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Introducing an article on someone as iconic as filmmaker George A. Romero in the pages of Fango is daunting, as he shouldn’t really require an introduction at all. But for the sake of this feature, let’s just say that, living or undead, film history has never seen an artist quite like him.

The New York-born, Pittsburgh-forged and, eventually, Toronto-based maverick accidentally made horror-film history with his 1968 shocker NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, a picture that envisioned humanity on the brink of hell, with friends and enemies alike falling prey to an ever-increasing army of flesheating zombies. That film’s international success would define—in ways both wonderful and, in some cases, woeful—Romero’s creative legacy, and would see him literally give birth to an entire subgenre of socially aware, ultraviolent horror cinema, movies that have and will continue to be adored, discussed and debated long after his current crop of admirers become “dead…all messed up…”

Romero’s latest cannibal-corpse epic is the partially Canadian-funded SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD, the sixth in his evolving, sometimes experimental series that most recently went viral with 2007’s DIARY OF THE DEAD. For the first time, this film carries over plot threads and a single character from the previous entry.

The movie finds National Guardsman “Nicotine” Crocket (DIARY’s Alan Van Sprang) and his not-so-merry band of rogue warriors fleeing the living-dead outbreak and hightailing it to the hopefully remote Plum Island, which promises refuge from the shambling, human-devouring threat. Instead, not only do our gun-toting antiheroes discover that the dead are “alive” and well on Plum, but they become embroiled in a decades-long conflict between two warring Irish-American families—the O’Flynns and the Muldoons—whose current battle involves the fate of the zombies themselves.

But beyond Romero’s typical satire and buckets of gruesome gore, SURVIVAL is unique in the series because, well, it’s a Western. A full-on, dirty, rough-and-tumble action epic containing as many horses, rifles and cowboy hats as it does blood-hungry, undead monsters. Coming from Magnolia Pictures via video-on-demand and other platforms April 30 and then in limited

theatrical release May 28, the movie has already screened at festivals around the world—and, like a good deal of Romero’s work, has won as many cheers as it has jeers.

Fango caught up with the now 70-year-old master of horror in his Toronto home this past January and found him sipping scotch, mulling over a new project that, unfortunately, we can’t talk about yet (trust us: If it happens, it will be—as usual—controversial) and nursing his sick budgie, all while preparing to officially unleash his most offbeat DEAD film to date.

FANGORIA: Your model for SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD was William Wyler’s 1958 oater THE BIG COUNTRY. When did this classic flick first fall under your radar?

GEORGE A. ROMERO: I saw it in Pittsburgh as a kid. I was just out of college and tickets went on sale for this big movie premiere. This was before every premiere had to go down in Orange County. Back then, studios would test their films all over the country, and THE BIG COUNTRY just happened to be [shown in] the ’Burg. It was a big deal, huge turnout, in a big theater, tons of lights, the full spectacle. Gregory Peck was there with his new wife Veronique, and he got up to introduce the film and was just so gracious. He was so proud of it, and he specifically asked us all to pay attention to the music. Of course, not everyone did…but I did.

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