

Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: Movie Recommendation - **George A. Romero's Land Of The Dead**

After a long absence the zombie movie master returns with a solid new entry in the series – August 2005

It's been twenty years since the last installment in filmmaker George A. Romero's zombie saga. His 1985 film **Day of the Dead** portrayed a world virtually wiped out by the zombie infestation. In that movie a small group of scientists and military personnel holed up in an underground bunker worked side by side in a tense and volatile relationship as they tried to understand and combat the zombie epidemic. Now in 2005 we are finally seeing the next evolution of the story, in the form of **Land of the Dead**. Here we learn that there are indeed many more humans left alive, and that they are basically divided into two groups. The remaining affluent and powerful people live in a walled and heavily fortified utopian city lead by a guy named Kaufman (Dennis Hopper), while the rest of the population lives in slum areas outside the city. Beyond the outer walls of this area is where the zombies reside, and where they are evolving. **Land of the Dead** also stars Simon Baker, John Leguizamo and Asia Argento.

George A. Romero's fourth zombie epic reminded me a bit of **Day of the Dead** because of all the gunplay and military presence, while the luxury accommodations of the rich people brought to mind the shopping mall in **Dawn of the Dead**. The gung-ho attitude of some of the military personnel (especially John Leguizamo's character) also reminded me of the bikers in that movie. Additionally, George Romero once again portrays many of the humans in a very unflattering light. Kaufman and his cohorts are rich opportunists who have managed to effectively keep the class structure intact even in the wake of the zombie epidemic. The military personnel they've hired string up the zombies and use them for target practice, while in the slum areas zombies are put in cages and provide the means for gambling. This all tends to make the zombies appear sympathetic, especially when a mechanic zombie called Big Daddy slowly begins to sense things

around him and starts leading the other zombies on a march toward the city. The walking dead are like a persecuted group rebelling against an evil regime. In fact I'll say I was rooting for Big Daddy and his cheerleader sidekick more and more as the film progressed.

This was a solid movie from start to finish and there are some key reasons why. First, the story is interesting and seems like a natural evolution from the events in the previous movies. * The action involving Cholo (John Leguizamo's character) and his attempt to use an armored vehicle called Dead Reckoning to blackmail Kaufman and force his way into the upper class nicely complements the zombie march toward the skyscrapers and gives the movie more depth and complexity. **Also the performances are all first-rate, especially Simon Baker in the role of Riley, the film's main protagonist, and Leguizamo as the tough-talking Cholo. Additionally, it's always nice to see Asia Argento onscreen, even though admittedly her role here as a prostitute turned freedom fighter is pretty standard fare.

A second thing I liked about the film was the zombie makeup and gore effects. The zombie makeup was all very well done and added nicely to the characterization of several of the main zombies. As with all George Romero zombie movies, this one doesn't skimp on gore either. In fact I was surprised how much he was able to get onscreen in this picture. Gore hounds should not be disappointed, as the carnage gets heavy during the zombie march toward the skyscrapers. There were also some very memorable shots during this march, particularly one where we see the zombies lined up at the edge of the pier looking down at the water and across to the city beyond. A bit later we see them slowly emerging one by one from the water in some shots that reminded me of the classic cult film ***Carnival of Souls***.

On the whole this film kept me interested from start to finish. As mentioned above it was reminiscent in many ways to George Romero's previous entries, while at the same time having a unique story and style all its own. While I don't believe it is a landmark achievement like ***Night of the Living Dead*** or ***Dawn of the Dead***, I do think it's a worthy entry to the series and definitely one of the best movies I've seen so far in 2005. In a year filled (so far) with remakes and forgettable big-budget summer action movies, ***Land of the Dead*** shines brightly and proves (as the trailer points out) that George A. Romero has indeed returned with another masterpiece in the genre *he created*.

* From what I know about the evolution of this long-anticipated movie, Dead Reckoning was one of the possible titles for the film. Another one was *Twilight of the Dead*, which I personally think would have been just as good as ***Land of the Dead***.

** I'd like to also note how cool it was to see Tom Savini appear in a cameo as a biker zombie.