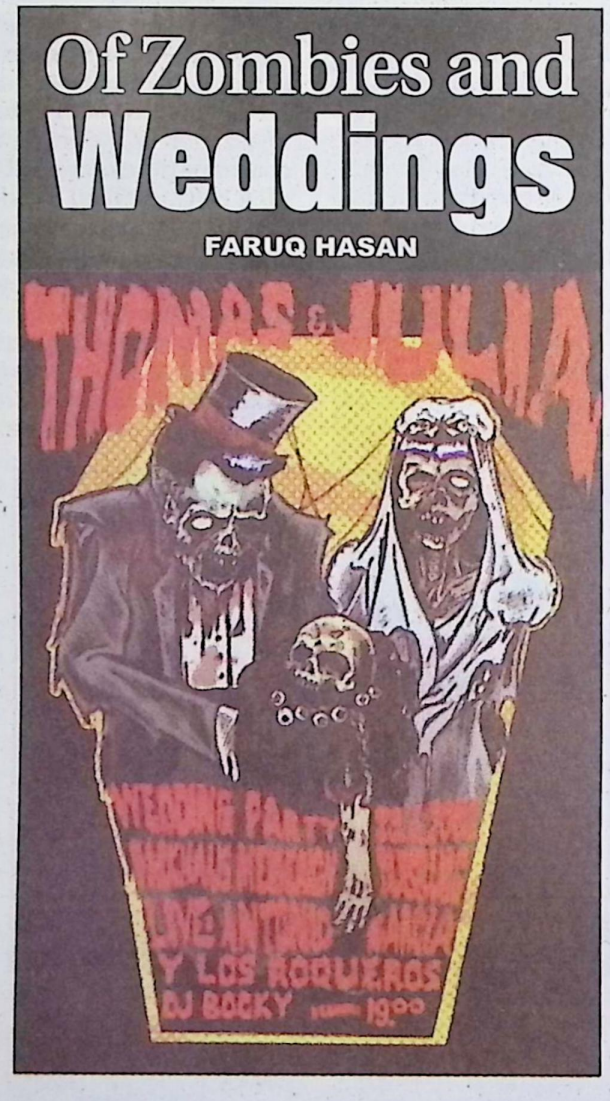
Of Zombies and Weddings

FARUQ HASAN



I often wonder why more horror movies are not based in Dhaka. Notwithstanding the small detail about Bangladesh not having any viable movie industry in the first place, I still think Dhaka is fertile ground for a good old fashioned hair-raising, spine-tingling, absolutely gruesome horror movie, the type that makes you stay up all night reading Tolstoy's War and Peace cover to cover anything from preventing switching off the lights and trying to sleep. The reason why I say this (what, you actually thought this was a totally random thought?) is because the basic ingredients for a good horror flicka terrible injustice done to a hapless victim, a greedy magnate trying to pull the wool over someone's eyes, creepy derelict structures that host god knows what and deformed zombie-like figures trolling the nights or driving metal contraptions at maniacal speedsare all found aplenty in one form or the other in our beloved streets. Darn it, you could actually do a rich horror movie, full of meaning and metaphors right here in front of New Market or Gausia.

What our deshi movies do have aplenty (aside from vulgarity and rotund protagonists) are marriages. Like one of Shakespeare's comedies, all our movies seem to end with a marriage no matter what. So here's a totally innovative concept: why doesn't a director marry (pun fully intended) two of these motifs and form one heck of a scary and funny story replete with zombies and weddings? Oops, someone already did, at least in fiction form. In Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Classic Regency Romance (yes, you read the title right!), the author Seth Graham Smith pens a harrowing journey where our protagonists Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet finally find solace in each others' arms but not before they have slaughtered a couple of thousand of zombies in the process.

The book represents one of the many new hybrid novels that have been making themselves popular amongst readers of all ages and classes, not least because they seem to take the best and often most ridiculous aspects of all time classics (in this case, the zombies are inspired from George Romero's 1968 cult hit Night of the Living Dead), give it a modern twist and mass market them to the common Joe. My question is, why didn't the genre (and I'm being very loose with definitions here) actually originate right here in our beloved Dhaka?

Think of it, in the world of zombie (and Dhaka) horror, the juxtaposition of the calm world (think of a rich Dhakaite sitting alone in his air conditioned car) and the menace of the near dead (our heritage of maimed beggars and street urchins) inspires true terror. Throw in a good marriage or two, and you can inspire comedy as well. Our young lovers fight the ghouls side by side for the first time, thus bonding their incipient relationship and feelings, and soon after they are wed but not before gorging themselves on biriyani and roast.

But superficialities aside, I think such a movie would speak volumes for our society which is slowly slipping into a chasm of denial and superficiality. Monster stories are a projection of our own unconscious fears and anxieties whether we will have our jobs tomorrow, whether the *molom* or *aggan* party will mug us on the way back from work, or will our children be infected with melamine milk that translate into zombies, vampires and super villains as metaphors for our fears. Such creatures are bluntly menacing not only for the visceral terror they evoke on the silver screen, but also because when they rise up, what usually results is complete social breakdown. And social breakdown is something that all Dhakaites are familiar with.

But the true beauty of mashing up zombies and weddings is the hybrid nature of the movie: Bangladeshis constantly live with beauty and monstrosity. We have long grown blasé with the dualities of our lives, where palatial neighborhoods and downtrodden slums coexist side by side with nary a complaint (at least on the surface). If someone does direct *Zombie Apa'r Biye*, we create a movie that is entertaining and something that hits close to our hearts. No longer will a movie have to sacrifice verisimilitude for fantasy because in Bangladesh, reality is tinged with a kind of macabre fantasy.

So go ahead budding movie directors, make a movie that is a social commentary which chills us to the bone. I will be one of the first ones queuing up for a ticket.