

Oscar Worthy... Well, Almost

10 Great Zombie Films You May Have Missed

BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON LOPEZ

Spanning close to 40 years and six countries of origin, this list of zombie films showcases movies that may not have achieved the level of notoriety that is their due. Exploring the ones you haven't seen should be a no brainer.



1. 28 Days Later (2002)

"28 Days Later" is one of the films that opens up showing us what caused the virus. And PETA members will likely not be happy it.

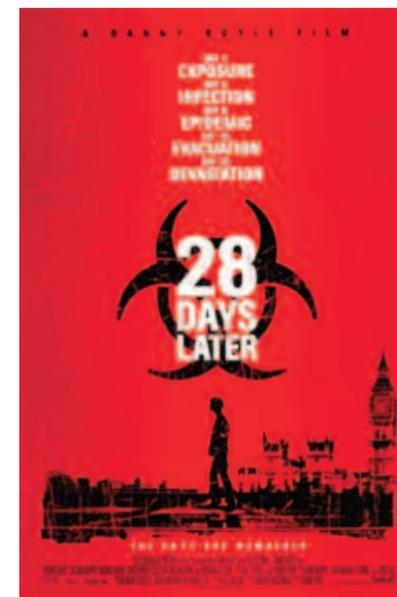
Cillian Murphy awakens in a hospital bed. Long after the panic on the streets of London, a lot of overhead and distance shots emphasize his aloneness. He later finds other survivors who explain what happened. Brendan Gleeson, acting as a neighborhood watch of one, is among them and

the group enjoys moments of normalcy, like enjoying a picnic and watching all the pretty horses. Later the group is at risk from both hungry zombies and horny soldiers.

Sum It Up

There are a few plot holes in this one, but "28 Days Later" is overall well done, with some beautiful cinematography that you don't typically see in this genre.

Rating: 4.1



2. Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things (1972)

Ok, if you're looking for stellar special effects and acting, this won't be your thing. But it is if you like the genre with some cheesy goodness and can appreciate a cinematic time capsule.

First, just knowing it is directed by Bob Clark, far more well known for "A Christmas Story," makes it worthwhile. As for the story, a director with an affinity for speaking in alliteration takes his acting troupe to a cemetery where they perform a Satanic ritual in an attempt to

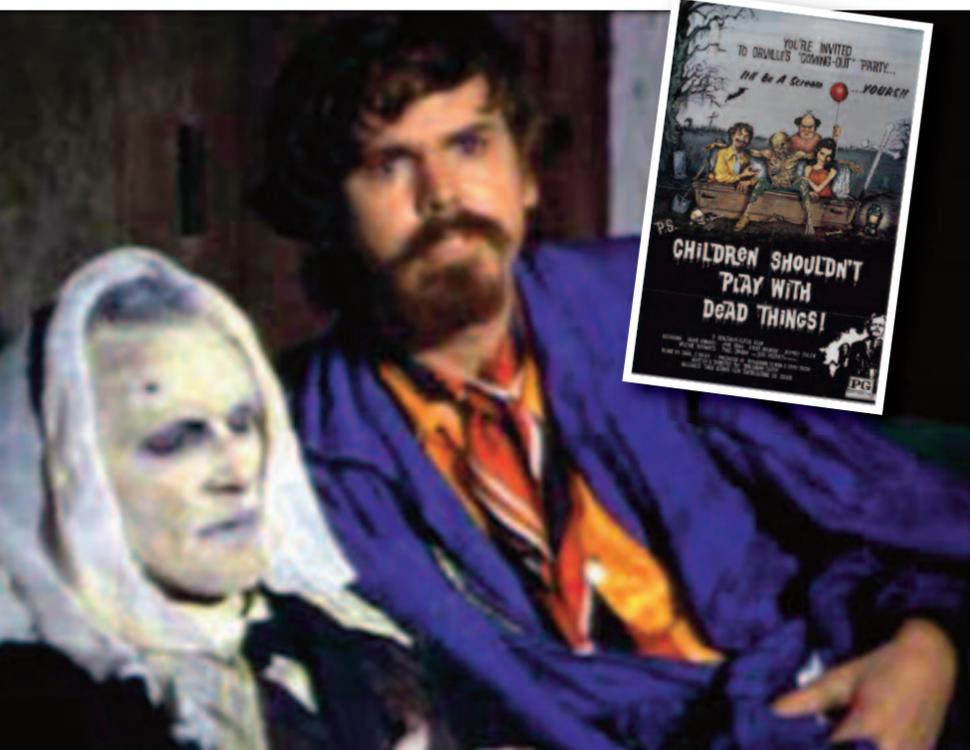
summon the dead from their graves. Before this is successful, the director forms a very strange bond with Orville, the corpse they dig up.

