



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

Day of the Dead

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A contemporary review

Although *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead* were supposed to be the first two thirds of a trilogy, *Day of the Dead* is not necessarily the final chapter of George A. Romero's living-dead series. Loosely inspired by Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend*, in which the old world is destroyed and replaced by a functioning society of the undead, the game plan was for *Night* to deal with the beginnings of the holocaust, *Dawn* to follow the complete breakdown of society, and *Day* to depict a future world where living and dead have come to terms, and trained zombies fight wars on behalf of human masters who live in walled city states. The current film was facetiously announced as *Zombies in the White House* – it closes on a shot of Sarah's Crusoe-style home-made calendar as she marks off November 4th, election day – and should have ended (as does Romero's unreleased-in-Britain *Knightriders* and his projected version of Stephen King's *The Stand*) with the establishment in the ruins of the old society of an ambiguously utopian new normality. However, given the need to release the film unrated in the U.S. in order to avoid the stigma of an 'X' rating, Romero had to abandon his elaborate original script for *Day of the Dead* as economically unfeasible. Instead, he has backtracked in the history of the zombie apocalypse to the point when – following hints dropped in *Dawn* – it is generally acknowledged that the living dead retain some species of conscious thought, and science in the shape of the Frankensteinian Dr Logan is pioneering the domestication of the zombie hordes.

Day follows the earlier films in that it is a self-contained unit rather than a conventional sequel, so that the series gives the overall impression of three reports on isolated incidents in the larger story of the end of civilisation as we know it. As in *Night* and *Dawn*, the most sympathetic and thoughtful (if not heroic) male character is Black, and the zombies are depicted in a less unpleasant light than the violent human characters (with the crazed militarists replacing the bikers, National Guardsmen and sheriff's posses of the earlier episodes); and as in *Dawn*, the moral focus of the film is a woman who wants to do more than repeat the errors that seem to have brought about the crisis. Although no definite cause is given for the living dead plague (John has a slightly misjudged tirade which construes the zombies as the vengeance of God), Romero, through the character of Logan, does give further details of the rules by which the zombies live. In scenes which approach the gruesome humour of *Re-Animator*, Logan demonstrates his theories by pruning away an entire head except for the fragment of the brain that accounts for the urge to eat, and by disconnecting all internal organs in order to prove that the hunger impulse exists even when a zombie has no stomach to digest what it has eaten.

Throughout the series, Romero has been influenced by the black comedy and blacker worldview of the EC horror comics. In fact, he seems to have been working with the traditional EC plot (a villain commits more and more outrageous crimes, and is given an ironically apt comeuppance by supernatural means) all along, with American society cast in the role usually given to an individually hateable character and suffering its just desserts in the shape of the

living dead, who are seen to mirror any number of vices: conservative complacency, consumerist frenzy, mindlessly instinctive political positions, pointless greed. Here, Romero scales down the story and gives us, in the thoroughly despicable Rhodes (one major confrontation scene has him threatening to shoot Sarah for refusing to sit down during his lecture to the assembled survivors, and his penchant for summary executions more than justifies his own fate) and his equally thuggish followers, actual individual bad guys who can stand in for greater evils and be graphically pulled apart in the style of EC's famous gross-out last panels.

In the characters of Logan and Bub (brilliantly played by Richard Liberty and Howard Sherman), Romero also gives us authentic EC monsters – the scientist blathering about his theories and his personal problems, and giving schoolmasterish speeches to his tethered zombie test subjects (after one has misbehaved, he locks it up in the dark, 'So you can think about what you've done'); the zombie half-remembering his pre-death life in the army with mocking salutes, pacified by Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' on a Sony Walkman, and finally pursuing His Master's Killer in an implacable, shuffling chase sequence that is effectively a panel-for-panel reshoot of many of EC's merciless poetic-justice finales. With the aid of make-up superstar Tom Savini, Romero has done a far better job than the Amicus anthologies ever did of visualising the comic/horrid fates of his villains: one's head is turned into a gory bowling ball with eye-socket finger-holes; Rhodes is literally pulled apart, defiantly shouting 'choke on 'em' to the zombies gobbling away at his intestines.

