

Terror Tidbits (Fango #305)—Raising “THE DEAD,” Part One

Written by Thom Carnell
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In 1968, the world’s conception of zombies was changed forever when George A. Romero unleashed NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. Its premise of the deceased rising from their tombs to devour the living was revolutionary, and deviated radically from previous ideas of Haitian voodoo and mysticism, of men devoid of will, puppet-mastered by ebony-skinned figures with white skulls painted on their faces. After Romero, we had humanity’s worst imagining (death itself) rising up and reducing us all to food.

Today, after years of retreads, the ghouls have become archetypes. Used for selling everything from car stereos to televisions, these once-frightening icons have been strip-mined to the point of impotency. But with writer/directors Howard J. and Jonathan Ford’s THE DEAD, zombies are granted a fresh lease on unlife—and a whole new hunting ground. What makes the movie (coming to theaters later this year from Anchor Bay) so different and so important is not that its dead are fast (they’re not) or that there are countless hordes of them (there are), but that the setting is unlike that of any undead film before it: the barren landscape of Africa. Fango spoke to Howard Ford to learn what it took to bring this unique vision to fruition.



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FANGORIA: How did THE DEAD come together?

HOWARD J. FORD: Well, my brother Jon and I saw George A. Romero’s original DAWN OF THE DEAD, and that had an incredible impact on us; it remains one of our favorite movies. It took horror into the daylight, and something about zombies got through to our very core. So, Jon and I had always wanted to make a zombie movie, but by the time we got going professionally, there had been so much ripped-off crap. As a result, zombies had started to get a bad name. It suddenly felt like, “Well, we can’t really do it. No one would take this kind of movie seriously.” And to be fair, had it not been for Jon, I don’t think we would have ended up making THE DEAD. We’d become commercial filmmakers, directed a lot of TV spots for every kind of product from Guinness to mobile phones to condoms, but every now and then, we’d be on set somewhere and Jon would say, “We really should be doing that zombie movie.” I’d agree, but it didn’t feel right until we had Africa in the equation.

FANG: How exactly did you end up on the Dark Continent?

FORD: We wound up shooting commercials overseas and going to places like Ghana, Nigeria and Cape Town in South Africa. In between locations, we would see these amazing village huts and think, “Wouldn’t it be great to shoot here?” During a conversation, one of us said, “What about setting that zombie movie in Africa?” I realized that was different, and thought, “We can make a film here that would have so many other meanings, and tap into the country’s spirituality and all sorts of themes,” and I became really excited.

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