The movie withstands the test of time – sometimes. Some of the acting and dialog is goofy; some is ok. The blood special effects on the multitude of zombies are passable while the wigs and face makeup are laughable. In fact, one zombie wears what looks like a Lon Chaney/Phantom of the Opera mask with the sides peeling off.

Sum it Up

Mock if you must: This is still a memorable ride.

Rating: 4.8



3. Dead Alive/Braindead (1992)

If Ed Wood and John Waters had collaborated on a zombie film, it might look a lot like "Dead Alive."

Co-written and directed by Peter Jackson (yes, the Lord of the Rings Peter Jackson) and filmed in his native New Zealand, this

cult Kiwi classic is a fun, campy zombie flick against the backdrop of a late 1950s love story. While some of the effects are deliberately cheesy—think a demented stop-motion rat monkey straight out of a Harryhausen film—others are pretty spectacular and hold up very well.

There are definitely things in this

"If you're a fan of pudding, have some before the film; you may never want it again afterward."

highly gory movie I've never seen before. And, I admit, a few I kind of wish I hadn't. There are some serious gross-out scenes like a wound that not only festers and oozes, it pulsates and explodes.

If you're a fan of pudding, have some before the film; you may never want it again afterward.

Sum it Up

"Dead Alive" is well worth seeing for lead character Lionel's many efforts at controlling his town's zombie population, which includes his domineering mother and a zombie infant that is certainly a sight to behold. (Note: the film's original name is "Braindead," and "Dead Alive" was for the North American release.)

Rating: 4.2

4. Dead Snow (2009)

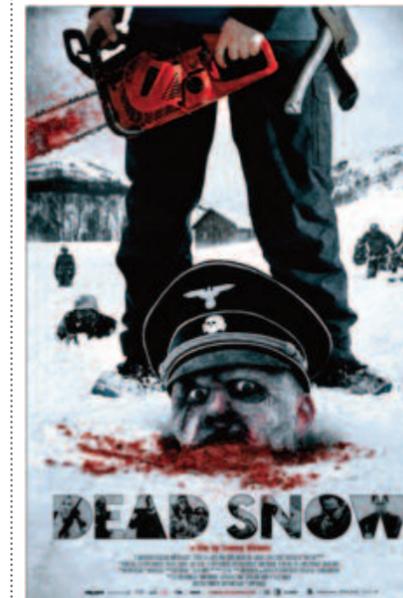
This subtitled Norwegian film is gem.

"Dead Snow" has some typical horror movie aspects, like don't go outside alone—in fact, you could make a drinking game out of every time someone calls out, "Hello?"—and definitely don't have sex.

But the fact that the movie has Nazi zombies makes for something completely different. There are also some atypical kill scenes that make you say "whoa!" These zombies are organized, fast and kill because they're on a mission, not because they're hungry. At first there appear to be just a few of them, but that quickly changes.

Sum it Up

There's quite a bit of gore—these



zombies seem to perpetually drool blood—but a lot of humor, too. And there's a nod to the genre with one of the characters wearing a Brain-dead t-shirt.

