

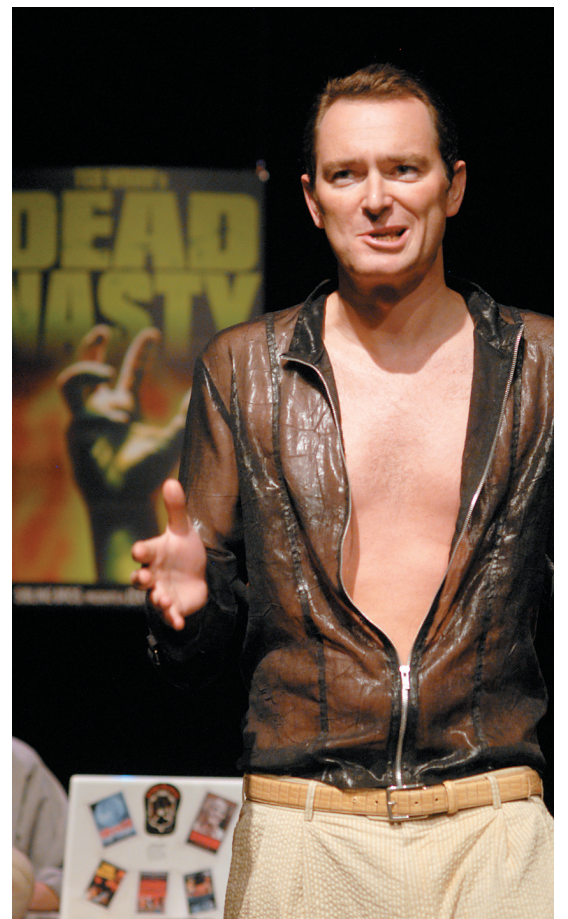


WEEKEND OF THE LIVING DEAD

There were a number of things I should have attended to this weekend: there's an IKEA dresser I still need to build, my roommates had a campfire in the backyard, and I probably should have bought my textbooks. Instead, I walked down to the Varscona Theatre to watch Die-Nasty's 53-hour improvised Soap-A-Thon—in its entirety. From 6pm Friday night until Sunday at 11pm, I was there taking it all in, trying to fend off sleep, and upholding questionable levels of hygiene. While I've experienced 24-hour improv sessions of a similar nature, it wasn't something I could fall back on—especially when I'd never managed to make it through without sawing logs. Here's how it went.

6PM FRIDAY The stage is dimly lit. Michael Jackson's "Thriller" announces the beginning of the show, but the room is only half-full. Despite it being primetime hours—when the improv still promises to be quality, and not sleep-deprived—only about two thirds of the theatre's seats have asses in them. In the lobby hangs a chalkboard, ready to record how long each actor manages to perform for. It's updated during the 15-minute breaks that happen every two hours, which also give us a chance to track down food or use the bathroom.

A bed sits stage right, a cruel reminder of the sleep that the cast, the most hardcore audience members, and I'll all be missing out on this weekend. The band and narrator take to the side of the stage, introducing the starting cast of characters one by one with guitar flourishes and witty lines. These introductions will happen after every break to help us keep track of who's playing—and who's still awake.



10PM FRIDAY A few hours in, the initial plot threads generated by each character are beginning to stitch themselves into a general outline, and romantic feelings are shaping themselves into your standard two-girls-love-the-same-boy-who-just-wants-a-threesome situations. The audience is pretty full, and it's surprising how relaxed everybody on stage appears. Not to say that the actors are fading in energy—far from it, as they scamper, kiss, and shout—but nothing they do feels forced or rushed. Scenes are just playing out, and the end goal of Sunday night is miles away, giving the cast a seemingly infinite amount of time to explore characters and relationships.

Under the pretense of making a zombie movie in fictional the town of Cadaver, AB plot arcs are born, rear up, and settle back down. A town member is hit by a car, spends an hour of actual time in an onstage coma, recuperates, then picks up right where she left off.

2 AM SATURDAY During the 15-minute break, I finally crack open an energy drink, that holy water of late-night gamers everywhere. Feeling its cream-soda-esque sugar rush down my throat is like an ignition for my consciousness, but I only really snap out of my drowsy haze when an intoxicated friend shows up with second one.

By this point, story progress has slowed to a crawl. Tangent after subplot after new character is introduced, justified, and incorporated, all while the overarching plot flops around in the background, making real progress in only a few scenes.

A significant number of the original characters are notoriously absent—sleeping, presumably, those lucky bastards—while the rest of the cast diligently carries on. Even the most stone-faced improvisers are beginning to crack under sleep deprivation, laughing on stage and taking more and more time to compose themselves. The audience has thinned; people are yawning, and those that remain are napping during the breaks.



WRITTEN BY PAUL BLINOV

METHODS FOR KEEPING AWAKE

EATING REAL FOOD: Surviving on sugar alone will only set you up for a big crash. Remember the food pyramid, and eat accordingly.

ENERGY DRINKS: Not particularly healthy, but in concentrated doses—ie multiple cans—you'll find your eyelids fastened to your eyebrows for hours.

STABBING YOUR ARM WITH A PEN: A grim, painful last line of defence, but if you perfect your pokes—using just enough force to cause genuine pain without breaking skin—it's an effective method for avoiding shut-eye. Just be ready for countless tiny blue spots resembling the track marks of a smack-addicted Cookie Monster dotting your arm.

THE STATS

- 6:** Total hours slept
- 5:** Energy drinks consumed
- 2:** Number of times I hallucinated that someone was beside me when alone
- 5:** Number of Trips made to 7-Eleven