

The three stooges and their influence on evil dead 2



In 1986, Sam Raimi released *Evil Dead 2*, which became the quintessential shock and gore movie. News shows like *20/20* would use the movie to scare parents with visions of their teenage children renting it from the local video store. Even though horror movies were popular in the 1980s, most movies seemed too polished. The heyday of low budget exploitation films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* had passed. Horror movies had lost their audacity when they had large budgets and studios depending on their success.

Evil Dead 2 was an exception to the trend. Both a sequel and a remake to Raimi's 1981 low budget demon possession in a cabin movie, *Evil Dead 2* brought back Bruce Campbell as Ash, the lone survivor. In the first fifteen minutes, the first movie is recapped with notable differences such as Ash's girlfriend being played by a different actress and an absence of the second couple from the first movie. There is also a notable shift in tone from the first movie which was a serious movie. By contrast, *Evil Dead 2* uses excessive gore and violence for the purposes of humor, in the tradition of the Three Stooges. The movie is 90 minutes of gore, violence and physical comedy.

Many of the gags are morbidly violent. Ash cuts off his possessed girlfriend's head and she rises from the dead with a Fred Astaire dance. The taxidermy cackles at Ash in one seen. When Ash's hand is possessed, Bruce Campbell fights with his hand for a long stretch of time and then cuts it off with a chainsaw. This does not stop the hand from running around, showing up at the wrong moments and giving Ash the finger. By the end of the movie, Ash is fighting demons with a chainsaw attached to his stump and a shotgun in his good hand as evil trees surround the cabin. In a final twist, Ash is sucked

into a time vortex and finds himself in the medieval village with peasants worshipping him as a savior.

Even though the movie is a brilliant combination of violence and humor, the major draw is the rubber face go-for-broke physicality of Bruce Campbell. Even though there are other characters, Bruce Campbell is often alone fighting decapitated heads and his own hand. Thus, he carries the movie with aplomb. In many ways, Campbell needs to be Larry, Curly and Moe combined.

The Three Stooges references are intentional. Sam Raimi was such a Three Stooges fan that he coined the term "Fake Shemp" to denote the actors who were replaced by crew members when the actors weren't available. The term comes from the three movies that the Stooges filmed shortly after Shemp Howard died. The studios filmed around him with old footage and the back of a stand-in's head. Since Sam Raimi was filming Evil Dead on a shoestring budget, the majority of the actors could not make every shot and so he would get various members of the crew (including his brother Ted) to stand in for them.

Evil Dead 2 takes the Three Stooges love even further to full tribute. Bruce Campbell's evil hand routine is one of the funniest scenes in physical comedy. The enthusiasm that he brings to poking himself in the eye, punching himself in the face and imitating Charlton Heston sells the scene. Once he cuts the hand off, it becomes another character in the movie by running around, dodging bullets, giving him the finger and showing up just

as everyone has forgotten about it in order to answer the question: " Why is your hand on my shoulder?"

The most important part about Evil Dead 2 is that the excess never becomes old. Horror fans can point to a movie where the violence and gore became so prevalent that the suspension of disbelief disappeared. By that same token, comedy has a short shelf without the presence of normality. In the latter case, Hannibal ends with the title character cutting open Ray Liotta's skull open, scooping out his brains and cooking them. The scene goes from horrifying to utterly ridiculous within seconds.

In terms of humor, there are just as many cases where the excessive repetition of a joke turns into a tedious experience. Most of Jerry Lewis' movies are based on infantile behavior. In fact, the whole idea that French people love Jerry Lewis seems to be a story that Americans love to tell themselves in order to feel superior to a European nation. By the criteria of horror and comedy, Evil Dead 2 succeeds in making the audience both laugh and feel horror. Partially because Sam Raimi meant for Evil Dead 2 to be ridiculous, but mostly because he infuses the movie with a boundless energy, the movie never lags long enough for the audience to stop and think that they are watching actors under make-up pretending to be menaced by demons, evil hands and decapitated heads.

The movie both meets and exceeds expectations. When the camera rushes through the woods to depict demonic spirits rushing to attack the characters, it makes sense that Bruce Campbell would end up flying through the woods in the same style. When the owners of the cabin show up and throw Ash in

the cellar; of course, there's a demon possessed woman down there ready to kill him. And what's the point of a deer head on the wall if that deer head can't thrash back and forth while chanting "dead by dawn, dead by dawn"?

Evil Dead 2 changed Sam Raimi from an aspiring filmmaker who made low budget horror movies on shoestring budgets to a Hollywood director and producer. Fifteen years later, he would become one of the most successful directors with The Amazing Spiderman. Yet, for many movie fans - most notably, those who were teenagers in the 80s and spend many evenings going through the video store seeking the kind of movies that their parents would not approve of - Raimi would never direct a movie even remotely as fun as Evil Dead 2.