

Anchor Bay presents

Dawn of the Dead: Ultimate Edition (1978)

Francine: *What are they doing? Why did they come here?*

Stephen: *Some kind of instinct, memory. What they need to do. This was an important place in their lives.*

- Gaylen Ross, David Emge

Review By: Mark Zimmer 

Published: September 06, 2004

Stars: David Emge, Ken Foree, Scott H. Reiniger, Gaylen Ross

Other Stars: David Crawford, David Early, Tom Savini

Director: George A. Romero

Manufacturer: Crest National

MPAA Rating: R for (flesh-eating zombies, extreme gore and violence, language, racial epithets)

Run Time: 02h:07m:04s

Release Date: September 07, 2004

Genre: horror

Style Grade	Substance Grade	Image Transfer Grade	Audio Transfer Grade	Extras Grade	Member Comments
A-	B+	B+	B+	A+	0

DVD Review

George A. Romero had scored a huge hit with his highly influential **Night of the Living Dead**, but due to a copyright registration screwup saw very little in the way of actual money from the film's success. Wanting to recover some of that money was one of the motivating factors behind this sequel, but it's an entertaining and thoughtful gorefest in its own right. Anchor Bay, having released the film in a couple different versions previously, here knocks the zombies out of the park by offering all three major versions of the picture.

Three weeks after the events in **Night of the Living Dead**, the zombies have rampaged across the countryside and civilization is starting to crumble. Stephen Andrews (David Emge) and Francine Parker (Gaylen Ross), a couple working at a television station, commandeer the traffic helicopter to evade the shambling scourge, together with Peter Washington (Ken Foree) and Roger DeMarco (Scott H. Reiniger), two heavily-armed members of a police SWAT team. Outside Pittsburgh, they stop at a shopping mall for supplies, landing the chopper on the roof. But upon realizing how much there is in the mall for supplies and provender, the group decides to hole up there and seal the zombies outside. It's a good plan, until a roving band of motorcycle raiders discovers them and attacks the mall, letting thousands of undead in, and it's shortly a three-sided fight to the death (or undeath).

Romero really goes over the top with the Technicolor gore and violence in this second installment, thanks to the makeup and effects wizardry of Tom Savini. While some of the effects work looks a little dated due to latex skin, etc., on the whole it's tremendously effective and highly revolting. Not for the weak stomach, obviously. But it's not just a parade of blood and guts; Romero uses the shopping mall setting to provide a nasty satire on the consumer mentality, as the zombies are doomed to stagger through the mall, shopping mindlessly for eternity, or at least until they scent fresh meat. The surviving humans quickly descend to looting, even though it's apparent that paper money is unlikely to have much if any value in this dystopian world. The rapidity of the breakdown of society is a consistent theme of Romero's, given its fullest expression a few years earlier in **The Crazies**. At the same time, the security of all the stuff that they surround themselves with eventually becomes oppressive and a prison to them. Interestingly, when the motorcycle raiders attack, Stephen sheds his survival instincts in favor of the territorial imperative, giving another indication of Romero's perception of the hierarchy of needs.

The cast of unknowns does a creditable job with the material, with Ken Foree in particular being a notable contributor with his intensity. Francine's character vacillates a bit between helplessness and capability, but at least her pregnancy isn't abused in predictable ways as a plot point. Considering this was made a year before Sigourney Weaver made female action heroes fashionable in **Alien**, this is a pretty forward-looking portrayal.

In addition to the original US theatrical edition, this set includes the longer pre-release version shown at the 1978 Cannes film festival. It's not a director's cut, however, but a rough cut, scored with library music. This version runs 2h:19m:28s, or about 11 minutes longer than the theatrical version. Much of the trimming is just improving the pacing, but there's also a longer opening and a more intense tenement siege. There are also more shopping scenes and violence in the final mall confrontation.

A third disc includes the revised European cut made by Dario Argento, who served as one of the producers. This European cut is significantly shorter (1h:59m:09s), but also bloodier, so gorehounds will be most interested in this version. The opening is again different, and the refueling scene is different, with the infamous (and hilarious) helicopter zombie missing. There's additional gore in the sequence where the humans block the mall entrances with trucks, plus additional cannibalism. There's much more music from Goblin on this cut, since they were frequent Argento collaborators. A few bits of their music made it into the final U.S. version, but not nearly to the levels of the European cut. A good deal of the context of the violence is trimmed, making it a bit more tedious. The U.S. theatrical version is pretty clearly the best of the three, but having the three versions side by side for comparison's sake is certainly commendable.

