

zombies came to be. The talking heads on the television propose theories, but just before they can explain what the latest theory is, our channel-surfing protagonist clicks to the next show. Apparently, he doesn't care to know, and we never find out. Second, at the conclusion of our film, we see the monsters returning to mundane jobs or becoming the participants on TV game shows. What lesson is there here? Better them than us? Instead of warning us to proceed no further, these monsters have been domesticated and assimilated into modern life. All wear collars or are caged to prevent attacks on the living, suggesting that, although the zombie aspect of our lives threatens to destroy us, it can be restrained or compartmentalized. It might even be useful.²⁷

Admittedly, our protagonist may not quite meet the Joseph Campbell-style hero's role, in which the hero undergoes a transformational journey, defeats the monster, and saves the world. Heroes from Gilgamesh to Luke Skywalker to Aang the Last Airbender have followed Campbell's blueprint for the hero's journey, but Shaun's excursion doesn't quite fit. Yes, he accepts the "call to adventure,"²⁸ but in his case, the initial "calls" are more like calls to grow up, such as Pete telling Shaun to "get your fucking life sorted out." Shaun and his sidekick, Ed, must transform from hapless grunts throwing kitchen implements to shovel- and cricket bat-wielding warriors. One could say that they undergo the "road of trials"²⁹ as they get Mum and Liz and wend their way to the Winchester, although their wonderful "dream landscape"³⁰ is filled with lots and lots of zombies. Shaun receives his "atonement with the father"³¹ during his stepfather's dying moments in the backseat of the Jag when Philip confesses that he was hard on Shaun only because he wanted him to learn to be strong. But although Shaun journeys to the underworld of Zombie London, his goal is not to defeat the monster and return to civilization with the "ultimate boon"³²—unless the ultimate boon is the monster itself. In this story, the slacker hero is given the opportunity to rid himself of all those who would interfere with his leisure time, and, rather than destroying the monster and bringing back something to help his society, he brings the monster back into his life.

At the beginning of the film, Shaun is surrounded by characters who remind him to grow up and take responsibility for his life. His girlfriend, Liz, pleads, "I want to live a little, Shaun, and I want you to want it, too." Her flat mates David and Dianne encourage him to see life outside his neighborhood pub. His stepfather, Philip, admonishes him to "be a man," and his flat mate Pete advises him to kick out Ed and to "get [his] fucking life sorted out." It takes an "end of the world" crisis to shock Shaun into

action. His first instinct is to save everyone he loves. But nearly every potentially heroic scene is undercut: Shaun tries to hop over a garden fence, only to have it collapse under him; he volunteers to check for zombies over another fence, but he has to climb a children's slide to do so; he aims the group's only rifle at the invading zombies, but he misses again and again. David bitterly calls Shaun "Captain Wow," but David cannot convince the group to break with Shaun and take over as their leader. Shaun's plan to gather everyone and go 'round to the pub is not brilliant, yet all the characters end up following him.

By the end of the film, characters who nagged Shaun to act more responsibly have conveniently turned into zombies and can thus be disposed of: Zombie Philip is locked in his car, David and Dianne have been devoured by the zombie mob, and Shaun shoots and kills Zombie Pete, who is once again picking on Ed. By taking action against those demanding beings, Shaun also wins back Liz, who is now content to make him tea (with two sugars) and go 'round to the pub later on. This film changes the standard romantic comedy plot from "boy meets girl/boy loses girl/boy gets girl again" to "boy loses girl he used to have/boy gets girl back and also gets to keep the slacker life that once repulsed her." What more could a slacker ask for?

A slacker could ask for a way to maintain his lifestyle. In the film's final moments, we learn that Zombie Ed, Shaun's childhood friend and social deadweight, is now kept chained in the garden shed, where he plays video games and avoids the new zombie workforce. Shaun pops out to the shed, joins in the game, and smiles at Ed as Queen's "You're My Best Friend" plays and the credits roll. Ironically, the opening line of the song is "Ooo, you make me live." In this scene, Shaun smiles sincerely for the first time in the entire film; he finally gets to sit and play with his best friend. Shaun may have appeared to have matured and entered domestic life in the car-lit shot of the redecorated flat with Liz, but we now learn that he has managed to preserve the part of his life he treasures most: he has kept the friend who was "holding [him] back," and, having eliminated the voices of the socially responsible and upwardly mobile characters who used to surround him, he can remain in his regressive state.

But there is a critical difference. In the beginning of the film, Ed lives with Shaun in the flat, they play video games even when Shaun needs to be getting ready for work, and Ed's beer-drinking presence in the flat leaves it in a continual state of disarray. Even when Ed "tidies up," he rewards himself by having a few beers and making another mess. Shaun's relationship with Liz cannot grow because Shaun brings Ed along on every