

## 'The Dead Don't Die' Offers Full-On Horror Homage But Little Else

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on June 18, 2019 - 5:44pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Before Jordan Peele, before Mike Flanagan, before James Wan, and especially before all of Blumhouse, there were other masters of horror who paved the way for the filmmakers we know today. The Carpenters, the Cravens, and the Argentos of the world helped turn horror into the thriving genre it is today. Jim Jarmusch's "The Dead Don't Die" openly acknowledges this with their love letter approach to the genre itself.

Any person who sees horror films regularly will notice a few commonalities in themes or even become aware of tropes. There's nothing wrong with a trope or two as long as there is something else of substance to go with them. Sometimes they're inevitable, which is fine because they tend to feel like a personal signature reminding us of the rich history of the origins. There's a fine line that needs to be walked to keep things staying in the homage territory and not crossing over to coming off as just plain lazy. Jarmusch toes the line carefully, and often successfully, but there are a few too many elements that he beats like an undead horse.



Photo credit: Focus Features

"The Dead Don't Die" has many callbacks to some of the greatest horror films, but its entire existence can be traced directly to zombie auteur George R. Romero. Romero's zombie films not only popularized and essentially created the zombie genre, but he also used them symbolically to tackle social and political issues. Writer/Director Jim Jarmusch stuffs all of this and more into his film, but without any of the

finesse. The sloppy, breezy attitude is confirmed early on to be nothing short of intentional. From the flagrant foreboding to the mildly amusing meta-isms, this film was made for one reason and one reason alone: Fun. For better or worse, this was an obvious labor of love, even if sometimes it feels like a chore to watch.

The biggest criticism that I can offer such a devil-may-care production is that some of the more comedic bits are overused. Fine, break character as often as you like, especially since the characters are nothing but composite archetypes from horror films past. Please, use your specially created theme song to your heart's content. I don't even mind the nonchalant attitude of the entire film and about half of the actors. There is just a balance that was never found to make all of these elements fit together harmoniously instead of the bumpy Frankenstein's monster it created. When the moments do come together, the humor and horror induce an infectious feeling of terror and joy, simultaneously.



Photo credit: Focus Features

If you think that there will be the level of somber profundity that some of Jarmusch's previous works like "Paterson" provided, you'd be dead wrong. The social message is ham-handedly inserted into the end, but it reads as an almost straight reading of every zombie film that came before it. People were "zombies" (to technology and consumerism) before they died and came back as zombies. (\*in my best Meryl Streep in "Devil Wears Prada" voice\*) Groundbreaking. Aside from a couple of surprises, there is little truly new that is introduced. Going in, that shouldn't even be an expectation since every cell, dead or otherwise, screams "homage". In that respect, the results are a roaring success.

The true allure, apart from the curiosity surrounding the choice of genre, is the cast full of Jarmusch film regulars. Only a filmmaker who truly understands their artists could pull these performances from these actors. Bill Murray and Adam Driver's straight-faced, buddy cop humor guide and anchor the film, but it's the more eccentric performances from Tilda Swinton, Tom Waits, Chloë Sevigny, Steve Buscemi, Danny Glover, and Caleb Landry Jones that truly make this worth rising out of the grave to see. Not to mention all of the cameos from mostly musicians like Iggy Pop, RZA, Selena Gomez, and Sturgill Simpson that keep everything from becoming too one-note.

*"The Dead Don't Die" opened everywhere on June 14th. Featuring Bill Murray, Adam Drive, Tilda Swinton, Tom Waits, Chloë Sevigny, Steve Buscemi, Danny Glover, Selena Gomez, and Caleb Landry Jones. Directed by Jim Jarmusch. Written by Jim Jarmusch. Rated "R"*



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