

ROMERO SLAMS BIG-BUDGET ZOMBIES

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How do you feel about the recent wave of big-budget zombie productions?

That's why I got out of it. I did *Land of the Dead*, which was a bigger budget movie with Dennis Hopper. I really didn't like the experience. I loved Dennis Hopper, by the way. But one of the line items was Dennis Hopper's cigar budget. I would have liked to have bought two extra days of shooting instead!

Did you have to make a lot of compromises on that film?

Yes, the first three [zombie] films had African American lead males. The first time was an accident. Duane [Jones] was just the best actor available. Then it got such a reaction and I honestly think that it's one of the reasons that that film was so widely played. People interpreted it as a racial message. I decided to keep doing it. First of all, to give a chance to those actors who couldn't get work. But [the studio] wouldn't let me [cast an African American lead] on *Land of the Dead*. They blamed the Europeans. They said Europeans wouldn't accept it. I had to concede, so what I did was I made the main zombie black and they really fought me on that too.

And you returned to lower budget productions after that?

I did two more films then all of sudden along came *The Walking Dead* and *World War Z*. This whole idea of zombies who swarm like army ants – I don't find it frightening or entertaining, I just find it stupid. Now you can't do [zombie movies] any more for a low budget, so I decided to do a comic book. It's very traditional. It's got

zombies and vampires. It's set in post-apocalyptic New York City and the vampires are basically the ruling class, and zombies are used for entertainment or ignored.

You've collaborated on video games too. You make an appearance in *Call of Duty: Black Ops*...

I'm the guy that you have to kill! I think video games really are what kept zombies alive, not movies. I was almost the only guy doing zombie movies for a long time.

If you had unlimited funds, what sort of movie would you make?

I'd like to do Tarzan the way [Edgar Rice] Burroughs wrote it. That's just a childhood fantasy but if I had an opportunity that's what I would do.

Do you enjoy how you've come to be seen as the godfather of the zombie genre?

Not so much. I never wanted to just make zombie films but I found out that I could easily talk about social issues by using that genre. And that's the biggest disappointment for me right now, because zombies have become something else.

Throughout your career have you seen substantial changes in cinema besides the technical ones?

You know what? As far as I'm concerned when you see a very personal thoughtful film from a good filmmaker, it hasn't changed at all. Perhaps more films can be made because of the new portable and inexpensive ways of shooting them, but a good film that has some sort of a soul can come from anywhere and I don't think that aspect has changed. ■

Christine Eloy

General Manager, Europa Distribution
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Can you tell us a little bit about your organization?

It was set up nearly 10 years ago by distributors. It's an association and a network. We represent independent film distributors, mainly European, but also from outside Europe. The idea behind it is to create a network – a place where they can talk to each other. We do this through organizing panels and workshops. We also inform them about what is going on in our area and we cooperate with journalists, working on articles informing about distribution in different countries. We also share our experiences with each other.

And why are you at KVIFF?

Because we are a European organization, we need to be in several regions of Europe. This area of Europe is important to us, so that's why we're in KV. We had an open panel Monday morning and we've also just held a closed panel tackling what's been happening in the last month in the European Parliament and European Commission with respect to the proposed digital single market.

You don't like the EC's proposal to create a digital single market for films, which could make movies available as videos on demand all over Europe regardless of whether or not they've been released in their home countries. Why?

Because we are Europe, we are a fragmented continent. That's normal. We have some 20 different languages, we have varied cultures and we even have different holidays – if we take a children's film, it will never be released on the same date, because, of course, you want to release it on the date when kids go on holidays. The problem is that, if there's a country where a film is being released on one particular



date and a Czech producer wants to release it at a later time, because it's a better moment for him, this means that it could already be available on another platform somewhere. As a result, the Czech distributor, who is working on his own territory to make the film known, could lose part of his public, because some of his potential audience may have gone and watched it on a platform that is not local.

Any other potential ramifications?

It also has an impact on windows. Take *The Great Beauty*, for instance. The film was shown in Cannes two years ago, but was released during Cannes in some countries, such as Italy, of course, and France. So, France had a theater release in May... Belgium released the film into theaters in September... If the film had been available at that time on VOD, no Belgian theater would have taken that film. They would have just said no. It would have made the release impossible for a Belgian distributor, as his first window would already have been shut for him. It's just an unworkable idea. Our sector is like an

ecosystem. If one part of the sector is touched, then everyone is affected. If you touch the exclusive territoriality of rights, it means a distributor can't recoup the investment he made to acquire a film he believes in and wants to promote on his own territory, thereby making the film exist for an audience. That's really what distributors do.

How are you responding to the EC's proposal?

We are trying to find other solutions, which would really help films to circulate, knowing that some things just won't circulate anyway, because they are aimed at a local audience and that's okay. It happens all the time... But it's also true that some films should travel more and don't, so we're trying as a part of a working group set up in Cannes [along with other interested organizations] to see what we can do for those films that should be available in some territories, but aren't, because there are not enough cinemas, for example, or the distribution sector is still only small and emerging. It is true that we need to find ways for people to have access to this output. Hopefully, the Commission will drop its bad, bad idea and then we'll really have a dialogue with them to really find a solution to improve the circulation of films.

And what do you think would happen if the EC ignores the objections and pushes ahead with the proposal?

It would decrease production on a very epic level... It means that distributors would only buy films that they know will see them recoup their investment in theaters – so they'll buy the more commercial ones. Ultimately, instead of increasing circulation, you would decrease production and reduce the circulation of films. It would be a nightmare. It would kill European cinema as well as diversity, of course, because films wouldn't travel as much as they do now. (COC) ■

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