Rating: 4.0





LE PACTE

5. The Horde (2009)

This French film is subtitled and takes place almost entirely in an apartment building.

Two groups that start out battling each other reluctantly join forces against the hordes of zombies that threaten from inside and outside the building. The building itself—condemned with just a few residents—is a foe, as well, with sporadically working elevators and sketchy escape routes. The group

is divided at first by approach to the situation and then by geography as certain members split off. One group adopts an old man who is far too delighted to go into battle and clearly enjoys taunting a fallen female zombie with vile threats. “The Horde” has some exciting shoot ’em up scenes, including ones where zombies take what looks like 20 bullets and still stand tall. “The

Horde” doesn’t shy away from blood, either. It’s everywhere: on the walls, the ground, the clothes, the living and the undead.

Sum it Up

For sheer volume of zombies, “The Horde” is tough to beat. These zombies, too, pay homage to the title in the alternative meaning — they hoard bodies like demented squirrels storing food for the winter.

Rating: 4.8

6. I Am Legend (2007)

It’s easy to recall this as the “Will Smith and a dog” movie, more so than a zombie flick.

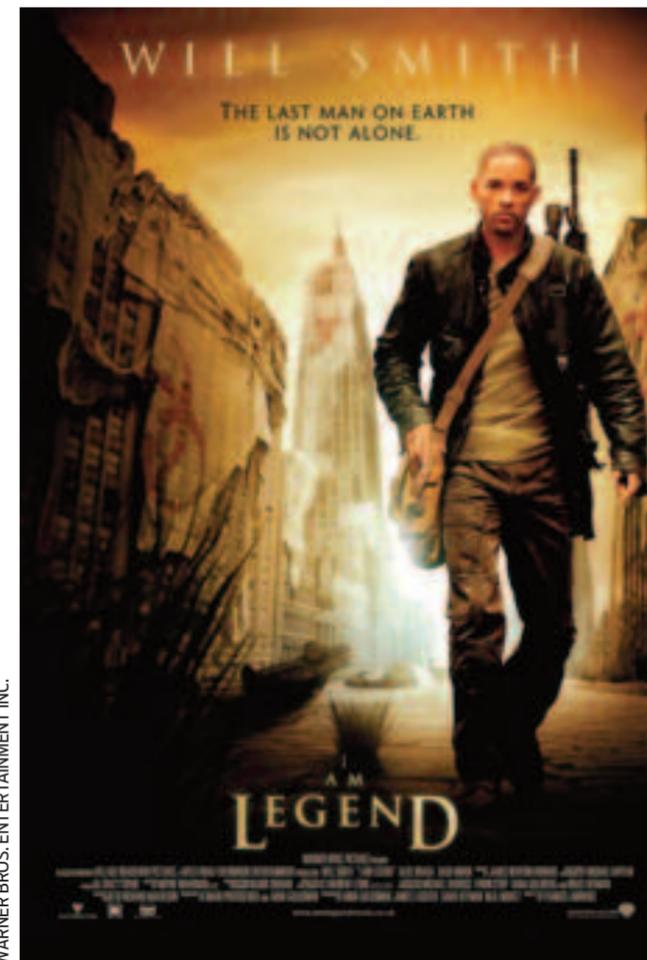
Smith lives in comfort in a townhouse with electricity and a plentiful food supply. In the empty streets of New York, Smith and German shepherd Sam have a routine, which includes visiting his “friends”—the mannequins in a DVD store. Of course, later we see the “dark seekers,” who are crazy strong and relentless as long as they aren’t exposed to light.

Through the introduction and a series of flashbacks, we learn about the virus Smith is fighting against and see the exodus from the city that looks like a reverse Ellis Island.

Sum it Up

There’s a lot of heart and suspense in this one, with in-the-nick-of-time scenes like the shrinking sliver of light that keeps attackers at bay. The DVD has an alternative version that includes a couple deleted scenes that culminate with a substantially different ending.

