

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Zombies turning out in Bemidji

By Laurie Swenson Pioneer Staff Writer

As Halloween approaches, so do the zombies.

Last Saturday, zombies filled two blocks of Beltrami Avenue Northwest for the filming of a scene from the movie "Lazarus." This Saturday, they'll be on stage at the Chief Theater for a trilogy of plays in an evening billed as "Three Zombies and a Demon."

Why zombies?

Roy C. Booth, who wrote two of the zombie plays and co-wrote the other, said part of it is that zombies are simple.

"It's the ultimate simplified monster," Booth said. "It's a flesheating corpse that rises up and runs after you. He has no electronics, he has no other means, other than just 'Braaaaaains' or whatever."

The presentation at the Chief Theatre, billed as "Three Zombies and a Movie," will include

"How to Make a Brain Soufflé" and "Tenure," both written by Booth, and both from his book "Three Zombies and a Demon." The third play is "Marriage...After Death," written by Abby Ferrier and Booth.

Starring in the plays are Cynthia Booth, Kevin Cease, Ryan Frank, Greg Gasman, Jadie Hunt, Erica Johnson, Andor Lofthus, David Moffett and R. Thomas Riley.

The night also will feature the short film "The Day Lufberry Won it All," based on the dark science fiction story of the same name from Riley. The film is directed by Booth, who wrote the screenplay with John F. Mollard, and stars Lofthus, Andrew Browsers and Cease. Mitch Berntson is director of photography. The film was shot in Bemidji.

Tickets are \$10, \$7 for seniors, and are available at Roy's Comics and Games in downtown Bemidji and at the door starting at 6:30 p.m.

#### Origin

The concept of zombies in literature and film came from the Haitian religion of voodoo, which originated in West Africa. According to voodoo tenets, a sorcerer can temporarily revive and control a corpse.

Booth spoke of a voodoo ritual involving drugging and briefly burying someone who would then be in a state of suspended animation and could be commanded to do things, such as slave labor.

"White Zombie," a 1932 film starring Bela Lugosi, is considered the first featurelength zombie film. It features a woman (Madge Bellamy) temporarily transformed into a zombie by a potion administered by a voodoo priest (Lugosi).

Zombies' popularity swelled with the 1968 George A. Romero film "Night of the Living Dead," which featured people in a farmhouse in Pennsylvania being attacked by mysteriously reanimated corpses.

Booth noted that in Romero's 1978 film "Dawn of the Dead," the zombies were reanimated corpses that rose from their graves because Hell was full.

"Zombies basically are wide open, culture wise," he said. "It's a wonderful horror template. You can do what you want with it."

Author Brian Keene, who has written best-sellers about zombies, came up with the idea of zombies as reanimated corpses possessed by evil spirits. Booth noted that Keene's zombies could talk, and could be animals as well as humans.

Zombie movies thrived in mainstream cinema in the 1970s because of drive-in movie theaters, but as the drive-ins started to disappear, so did the zombies, Booth said.

"But now that we've got this revolution in film technology, if you've got the knowledge and few extra hard bucks lying around, you can actually put on a decent movie, and the zombies made a huge comeback," he said. "All you need is some decent makeup skills, some fake blood, tattered clothes ... voila, you've got a zombie."

#### Zombie concepts

Saturday's zombie plays feature three zombie concepts.

The zombies in "Tenure" are caused by a pathogen. The twist is that after a while, they get their brains back.

"You have this problem - what do you do with zombies now that they've got their intelligence back?" Booth said.

"Marriage...After Death" is set in a zombie apocalypse.

"How to Make a Brain Soufflé" puts zombies on the small screen with their own cooking show - "a very macabre cooking show," Booth said.

Booth, who also has been asked to develop a zombie screenplay, wrote his first zombie story at the age of 6 for a school assignment. His 24-page comic book-style story featured him in a haunted house with a silver baseball bat, attacking zombies, vampires and werewolves.

"My mom actually got a call about that," he said, laughing.

#### Nightmares

"Lazarus" director Mike Bredon's relationship with zombies is a complicated one of fear, comfort and insight.

He has had nightmares about zombies since childhood, but most notably following a painful long-term relationship.

"I was plagued with them," he said. The nightmares were gruesome and almost nightly. In them, he was trying to save as many people as he could.

"I lost two years of my life," Bredon said, adding that he felt lost during that time. "I realized it was systemic. I was alive but not living."

Much like zombies.

Bredon, who said he deals with things by making movies (which he has done since the age of 6), doesn't have the nightmares anymore.

"It's really facing my nightmares," he said about making "Lazarus," a story of reconciliation between two brothers (portrayed by brothers Mike and Danny Bredon) set in an apocalyptic background. The film is set in and was filmed in Bemidji, produced by Lara Gerhardson. They started filming in the spring and hope to release the film next spring.

"That's another thing that's really cool about it and will really give it legs," Bredon said. "This town is really appreciative."

Zombies have always been symbolic, Bredon said. The zombies in "Night of the Living Dead" represented the Cold War, he said, adding that in the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic sparked zombies who were infected by being bitten.

"It's sociopolitical satire," he said.

People connect with zombies, Bredon said.

"It is about life and death and dreaming and being awake," he said. "They hate the dead and the dead hate the living. ... One of the most interesting things about zombies, it is about fighting our demons, fighting ourselves, to be able to get on and forgive."

"I think that zombies come into vogue when society is feeling uneasy and uncertain," Gerhardson said. "Zombies present a symbol of that uneasiness because they continue to have physical animation/strength but no access to human thought or emotion – they are unpredictable and thus frightening."

Sometimes, people move through life even while circumstances leave them feeling numb and without control, but through zombie films or stories, live humans get to fight back, against the zombies, she said.

"In effect, it gives us the opportunity to combat the feeling that we have lost control of the world around us. The human spirit remains despite unpredictable chaos and an uncertain future."

Film shoot

Bredon said more than 300 people – including Booth and his oldest son, Riordan – showed up to moan, groan and stagger stiffly down Beltrami Avenue last week.

"The film shoot on Saturday was an amazing opportunity to bring so many people from the community together," Gerhardson said. "It was a real bonding experience – fun was had and friends were made."

"The goal that Mike and I share to make this feature film was strengthened. I have to admit that I was a little choked up as we stood hugging each other and watching hundreds of people walk down Beltrami Avenue to make our dream a reality. I would like to truly and fully thank everyone who participated. It was amazing."

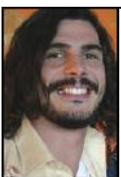
"It will become one of the best days of my life," Bredon said. "It was once again defining why I love this place. This is a community coming together – nobody's getting paid, they're cold, everybody just comes together and has fun and plays it safe. It was just a symbol of Bemidji's connectivity. I couldn't wipe the smile from my face."



Photo courtesy of Lara Gerhardson More than 300 people made up as zombies filled two blocks of Beltrami Avenue last Saturday during the shooting of a scene for the film "Lazarus." The zombies are moving past the Chief Theatre, which will feature three zombie plays and a short film this Saturday.



Gerhardson



Bredon



Booth