

ZOMBIES THROUGH THE YEARS

BY MATT FAUGHT



WHITE ZOMBIE
1932

'30s-'50s

Zombies originated from Haitian folklore as a corpse roused by a sorcerer called bokor. They would forget their past lives and become enslaved to the whims of their master. Zombies of this era vaguely resemble zombies today. Examples include "White Zombie" (1932), "Revolt of the Zombies" (1936) and "I Walked With a Zombie" (1943).



NIGHT OF THE
LIVING DEAD
1968

'60s

George A. Romero's "Night of the Living Dead" (1968) set many conventions of the modern zombie film. The film's zombies were slow-moving, hungrier for human flesh, sported deteriorating skin, spread through infection and were killed by destroying the brain. They have little in common with their Haitian counterparts as Romero took more inspiration from the vampires in the novel "I am Legend." The short story "Herbert West-Reanimator" by HP Lovecraft was the first time zombies were portrayed as cannibalistic corpses. However Romero's film solidified this as a trope of the zombie genre.



ZOMBIE
1979

'70s

While zombies didn't change much in the '70s, they did become more grotesque. The lifting of censorship in America meant films here could push the envelope with gore a lot more than before, with films like "Dawn of the Dead" (1978). Europe, which didn't deal with as harsh censorship, also produced a handful of notable films including Lucio Fulci's "Zombie" (1979) which featured stunning practical effects showing off his zombie designs.

'80s

Zombies began to wither out of popularity in horror films. Notable changes in this era would be establishing their lust for brains in 1985's "Return of the Living Dead," particularly with characters like the Tarman. 1985's "Day of the Dead" also started to popularize more intelligent zombies through characters like Bub, who could use firearms. European zombie films continued to enjoy success through filmmakers like Lucio Fulci, whose films leaned into supernatural themes with "City of the Living Dead" (1980) and "The Beyond" (1981).



RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD
1985



DAY OF THE DEAD
1985

'90s

While zombies had fallen mostly out of mainstream, they were revived in the video game scene through titles like "Resident Evil" and "House of the Dead." Both games pushed boundaries and featured mutated undead and fast zombies. Some critics believe these games ignited a shift to more scientific zombie media.



RESIDENT EVIL
1996

THE ET CETERA

4/12/23

ENDURE AND SURVIVE

'THE LAST OF US' INSPIRES A MEDIUM

By CARMEN GUZMAN
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Zombie fans are eating well right now. Tackling apocalypse fiction requires a perfect alignment of competent writing, compelling characters and chaos. Many have tried but creatively misfired, driving away fans of the medium.

But when entertainment gems like HBO's "The Last of Us" demonstrate TV's ability to move audiences, it reminds you that when you're lost in the dark, you look for the light.

In a faithful but refreshing adaptation of the 2013 game, "The Last of Us" is a heart-wrenching story about finding love and hope in a bitter apocalypse.

The show takes place 20 years after a fungal infection that turns its hosts into zombie-like abominations. We walk through the United States in the shoes of Joel Miller, a smuggler hardened by the loss of his daughter.

He's bitter and doesn't hesitate to pull the trigger, but receives a rude awakening when ordered to smuggle a teenage girl named Ellie.

Ellie is immune to the Cordyceps infection that brought humanity to its knees. After being put in Joel's hands, the two embark on a journey across the country to a fabled facility where Ellie's gift can be turned into a cure.

Along the way, Ellie helps Joel rekindle his lost humanity. He's given someone to care for beyond the job and fears reliving the trauma

of losing his daughter again. Each stop features dilemmas that pit Joel against the exterior that consumed him for decades. By the end of each episode, his connection with Ellie thickens - this culminates in the season finale when Joel has to make an impossible choice to preserve his bond with Ellie.

"The Last of Us" isn't afraid to pull any punches. No matter the hazards thrown at our dynamic duo, we can trust they'll come out feeling closer than ever.

There's room for the apocalypse backdrop, but its moments of fungal chaos are calculated to avoid overshadowing Joel and Ellie's survival. Its moments of genuine terror wouldn't be the same without its characters adding an emotional stake to the action.

People trying to save themselves and others are what make survival drama gripping, not guts and gore. Other shows can take notes from this.

When this show was announced, zombie fiction was in a slump. "The Walking Dead" wrapped up its tumultuous, decade-long run to little fanfare. Furthermore, the "extended universe" marketed to reinvent the franchise is already off to a rocky start.

Shows like TWD took off because of legendary character drama. But as time, writers and even leading actors went on, the show decayed into an identity crisis. Matching its namesake, the show stumbled without a clear plan, let alone end, and the exhaustion was evident in the ratings.

Fans initially worried "The Last of Us"

wouldn't be different. Video game adaptations are known to fail: demonstrated by Paramount's "Halo," ruined by a source material departure that felt like betrayal.

Fortunately, ratings and viewership exploded - in just nine episodes, viewership rocketed from 4.7 million views to 8.2 million, giving other streaming gems "House of the Dragon" and its near 10 million viewers a run for their money.

Like the 2013 game, "The Last of Us" succeeds in elevating entertainment into an artform.

Similar shows like "Station Eleven" and "The Leftovers," albeit not directly inspired by the fungal apocalypse, are examples of survival fiction that needs more humanity to keep audiences engaged.

While a fictional apocalypse rooted in cynicism can exist, viewers like myself have left the show feeling hopeful in humanity, despite how divisive our world feels at the moment.

The existence of "The Last of Us" and similar shows proves that apocalypse fiction can enrich us on a critical level, invoking a sense of humanity that moves its colorful cast. Its writers have done an excellent job at advancing the medium. No matter the amount of slop made for controversy, we can still get shows with passion at the wheel. On the second, third, or even fourth re-watch, there's always something new to appreciate.

This show creates hope for future shows that will bud from its success like the spores of a budding fungus.

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'00's

"28 Days Later" popularized the fast-moving zombie in 2002. Screenwriter Alex Garland cited "Resident Evil" as inspiration for his film, saying it reminded him how much he loved zombies. Zombie games continued to enjoy popularity with "Dead Rising" and "Left 4 Dead."

"28 Days Later" also influenced other films such as "World War Z" (2013) and "Dawn of the Dead" (2004).

'10's

In 2010 AMC's "The Walking Dead", based on the 2003 graphic novel, mainstreamed zombie media once again. The first "Last of Us" game dropped in 2013, introducing the world to its unique brand of Cordyceps zombies. While unique, they share some conventions with zombies of the past, including loss of free will, spread of infection through biting, fast movement speeds and slower movement in advanced stages of infection.

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