

## Just saw "Land of the Dead"

Posted by L - 2005/06/27 20:27

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Well, there's certainly no sense in trying to MAKE someone like something they don't. De gustibus non est disputandum.

But I can say what \*I\* liked about it.

The zombies want us for food: Fine, but there's two points about that. First, the simple one: they don't NEED food. They don't die! So if you keep them walled out, they're fine. They only came to Fiddler's Green because that big tank kept killing them -- otherwise, they were fine wandering around in their little town.

Second point is more complex, I have to work to get there. Zombie threats for Romero are not about how evil the zombies are -- they're about how something like zombies allow us to unleash our own worst impulses. Romero is an unabashed pacifist -- for him, killing is ALWAYS a bad thing, always dehumanizes us just a little. If we have to do it to survive, we will, but it hurts us. Just like taking a drug that you get addicted to --- it has a benefit, but it also has a cost. Plus, not everyone will show restraint. Some people, like lynch mobs at the end of "Night", will just start to indulge. Finally, we get to kill people -- it's okay, because they only LOOK like people.

That's the key point -- Romero is convinced that, however legitimate the threat, however dire the struggle for survival, there's just some part of us that relishes the kill, that enjoys the rush, and that we give into it. Power corrupts. Violence becomes its own end. It's not something you have to agree with, of course, and if you don't you certainly aren't going to like the movies as much, I would imagine. But he does a really good job of fleshing it out and putting a story to it -- those alpha males luxuriating in their displays of power, from "Night" all the way through to "Land."

So you end up in a situation where everyone is fighting for their humanity -- the zombies are trying to get it back, remembering their old lives and returning to old habits, and the people are in danger of losing it, some more willingly than others.

So that brings me to the second point about zombies eating us -- they end up being more sympathetic, to Romero at least, than the people who kill them in fun. Killing a zombie about to eat you is one thing, but taking pot shots at them etc. is quite another. And it's more of a moral transgression than the zombie craving for human flesh. It's more tragic. There's a sense in which we should know better -- the zombies are like children, their impulse control is kinda explained. Ours is more baffling, more upsetting.

What makes the movie work for me is how, in the end, it's actually kinda subtle. The zombies aren't really sympathetic, not really "just another lifestyle." But we aren't morally superior to them, either, not so long as we kill to survive and kill for fun, not so long as we have to give up our humanity in the struggle against them. We are both trying to be fully human, and both failing, some a little and some a lot.

That said, I thought the acting was fine, though Riley was the weakest of the bunch. Certainly Dennis Hopper and Leguizamo were fun, and I personally enjoy a good zombie apocalypse. I wouldn't say it was anywhere near as good as the two best films in the genre, "Dawn" (the original) and "Shaun," both of which do an excellent job of dealing with complex human relationships and keep the zombies in the background, at least until the ending. Plus "Shaun" is frickin' hysterical, I think.

Anyhoo, I was taken aback a little by the "zombie relativism" myself, until I started thinking about it, and I think George really did pretty much everything he needed to in order to justify getting there. If you take the zombies as absolute evil, as something Beyond, then you rationalize and justify treating them however you want - and in treating them abominably, you become the enemy. It's that Nietzschean sentiment again -- those who look for a pure evil to fight are looking for an excuse to lose a little of what made themselves good. What Romero does well is show how easy it is, how necessary it can be, and there's the tragedy. It's not like we can just let the zombies be -- we have to fight them, and the center does not hold. Things fall apart. It's a classic tragic structure. Good stuff.

L

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## Just saw "Land of the Dead"

Posted by carnivore - 2005/06/28 01:58

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My sentiments exactly...

... and might I add my observation...

This film (and others in the series by Romero) also show that regardless of how large and dangerous our common enemy is, we still have this need for profit and a place in the social class. Greed overpowers safety and finding the true answer to our common problems.

Apocalyptic zombie scenerio and somebody out there created an economic system with cash money and a class system where rich people were "safer" than the poor.

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## Just saw "Land of the Dead"

Posted by Yukon Cornelius - 2005/06/28 15:26

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I didn't mean to make it sound like I wanted you to make me like it, L. I just wanted to see if there was something in there that I was missing.

I think my problem with the film is that the zombie is really a one-trick pony (and this is where I hear the voice of The Tick in my head saying, "I mean, it's only got ONE TRICK!") They shamle about, and they eat. They bite you, and you become one. They're a dark reflection of humanity at its most base: stimulus-response, gluttony, and mindless aggression, and you or I can become one at any time.

There are a lot of things that you can say about humanity when you view it through that kind of a lens, and this movie did cover some new ground. However, when you change that lens, you start to muddy the message. Give the zombie emotions and social structure, and they cease being that dark reflection. The more humanity the filmmakers tried to inject into them, the more they were at cross-purposes with their own message.

The movie worked against itself in other ways, too. It hovered between drama and camp, and couldn't really pick which side it wanted to be on. Overall, it just felt misguided and overthought, taking itself too seriously at times and not seriously enough at others. The morality was obvious and heavy-handed, and

the film's politics (while I tend to agree with them) had a way of detracting from the story.

For me, it didn't work. I'm glad so many people are enjoying it, but I just can't get behind it the way I could 28 Days Later, Shaun of the Dead or even the remake of Dawn of the Dead. However, if it does well, maybe we'll get more zombie movies and another expansion to the Zombies!!! game.

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### Just saw "Land of the Dead"

Posted by Winter - 2005/06/28 15:41

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But ish it scarries?! :shock:

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### Just saw "Land of the Dead"

Posted by L - 2005/06/28 16:00

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No problem, YC, I think I saw what you were getting at. I also figured you knew what I'd point out, especially since it isn't exactly hard to discover. ;)

But, yeah, that's what I liked about it. I'd say my analysis of it helps with the "add emotions to the mix and you dilute it" since I think Romero really did want to blur the line between zombies and people -- again, the movie is about how hard it is to hold on to your humanity.