Rating for Style: A-

Rating for Substance: B+

Image Transfer

	One
Aspect Ratio	1.85:1 - Widescreen
Original Aspect Ratio	yes
Anamorphic	yes

Image Transfer Review: The anamorphic widescreen picture looks quite good. Color is excellent and detail is reasonably good for a low-budget picture of this type. The main defect is excessive edge enhancement ringing that's particularly noticeable in the outdoor sequences. Black levels are solid and little other artifacting is evident.

Image Transfer Grade: B+

Audio Transfer

	Language	Remote Access
Mono	English	yes
DS 2.0	English	yes
Dolby Digital 5.1	English	yes

DTS	English	yes
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Audio Transfer Review: Not one, but four English tracks are provided, including the original mono, which sounds quite serviceable. The best of the other tracks is the DTS track, which has a broad and expansive soundstage, though not much in the way of surround effects. LFE is fairly light, and the sound is a bit piercing and shrill in all versions. There are obvious source material limitations here, but the audio is free of significant noise and hiss and thus quite acceptable for its time. The European cut lacks the DTS audio track and the extended version only carries the original mono, but they're all of comparable quality to their theatrical cut equivalents.

Audio Transfer Grade: B+

Disc Extras

Full Motion menu with music
 Scene Access with 24 cues and remote access
 Subtitles/Captions in English (closed captioning only) with remote access
 Cast and Crew Biographies
 Cast and Crew Filmographies
 5 Original Trailer(s)
 5 TV Spots/Teasers
 2 Documentaries
 3 Feature commentaries by 1) George A. Romero, Tom Savini and assistant director Chris Romero; 2) David Emge, Ken Foree, Scott H. Reiniger, Gaylen Ross; 3) producer Richard P. Rubinstein
 Packaging: Digipak
 Picture Disc
 4 Discs
 1-Sided disc(s)
 Layers: RSDL
 Layers Switch: 01h:09m:00s

Extra Extras:

1. Radio spots
2. Poster, lobby card, stills, memorabilia and advertising galleries
3. Home movies
4. Tour of the mall and commercial for the mall.
5. Mini-comic

Extras Review: Anchor Bay spares no efforts in providing extras for this massive special edition. First there's a commentary for each version of the film. The U.S. theatrical version features Romero and Savini, both of whom are talkative and happy to discuss the picture as well as their philosophies of effects works. There aren't a ton of anecdotes provided, but it's a highly interesting technically-oriented track. The European cut features a commentary from the four principal cast members, but they are generally just having a good time getting together, and they yuk it up as they reminisce. For a purer history of the film and its reception and the various versions, the commentary by producer Richard P. Rubinstein is preferable, even though it has some sizable gaps of silence.

A ton of supplemental material accompanies these first three discs. Two U.S. trailers, an Italian trailer, and two German trailers, three American TV spots and two U.K. TV spots and nine radio spots are joined by numerous art galleries with a grand total of 14 posters, 68 lobby cards, 15 ads, 100 stills, 100 more behind-the-scenes stills, 52 photos of memorabilia (including books, games, figures and more), 73 pressbook images, 21 soundtrack covers and 90 video covers (DVD, laserdisc, and video). Lengthy bios and filmographies for Romero and Argento are also supplied, and as a hoot there's a period advertisement for the Monroeville Mall where the film was shot.

The fourth disc is devoted to documentaries. A new 1h:15m:02s documentary, **The Dead Will Walk** includes recent interview footage from most of the principals and surprisingly enough hardly duplicates the commentaries, and when it does, gives a different perspective. Also provided is the acclaimed "making-of" film **Document of the Dead** (1h:31m:37s), previously released on DVD by itself from Synapse. A 13m:24s segment of home movies from the set is provided with narration from one of the zombies. Finally, there's a video mall tour (11m:27s) guided by Ken Foree. The foldout digipak includes a roadmap for what materials are where, as well as a mini-comic adapting the beginning of the film.

An exhaustive package that ranks right up there with the **Lord of the Rings** extended edition sets.

Extras Grade: A+

Final Comments

Anchor Bay's long-anticipated Ultimate Edition does not disappoint. A classy transfer, three versions of the film, three commentaries and another disc packed with extras make for an essential buy for zombie fans.

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