads to my final, brief segment:

The *Evil Dead* remake.

Produced by Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell themselves, I'm sure there's probably more to the film than the trailer lets on, but I cannot help but be disappointed. And don't get me wrong; I'm not like everyone else who cries foul at remakes. I rather enjoy them unless they are genuinely bad films. Most people

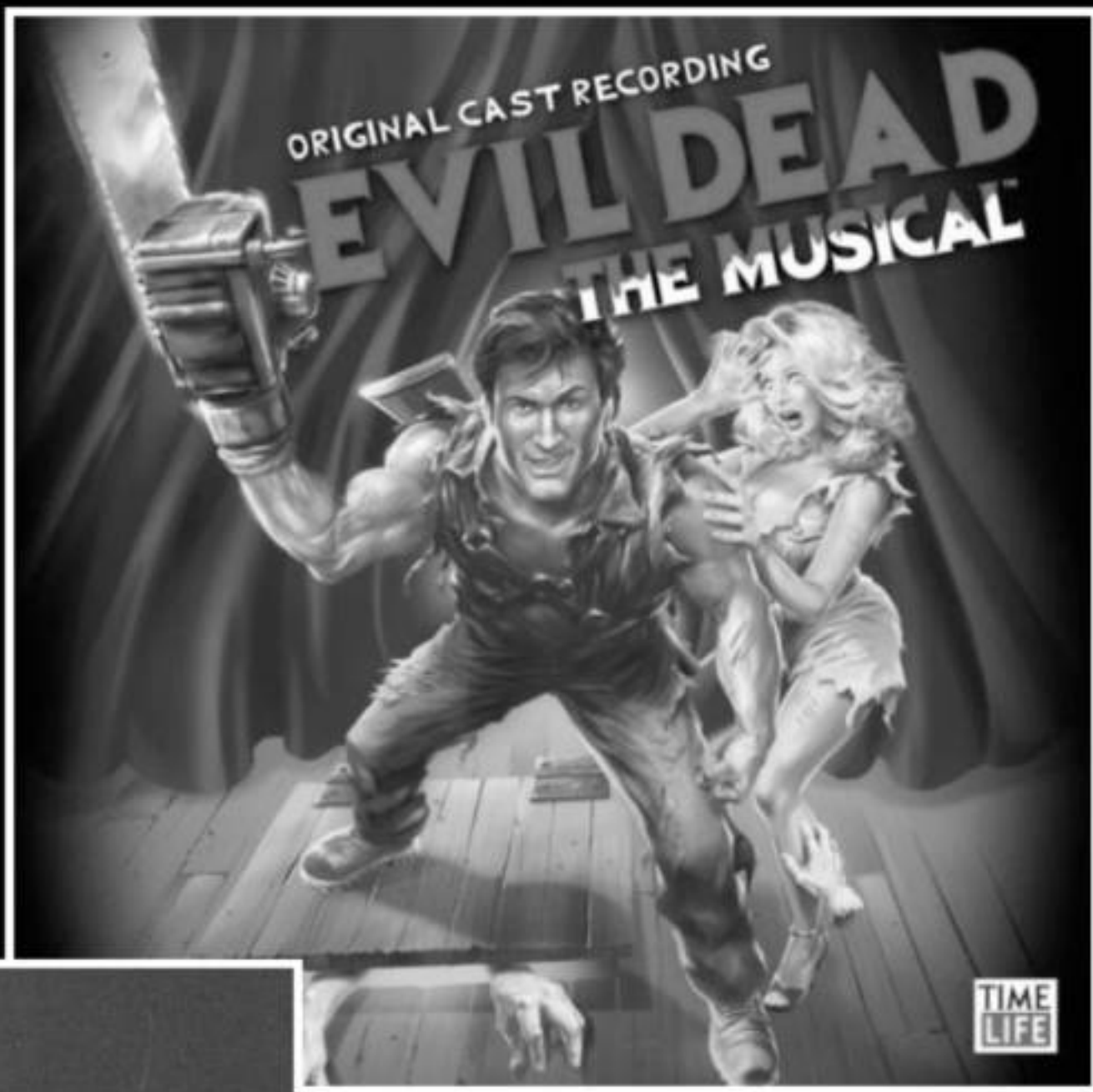


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just throw them under the bus for the simple fact of being a remake of something they loved from their childhoods. The “Ash” equivalent of the film is a woman, which I was pleased and intrigued about. It would be straight-up horror. Another plus for me.

But then, the trailer was released. What happened? A bunch of bland, forgettable teenagers doing deliberate, torture-porn style dismemberments to disturb young audiences (a Deadite cutting its tongue on a blade, for instance), and not to mention the Deadites crawl across the floor with their hair down like, oh, I don’t know, the creature from *The Ring*.

I’m not unreasonable. Ad campaigns can be notoriously wrong, so I will be there with ticket-in-hand. But does it look good? Not really. And for me, of all people to say that, that means something. I believe my articles for this magazine have shown me to be someone who thinks outside of the box. When I’m thinking like everyone else? That’s not a good harbinger! Hey, it’s at



least got to be better than that lamentable Evil Dead Musical!

Concluding: the Evil Dead franchise has evolved much since its conception. Going from two extreme ends of the spectrum: from horror to comedy. As time goes on and more people discover the grueling terror of this series, no matter how they got into it or why, I can only say enthusiastically: *JOIN US!*



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