Rating: 4.4



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The Classics

No article on great zombie movies is complete without the “of the Deads,” which are synonymous with George Romero. In his honor, we include a list of his films, along with year of release, as well as the remakes. You know, just in case you might’ve missed one.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

George Romero; 1968

DAWN OF THE DEAD

George Romero; 1978

DAY OF THE DEAD

George Romero; 1985

LAND OF THE DEAD

George Romero; 2005

DIARY OF THE DEAD

George Romero; 2007

SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD

George Romero; 2009

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

Tom Savini; 1990 (remake)

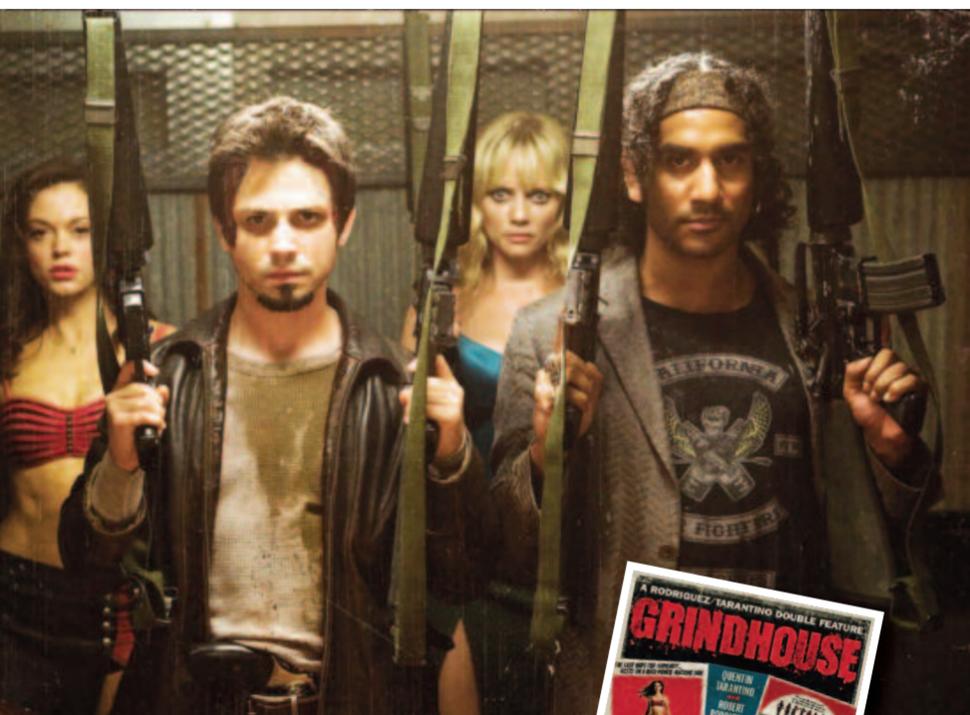
DAWN OF THE DEAD

Zack Snyder; 2004 (remake)

DAY OF THE DEAD

Steve Miner; 2008 (remake)

There are also several departures and parodies that capitalize on the success of the franchise, using some variation of “...of the Dead” in their names. They include “Children of the Living Dead” and “Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead” (no, really).



7. Planet Terror (2007)

This is exactly what you'd expect from Robert Rodriguez in terms of humor, violence and gore.

It has the bonus of a vintage vibe, complete with the snap, crackle and pop of old film. It also has zombies going back to their roots of hunting people to eat their brains, as well as other body parts as appetizers. "Planet Terror" is one of two films in the Grindhouse set (the other is by Quentin Tarantino), complete with coming attractions. Featuring a cast of established actors and otherwise (think James Brolin and Fergie), "Planet Terror" has a band of people trying to combat zombies caused by a virus set off by the military.



THE WEINSTEIN CO.