But certainly there's no response to the critiques you mention. I didn't really feel them, but I can see how people could. For me, I feel like I'm a little easy on the movie because it fits in with the other Romero films, and it does develop them a bit. Plus, between the class warfare/war metaphor/black zombie protagonist (every hero in a Romero film thus far has been black, for people who didn't catch that reference -- this time, it's a zombie), I felt he did find a new contribution to make. "Night" took the metaphor one way, "Dawn" developed it a bit, "Day" did very little and was by all accounts the weakest of the bunch, and "Land" found yet another nuance to add. In many ways they're all the same, but each is a little different and I thought this one carved out its own identity well enough.

Still, like I began to say, I'm really judging it as part of a whole. On its own, I wouldn't rave about it TOO much. Though I do like a good zombie picture, and I felt this was one.

And, yesh, it's scarysh. Too many "cat scares" for my taste, but it worked. I think the unrated DVD cut will be more effective, the excessive gore does serve a purpose and it contributes to the unnerving quality of the film. If the zombies do nothing but leap out at ya, it's weaker than if you actually SEE what they do to people more. Not that the theatrical cut left TOO much to the imagination...

L

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### Just saw "Land of the Dead"

Posted by Yukon Cornelius - 2005/06/28 17:44

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I'm a bad judge of scary, Winter. I agree with L about the "cat scares". There were something like four of them in one scene. It was gory, but not pointless gory like "Ichi the Killer". Still, it's a long way from the chicken and pasta that stood in for human entrails in Romero's first outing.

So, no, it didn't scare me. I think the only truly scary movies I've seen lately have come out of Japan. "Ju-On" and "Ringu" scared the pee pee out of me, and there was nothing gory about either of those. On the other hand, some just plain gory stuff has come out of Japan too. The aforementioned Ichi and "Audition" leap to mind--mean-spirited and just plain wrong.

Oh, look...I've gone off on a tangent.

Back to the film at hand, again I'm a poor judge, but I didn't think it was scary. Maybe that's another symptom of the humanization of the zombies. One guy biting another guy is just not that frightening. Unless, of course, that guy is Tom Savini. :twisted:

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**Just saw "Land of the Dead"**

Posted by Winter - 2005/06/28 18:44

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Oh I HATE cat scares! Especially when it's obvious they're coming cause I get all tensed up in anticipation and then I totally freak out when it happens. :oops:

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**Just saw "Land of the Dead"**

Posted by carnivore - 2005/06/28 21:44

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I would say not scary... because I'm jaded and over-exposed. :evil:

Actually, not a lot a movie can do to scare me - disturb, yes - but not scare.

Now, my negative comments on Land of the Dead (I'm trying!):

Didn't like zombie makeup - half of them looked like former Klingons or something.

Though consistent with the original, I prefer 'fast zombies' over 'shamblers'. I'm sure if Romero woulda' upgraded his shamblers to fast zombies, fandom woulda' roasted him.

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**Just saw "Land of the Dead"**

Posted by MyLordVoid - 2005/07/02 19:22

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Law,

I Definately "Get" What you are Saying, And Although I Tend to Get Accused of Over Analyzing Film (At

Least by my Friends)... I Have to Say that I Liked it, (And did not Dislike it), For Kinda' Different Reasons...

1- It was a Good Action Movie. And this more than anything supports a Recent Trend in the Genre', which is the Revitalization of 70's era Horror Movie by Improving the Budget and Writing, Improving the Acting Dramaticly (Yes I Felt this was Better Acted than most of it's 70's era Brethern), and by redressing the Gratuitous Gore Factor.

2- I Liked the Subtle Homage to Day of the Dead, Rather than an Overt Molded Copy. Basically rather than Making a New Movie With a Recognizable Name (Like what was Essentially Done in the Contemporary Dawn of the Dead), or Trully remaking a Classic (As they Did in the Contemporary Night of the Living Dead), George took the Most Important Point in Day of the Dead (Which was Bubs Capacity to Reason on some Primal level), and Updated and expanded it... I Really Liked that a lot...

3- I Did not Read an exagerated Level of Social Commentary into this Film... The Motives of Every One were Pretty Clear... There were the Coporate Vampires Living off of the Hard Work of the "Oppressed"... There was a Murky "Middle Class" or Perhaps more Acurately "Soldier Class" Who Bore the Brunt of the Danger, and Got A Taste of What the Elite Had... You Had the Destitute "Poor" Who were pretty Much at everyones Mercy... The Zombies were Taking their First Steps Towards maybe being a little less Reliant on Humanity, thus Becoming Independant as a Species, but I Saw No Morality Issues other than the Fact that Humans, When they Get Bored, Tend to be Cruel... (If it is Possible to be Cruel towards Someone/Somthing which Would Kill You Given the Opportunity for no Better Reason than Instinct)...

4- I Like that, Unlike the Original Day of the Dead, Land of the Dead as a "Third" Film in a Loose Series, Leaves a Much Larger World Open to Future Exploration AND Sets the Stage for Some Post Apocalyptic Mayhem for the Future... It is Unlikely that we will Ever See any thing as Incredible as the Road Warrior And Mad Max Movies Again, BUT perhaps there is Room For a Merging of the Genre's in Future Romero Endeavors... To Me that would be a Good Thing...

Over All I Would Give this Film a VERY solid 3.5 out of 5 Stars... And No It is Not Particularly Scary... Nor is It Particularly Gory Really... At Least Not Compared to it's 70's Zombie Shock Origins...

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