

Fango Flashback: “ZOMBIE”

Written by Jorge Solis
Saturday, 07 August 2010 09:27



During the recent Zombo Italiano at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, fans had a chance to see the 1979 apocalyptic opus ZOMBIE (a.k.a. ZOMBI 2) on the big screen. This is the quintessential ghoulish flick that established director Lucio Fulci as a horror icon. While this is an unofficial sequel to DAWN OF THE DEAD, which was titled ZOMBI in Italy, the films have nothing to do with each other; the producers were simply seeking to cash in on the success of George A. Romero's sequel.

Upon the arrival of a seemingly empty yacht sailing toward New York City, two harbor patrolmen are assembled to investigate. One of the patrolmen is savagely bitten by a living corpse. In a hail of gunfire, his frightened partner shoots the flesheater into the water. Later, the dead cop will wake up in the morgue, spreading the zombie plague.



Furious over the death of one of their own, officers drag the yacht owner's daughter, Anne Bowles (Tisa Farrow, sister of Mia), in for interrogation. Shocked to hear the news that her father is missing, Anne wonders if his disappearance has anything to do with his scientific research on a mysterious tropical island. Elsewhere in NYC, the patrolman's death has caught the attention of a busy and noisy newsroom. Assigned by his editor (played by Fulci himself), reporter Peter West (Ian McCulloch) sets out to investigate. Anne and Peter wind up crossing paths when they simultaneously break into the guarded yacht, where Peter discovers a note in which Anne's father declares he has succumbed to a strange disease. Anne believes she will find answers at the tropical island, named Matoul, but the duo have difficulty finding transport there, because scared locals fear the place is cursed. They enlist the aid of a seagoing couple, Brian and Susan, to travel to Matoul.

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Meanwhile, the island has collapsed under madness. Dr. David Menard (Richard Johnson) is obsessively hard at work studying voodoo while his erratic wife, Paola, pleads with him to leave. Menard stubbornly insists on staying to continue his research. When Anne and the rest of the group finally arrive, the dead buried on the island start rising from their graves.

In a highly memorable sequence, Paola hides in a closet when her home is broken into by a zombie. Hands burst through the wooden doors, reaching out for her hair. Grabbing the back of her head, the ghoul slowly drags Paola's face, toward a jagged piece of wood. Your jaw will drop as you watch the splinter pierce her eyeball. Elsewhere at a nearby cemetery, a corpse awakens with a face swarmed with wiggling worms.

This is a rare horror film in which most of the action takes place in broad daylight, the better to get a good look at the grotesque decomposition and gore. Renowned makeup artist Giannetto De Rossi did not skimp on the FX, allowing international audiences to see absolutely everything. Sergio Salvati's cinematography doesn't hold back; nor does he rely on shadows, placing the camera in extreme close-ups with distorted angles on the ghoul getup. The traditional “dark and stormy night” setting isn't always necessary when telling a scary story; you can actually do so in broad daylight, as Fulci successfully proves here. He is able to create an unsettling ambiance, a sense of hopelessness, even though the sun is still up.



Somebody in the Microsoft company must be a Fulci fan: In one of their current Windows 7 commercials, the infamous scene where a zombie battles a shark is prominently featured. This scene between a professional trainer and a real tiger shark is beautifully choreographed. It's even more impressive when you consider that today, the shark would no doubt be CGI.

The bleak ending dates the film, yet makes it more resonant at the same time as a parade of zombies march down the Brooklyn Bridge, heading toward the World Trade Center—a lingering, distant memory of New York as it once was. Fulci's imagery is still striking today, and ZOMBIE continues to deliver a bloody punch to viewers.

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