While the film owes much of its power to its gross pay-off, Romero has not neglected the serious side that has set his zombie films apart from those of his imitators. In fact, *Day of the Dead* stands practically alone in the mid-80s as a fundamentally non-comic horror film (compare *Re-Animator*, *The Evil Dead*, *Return of the Living Dead*, *Fright Night*, *House*, etc.) and – like *Dawn* – has the wit to devote much of its running time to character development, oppressive atmosphere and pointed social comment. As in *Night* and *Dawn*, there is an acute sense of claustrophobic discomfort about the stronghold in which the survivors are besieged – here a larger, purpose-built, more depressing bunker – and the feeling for explosive tensions and petty quarrels inflated to murderous feuds is cleverly played off against the larger, frequently forgotten threat of the zombies.

The film slips once or twice – Terry Alexander's overdone Jamaican accent almost turns him into the modern equivalent of the superstitious Mantan Moreland or Willie Best characters in 40s zombie movies. But for the most part, Romero reveals not only his proven skills as a director of action and personal unease, but a command of poetically profane dialogue that ensures many of the dialogue scenes are more forcefully shocking than the special-effects horrors: in particular, the series of explicit and roundabout threats made by Rhodes and his men against Sarah, the only woman in the group, who is sexually unavailable thanks to her (deteriorating and plainly doomed) relationship with Miguel. After the disappointment of the lazy *Creepshow*, *Day of the Dead* marks a return to form for Romero, the man who can claim almost single-handed to have reinvented the horror film for the post-1968 cinema.

Kim Newman, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1986

DAY OF THE DEAD

Director: George A. Romero
Production Company: Laurel Entertainment
Executive Producer: Salah M. Hassanein
Producer: Richard P. Rubinstein
Co-producer: David Ball
Associate Producer: Ed Lammi
Production Manager: Zilla Clinton
Production Co-ordinator: Leslie Chapman
Production Co-ordinator (Florida): Melanie Muroff
Production Controller: Tina Carbonell
Location Managers: Jim Bruwelheide, Bill Dickhaut
Production Assistants: Jeffrey Barker, Deborah Carter, Thom S. Downing, Barbara Frazzini, Dan Korintus, William Laxson, Nancy Suzich, John Williams, Michael Johnson, Jim Bozsán, Mike Butera
Production Assistants (Florida): Bob Scott, Frederick Peters, Dianna Slowey, Robert Cagney, Mark Arlington, David Mott, Laura Wortzel, Richard Fick, Sonia Lopes, Craig Myers
Assistant Directors: John Harrison, Katarina Wittich, Annie Loeffler
Screenplay: George A. Romero
Director of Photography: Michael Gornick
2nd unit Photography (Florida): Ernest Dickerson
Assistant Photographers: Frank Perl, Simon Manses
Matte Photographers: David M. Garber, Green
Special Effects: Steve Kirshoff, Mark Mann
Special Effects (Scenic): Howard Jones
Editor: Pasquale Buba
Production Designer: Cletus Anderson
Art Director: Bruce Miller
Set Decorator: Jan Pascale
Set Dresser: Martin Garrigan
Draftsman: Gary Kosko
Head Scenic Artist: Eileen Garrigan
Costume Designer: Barbara Anderson
Wardrobe: Karin Wagner
Make-up: Bonnie Priore, Jeannee Josefszyk, Natałka Vosłakov
Special Make-up Effects: Tom Savini
Special Make-up Effects Crew: David Kindlon, John Vulich, Howard Berger, Everett Burrell, Michael Trcic

Zombie Background Masks: THS, David Smith, Terry Prince
Opticals: Computer Opticals, Harvey Plastrik
Music: John Harrison
Music Producer: John Sutton
Sound Recording: Rolf Pardula
Daily Sound Transfers: Laurel Communications, Tony Buba
Sound Re-recording: Chris Jenkins, Gary D. Alexander, Larry Stensvold
Supervising Sound Editors: David Pettijohn, David B. Cohn
Sound Editors: James Beshears, Howard Neiman, Trevor Jolly
ADR Editor: Lauren Palmer
Foley Studio: Rubber Dubbers
Stunt Co-ordinator: Taso N. Stavrakis
Stand-ins: James Wetzel, Theresa Bedekovich
Stand-ins (Florida): Bruce Bellows, Ellen Moon
Weapons: John Wolcutt

