

“ZOMBLIES”: Bloodbath on a Budget

Written by Ashley Thorpe

Friday, 23 December 2011 12:11



Dartmoor...the UK region's name evokes tales of phantom hounds, deadly mires and devils that lurk in fog-shrouded hollows. It's a landscape wherein you can imagine many a monster lurking—but a zombie invasion?

Enter David M. Reynolds (pictured below) and Devon-based Realm Pictures, the determined young crew behind the accomplished short feature ZOMBLIES. Setting off with a crew of volunteers to the barren lands of Dartmoor with but a few fistfuls of borrowed money and gallons of their own brand of fake blood, they created a 50-minute action B-movie romp replete with motorcycle chases, air strikes and a veritable horde of the undead.



What really sets ZOMBLIES apart from the plethora of other indie ghoulish flicks is its firm refusal to compromise on production values, a determination accomplished with a number of resourceful variations on otherwise expensive techniques: Homemade compressed-air cannons allowing for safe, cheap explosions, the use of stunning local backdrops, including an abandoned factory complex, and industry-standard visual FX produced in the basement of the shared house the team live and work in. This may be grassroots horror, but it had lofty ambitions, as Reynolds discussed with Fango.

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FANGORIA: It seems nowadays that everyone and his grandmother is picking up a camera and making a zombie movie. What made you choose this particular genre trope to showcase your ideas with ZOMBLIES? Is it a subgenre that fascinates you, or was there some particular aspect of it that you thought needed a shot in the arm?

DAVID M. REYNOLDS: It’s nothing new for a filmmaker to cut his teeth in the noble art of the no-budget horror—you just have to look at the early work of Sam Raimi and Peter Jackson. A lot of people go for zombies because they’re cheap and easy to produce on an independent production. We went zombie for precisely the opposite reason: We wanted a challenge.

I had the idea a long time ago while debating the necessity of fast zombies in today’s cinema. My argument was that, in the same way audiences have become numb to bright colors and fast edits from MTV, today’s audiences are more and more difficult to scare—hence necessitating the use of a faster, more dangerous enemy. Rightly or wrongly, this is proving the case, at least where the primary intention of the ghoul is to terrify; comedies and nostalgia flicks are immune to this. So the idea for our B-movie was born: a crack unit of black-ops troops whose job is to travel beyond “the wall” into the infected zone to perform weapons tests and routine missions at the behest of a private arms company. What if we take this confident and well-trained unit of slow-zombie killers and present those complacent characters with a new, faster threat, in the same way the complacent audience of the old-school zombie flick is now assaulted with the likes of 28 DAYS LATER, the DAWN OF THE DEAD remake, etc.?



So our movie was to be an action flick! That meant guns, air strikes, explosions and a zombie-slaying motorbike chase scene—it is a B-movie, after all. Original in its own way, and yet deliberately clichéd in all the right places.

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FANG: It has an unusual running time for a short. What made you choose this particular duration, and were there ever any plans to extend it into a feature?

REYNOLDS: At 50 minutes, ZOMBLIES has been described as “festival death”—it’s a terrible running time for a movie if you want to get distribution. Truth be told, it was never conceived as a short feature, as it is now billed. It was originally 30 minutes, but it just ran away with itself! Never has a lesson been learned more thoroughly. The “one minute per page” theory of screenwriting is simply not applicable to movies that are essentially one long action scene. We have been asked to extend it into a feature by interested distributors—but it is what it is. The story is a 50-minute story, and two years on, we are ready to tackle new things.



FANG: Although your projects have been admittedly low-budget thus far, it’s evident from the way they’re made that they have loftier ambitions. Are there any key movies that set you on the path to filmmaking?

REYNOLDS: Lofty ambitions! It’s our greatest strength and our greatest weakness. I just can’t aim low. I find it literally impossible to come up with nice ideas that won’t cost much. There is no doubt that ZOMBLIES is a \$10-million movie at heart. We just had to find the best way to produce that with \$15,000!

I have pretty mainstream tastes when it comes to cinema. I grew up addicted to Spielberg, Lucas, anything with adventure and escapism. When I started film school, I went through a phase of being a little ashamed of that. Everybody around me was prattling on about Dadaism

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and German Expressionism, and I came to realize pretty quickly that a lot of those people were posers and weren't actually getting anything done. I quit film school and haven't looked back! Don't get me wrong, German Expressionism is great—but there is something deeply wrong with not being honest about what you genuinely enjoy.

FANG: It's a novel approach to offer something akin to a “guerrilla film course” with a Kickstarter scheme, as opposed to the usual signed-poster and credit expendables. What inspired you to take this route?

REYNOLDS: I used myself as a yardstick: I am the target market. There are a thousand movies on Kickstarter, and I hadn't heard of most and hadn't donated to any. And yet it's not difficult to get money out of me—so what was wrong?

We have tried really hard to give whatever we can to people in exchange for their support. We have lighting workshops; plans for DIY LED lights; and, perhaps most interesting of all, a copy of ZOMBLIES with 10 really in-depth tutorials for making killer indie action movies with no money.

We have had a fantastic response so far. People seem to really be getting behind the idea. One of the tutorials is how to construct a compressed-air cannon to add safe explosions to your movie—good clean fun! Check it out [here](#).

{vimeo}33506582{/vimeo}

FANG: Your new project, THE UNDERWATER REALM, recalls such vintage classics as 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA and—dare I say it—films like the Amicus picture WARLORDS OF ATLANTIS. It's an unusual style of picture to tackle these days. What led to that decision, and has it created any particular problems?

REYNOLDS: WARLORDS OF ATLANTIS! Now there's a movie! “It got my pencil!”

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THE UNDERWATER REALM is the one idea I can't walk away from. It's the fact that nothing like this has ever been done before, it's the fact that it's impossible—and the fact that instead of some far-off alien planet, or magical kingdom, the amazing world of our story really exists, right beneath our ocean!

20,000 LEAGUES was filmed in a metal tank. Ours is actually shot in the water. There are a thousand problems to combat, and it's a huge challenge we are tackling one step at a time. How do you eat an elephant? Bit by bit.



FANG: What next, and what would your dream project be?

REYNOLDS: We are currently writing a trilogy of feature films set in the world of the Underwater Realm. Our dream is that, with the completion of the five short films we are currently producing, we will have the opportunity to tell these stories. Imagine a fantasy trilogy about an ancient race of men living beneath our oceans!

The finished picture, having attracted a legion of devoted fans, is set for a UK DVD release in March 2012. You can watch ZOMBLIES below and see its official site [here](#), and follow the progress of THE UNDERWATER REALM

[here](#)

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