

actor Ken Foree of *Dawn of the Dead*—despite his desire to do something else with his life. He still needs to be reminded not to forget his bimonthly visit with his mother. He steadfastly refuses to “grow up” or go anywhere without his unemployed and otherwise friendless sidekick, Ed. Shaun is a consummate slacker.

Although the term “slacker” generally denotes “apathy, aimlessness, and lack of ambition” in young adults,⁶ works such as Douglass Copeland’s 1991 novel *Generation X* and Richard Linklater’s 1991 film *Slacker* champion the slacker lifestyle as a conscious choice for those who have no interest in being co-opted by the mainstream conception of proper work ethic and achievement. John Ulrich, for instance, stresses a more empowered interpretation of the term in his introduction to *GenXgeists: Essays on “Alternative” Youth (Sub)Culture*: “From the slacker perspective, working is not the point of living; in fact, it impedes living. Work, from the slacker perspective, marginalizes who we are; thus in the life of a slacker work must be decentered, relegated to the margins. As Linklater points out, . . . ‘if [slackers] have a job, the job doesn’t have them.’”⁷ Characters with acceptable occupations, like Pete, with his office job, or David, with his lecturer’s position, view Shaun and Ed as lazy and unambitious. In order to be taken seriously by these other characters, Shaun and Ed must convince them that their choices, such as deciding to seek shelter from the zombies at the pub rather than at a more conventional location, have merit. As he formulates his plan with Ed, Shaun imagines a number of scenarios, all of which involve Liz and his mum joyfully joining up with them and, without too much effort, finding a safe, zombie-free spot to relax with a beverage and wait for help. Once they realize that their favorite pub, the Winchester, is the perfect stronghold, Shaun imagines relaxing with pint glasses rather than tea mugs in their hands, and he exclaims, “How’s that for a slice of fried gold?”⁸ For Shaun does not intend to change himself by enduring *Rocky*-style training and strengthening monotages; he intends to win by slacking. He chooses his “stronghold” more for its amenities—beer and snacks—than for its defensibility. Shaun’s primary consideration seems to be finding a place that’s “familiar,” that won’t take him out of his slacker comfort zone, and that fulfills Ed’s requirement that he be allowed to smoke. But this first-floor pub in a corner building with large, unbarred windows soon proves insufficient at keeping out the zombie hoard.

In fact, part of the widespread appeal of *Shaun of the Dead* is the humor derived from placing a slacker in the hero’s role, and various reviews of the film comment on the pleasure of watching slackers in the standard

horror film scenarios. Roger Ebert, for instance, “[like[s] the way the slacker characters maintain their slothful gormlessness in the face of urgent danger.”⁹ In a *BBC Collective* review, Skye Sherwin describes the film as “peopled by twenysomething PlayStation-obsessed slackers,” and notes, “From the title it might seem like this is some spoof of the George Romero classic. In fact, it’s truer to the spirit of Romero’s vision of consumer society than the straight remake also released this month.”¹⁰ *Dawn of the Dead* features zombies who return to their favorite activity: hanging out at the mall; *Shaun*’s zombies return to their favorite activity: hanging around the neighborhood pub.

In addition, Shaun’s world consists of willing workers and defiant slackers. Workers such as Mary the cashier have been deadened by their jobs. Workers like Pete—who is willing to report to work on a Sunday, despite his own exhaustion—have been overcome by a sense of responsibility to their work. But slackers like Shaun, who has never fully given himself to the job he doesn’t want—or Ed, who has never accepted a job—resist the deadening affects of capitalist society. The problem with being a slacker, however, is that the workers disparage the slacker’s life, which leads to a sense of powerless isolation within society. In his review of the film, Mary Mapes acknowledges Shaun’s sense of powerlessness, arguing that while “Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* was a . . . satirical look at the growing materialism and mall culture of the 1970s[,] *Shaun of the Dead* says that this generation can’t be bothered with current events. . . . It’s not so much that Shaun’s generation is selfish or shallow . . . rather it’s that they assume they can’t change the world. News is what happens to other people, important people. Clerks and the unemployed just don’t feel empowered enough to be a part of the world.”¹¹ Mapes’s assertion is only partly right. Shaun may not feel empowered enough to keep abreast of current events, including the present unfolding zombie disaster, but Pegg and Wright’s story does provide disenfranchised slackers like Shaun and Ed with a situation where they can not only survive, but also succeed in winning others’ respect. In the course of the film, the already-deadened workers become actual deadened zombies. Those who are living must have a plan of action, as Shaun’s friend Yvonne emphasizes when she meets up with Shaun during the zombie invasion: “Have you got a plan?” Faced with this character-building crisis, Shaun develops the ultimate slacker plan: gather those he loves and head to his favorite pub. Yvonne looks dismayed when she hears his proposed course of action, but, by surviving, Shaun intends to rise above his denigrated reputation and succeed. According to Joseph Campbell, an unlikely hero such as Shaun would go through a series of