Sum it Up

Oh, and The Walking Dead fans will appreciate the special effects by Greg Nicotero.

Rating: 4.7



8. Pontypool (2008)

According to the film, "Pontypool" is French for "something about to happen."

It's easy to think that may apply

"Pontypool has a high level of suspense ..."

to the film as a whole. But that would be discounting the slow burn of the film. With most of the scenes in a radio station in the basement of a church, the movie takes place in a small space in a small town. With a

minimal main cast, "Pontypool" has a high level of suspense and it takes quite a while before we see any zombies. Once we do, we quickly find out how the people turned, and it's a highly unusual take on how the "virus" is transferred.

Sum it Up

"Pontypool" has a good combo of suspense and camp, and is a good introduction to the genre for people who shy away from the heavy amounts of gore in most typical zombie films.

Rating: 4.6

Knowledge is Power

Watching the profiled films taught me a few life lessons about preparing for a zombie apocalypse:

- Don't live in a small town.
- Don't live in a big city.
- Some zombies run really fast. Need to get in much better shape.
- Animals can turn into zombies. Zombie dogs are not cuddly.
- Blenders and lawn mowers are successful zombie-killing machines.

9. [REC] (2007)

Shot entirely from the POV of a cameraman filming, “REC” starts off with a reporter and said cameraman at a fire station doing a day-in-the-life profile of the firefighters for a television show. The reporter is clearly bored with the assignment and just waiting for something to happen, which certainly delivers.

They are called to an incident at an apartment building that is quickly sealed off for mysterious “safety reasons.” Some of the characters tend to blend together; the ones who

are a little more defined include the reporter who starts to lose it to the self-declared man in charge—the overly officious type you hope gets killed off quickly. As the number of “the infected” increases, we learn more about why the building is sequestered and the virus behind it.

Sum it Up

This subtitled Spanish flick is engaging and entertaining and boasts some very creepy zombies. Don’t see “REC” alone: there are some scares that make you jump, and the ending is likely to spark a discussion.

Rating: 4.9



The Kings of Comedy

Like George Romero’s movies, some other zombie films are well established as greats. In order to make room for some lesser-known films in the main list, this trio is broken out for those who like their zombie movies served with a substantial side of laughs.

FIDO (2006)

In this fetching film, zombies have largely been tamed and are used to help around the house. Timmy turns their zombie into a playmate, names him Fido and tries to protect him after attacking a neighbor. Fine cast includes Dylan Baker and Carrie-Ann Moss.

SHAUN OF THE DEAD (2004)

With Brits Nick Frost and Simon Pegg, Shaun of the Dead launched this century’s comedic homage to the genre, complete with “We’re coming to get you, Barbara.”

ZOMBIELAND (2009)

Zombieland sweetens this category with a great cast (including that famous cameo) and the quest for Twinkies in between their many adventures seeking safety and shelter.

Elizabeth Anderson Lopez lives with her husband and menagerie of pets in Lake Forest, Calif. They are woefully unprepared for the zombie apocalypse.

10. Slither (2006)

“The Walking Dead” fans will appreciate Michael Rooker as one of the leads of the film, who turns into Slither’s first zombie.

At first he makes due with an insane amount of steaks, as well as dognapping several meals, but that doesn’t satiate him for long. Slither takes the collective brain aspect of zombies and gives it a new twist. And before Rooker’s descent into Jabba the Zombie, he displays a higher sense of self awareness of his zombie state than typical: “I’m dead – don’t I look it?”

Sum it Up

It takes about an hour in to determine that “Slither” is, in fact, a zombie movie, but with Elizabeth Banks and Nathan Fillion as fellow lead actors, it’s entertaining from start to finish. And seeing zombies

feed against Air Supply playing in the background seems just a little less scary. Oh, and stick around after the credits for a bonus scene. Well, maybe not if you’re a cat person...

Rating: 4.75 🚩



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