Cast

Lori Cardille (*Sarah*)
Terry Alexander (*John*)
Joseph Pilato (*Captain Rhodes*)
Jarlath Conroy (*McDermott*)
Antone Dileo (*Miguel*)
Gary Howard Klar (*Steele*)
Ralph Marrero (*Rickles*)
John Amplas (*Fisher*)
Richard Liberty (*Dr Logan*)
Howard Sherman (*Bub*)
Don Brockett, William Cameron, Deborah Carter, Winnie Flynn, Debra Gordon, Jeff Hogan, Barbara Holmes, David Kindlon, Bruce Kirkpatrick, William Andrew Laczko, Susan Martinelli, Kim Maxwell, Barbara Russell, Gene A. Saraceni, John Schwartz, Mark Tierno, Michael Trcic, John Vulich (*zombies*)
Phillip G. Kellams
Taso N. Stavrakis
Gregory Nicotero

USA 1985

101 mins

IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

The Uninvited

Thu 1 Dec 18:05; Sat 17 Dec 14:30 (+ intro by broadcaster and writer, Louise Blain)

Kwaidan (Kaidan)

Thu 1 Dec 20:00; Tue 13 Dec 17:40

Night of the Eagle

Fri 2 Dec 21:00; Sat 10 Dec 12:10

Daughters of Darkness (Les lèvres rouges)

Sat 3 Dec 20:45; Tue 13 Dec 21:00

Transness in Horror

Tue 6 Dec 18:20

Let the Right One In (Låt den rätte komma in)

Tue 6 Dec 20:45; Thu 22 Dec 18:15

Philosophical Screens: The Lure

Wed 7 Dec 20:10 Blue Room

The Lure (Córki dancing)

Wed 7 Dec 18:15; Thu 22 Dec 20:45 (+ intro by Dr Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies at King's College London)

Cat People

Wed 7 Dec 20:50; Mon 19 Dec (+ intro by Clarisse Loughrey, chief film critic for The Independent)

Black Sunday (La maschera del demonio)

Fri 9 Dec 21:00; Sun 18 Dec 18:30

Ring (Ringu)

Sat 10 Dec 20:40; Tue 13 Dec 21:05;
Tue 20 Dec 21:00

Atlantics (Atlantique) + Atlantiques

Sun 11 Dec 14:50; Tue 27 Dec 18:20

Sugar Hill

Sun 11 Dec 18:00; Sat 17 Dec 20:40

Häxan

Mon 12 Dec 18:10 (+ live score by The Begotten); Sat 17 Dec 11:45 (with live piano accompaniment)

Sweetheart

Mon 12 Dec 21:00; Tue 27 Dec 12:40

Arrebato

Wed 14 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by writer and broadcaster Anna Bogutskaya);
Fri 23 Dec 18:05

The Final Girls LIVE

Thu 15 Dec 20:30

One Cut of the Dead (Kamera o tomeru na!)

Fri 16 Dec 18:15; Fri 30 Dec 20:45

The Fog

Fri 16 Dec 21:00; Wed 28 Dec 18:10

Being Human + Q&A with Toby Whithouse and guests (tbc)

Sat 17 Dec 18:00

Day of the Dead

Mon 19 Dec 20:40; Thu 29 Dec 18:20

Society

Tue 20 Dec 18:15; Wed 28 Dec 20:50

Interview with the Vampire

Wed 21 Dec 18:10; Thu 29 Dec 20:40

Ginger Snaps

Wed 21 Dec 20:50; Tue 27 Dec 15:10

A Dark Song

Fri 23 Dec 20:45; Fri 30 Dec 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Screen Horrors –

Screen Monsters

Thu 20 Oct – Thu 15 Dec 18:30–20:30 Studio

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