

MAN OF THE YEAR ?

TIMED-OUT



THE ZOMBIE



Google Search Results - as of 12th October 2009:

- Search for “Zombie Dollar” gave 3,930 results
- Search for “Zombie Economy” yielded 35,800 results
- Search for “Zombie Banks” gave 545,000 results
- Search for “Zombie” yielded 37,000,000 results

Yes, that is thirty-seven million



Zombie Origins

The word “zombi” derives from the Haitian Voodoo ‘spirit of the dead’ and its popular meaning has evolved over the decades thanks to a few key Hollywood movies. In Haitian culture people who were utterly obnoxious and impossible to get along were the ones typically selected for Zombie-hood. The family of the annoying person hired a Bokor or Voodoo priest to turn the detestable person into an easy to get along with Zombie. The Bokor applied some toxic powder that closely resembled death. The now apparently dead obnoxious person was then buried. The Bokor then dug up that person whose memory and will were now both erased. Once annoying, that person was now a mindless drone that did whatever his Bokor-master wanted him to do. And if there was nothing to be done the Zombie just kind of hung out waiting for its next command.

Markets, Movies, and the Collective Mood

The financial markets are not the only phenomena that reflects the collective mood of a nation. We have noted before that popular movies also reflect the collective mood. Movies that do not ‘strike a chord’ fail at the box office regardless of how good they might otherwise be. And movies that resonate with the collective mood succeed regardless of how many critics detest it. In this essay we will be looking at the timing of the release of ‘Zombie’ movies for clues to the nature of the collective mood that helped launch the movie in the first place and then helped make it successful. And this brings up another point worth mentioning. Movie studios are successful to the degree that they can gauge the collective mood and then launch a movie that resonates with that mood before the mood changes. So the field of movie germination and production is not a field of all possibilities. A movie must move from proposal to script writing to production to release in time to catch and resonate with the prevailing character of the times.

“White Zombie” - 4 Aug. 1932

Considering the severity and duration of the Great Depression it is no surprise that the period from 1931 to 1935 was the Golden Age of the horror movie. There has been nothing else quite like it before or since, so far anyway. The year 1931 gave birth to Dracula and Frankenstein. Then the flood gates of horror opened in 1932. Among the many offerings: Doctor X, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Freaks, The Monster Walks, The Mummy, Murders in the Rue Morgue, Vampyr, and White Zombie. The year 1933 was notable for The Ghoul, The Invisible Man, The Island of Lost Souls, The Son of Kong, and The Vampire Bat. The year 1933 was a bit less prolific in its production of horror movies compared to 1932 and things trailed off after 1933. There was The Black Cat in 1934 and The Bride of Frankenstein in 1935. No coincidence that 1932 was the banner year for economic horrors, social horrors, and movie horrors. The first Zombie movie was born of an incredibly dark social mood. The condition of being both dead and alive at the same time pretty much described the condition of the world economy in 1932.

The first scene of the movie ‘Revolt of the Zombies’ released in June 1936 was set in the horrors of World War One. This movie came out just in time to catch the decent into the deep recession of 1937 that for many was a double dip into the Great Depression.



The Zombie Movies of World War II

The horrors and depravities of World War II gave birth to the next batch of Zombie movies. There was long winded title "I Walked with a Zombie" of 1943, 'The Voodoo Man' of 1944, and 'Zombies on Broadway' from 1945. With the recovery from the Great Depression and the end of World War II the greatest bull market in history began. As would be expected, the upsurge in the collective mood that created this bull market was very bad news for Zombie movies. They would not revive again until the collective mood was dark enough. This occurred in the depths of the cold war and in time to catch the near apocalypse that was the Cuban missile crisis.

The Zombie Movies of the Cold War

In the 1959 release 'Invisible Invaders' the Zombies are created by aliens from the Moon in order to take over the Earth. While the bull market was still alive and well on Wall Street the fear was clearly growing on Main Street. This 1959 movie arose on the back of the fear of invasion and annihilation fed by both imagined flying saucers and very real nuclear missiles. There is actually no eating of skin in the 1961 film 'I Eat Your Skin'. In this weak attempt at a film the Zombies result from a scientist trying to find the cure for cancer. I guess we have a cross here between 'the road to hell being paved with good intentions' and 'scientists gone wild.' But still it was a Zombie movie and it did come out just months before the collective mood had fallen low enough to produce the Cuban missile crisis and the near termination of all life on Earth.

The reason Zombies were created in the 1965 flick 'Plague of the Zombies' was because workers were needed for an abandoned tin mine. While the background theme may have been colonial worker exploitation it was still a Zombie movie and it was released the year the bull market in stocks hit a brick wall. The Dow Jones Industrial Average hit 1,000 in 1965 and then proceeded to fall to a low of 570 in 1974. The 1,000 area provided resistance into 1982 and was not breached until then.

'The' Bear Market Zombie Movie

Our technical analysis of Zombie movies and the markets suggest three key years - 1932, 1968, and 2004. The year 1967 saw the Yom Yippur War, the OPEC Oil embargo, race riots in the USA, tornados in Chicago, Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War and massive anti-War protests, the rise of inflation, and Red China testing its first hydrogen bomb. In 1968 with the stock market well on its way from 1,000 to the 570 low the Viet-Cong launched the Tet offensive and the My Lai massacre occurred. The Rev Martin Luther King and Senator Robert Kennedy were both assassinated. The Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. The violent chaos of 1968 launched two notable phenomena. There was the introduction of '911' emergency phone service just as emergencies were becoming routine. And there was the release of a revolutionary Zombie movie - a movie that would forever after alter the nature and content of all Zombie movies yet to come. We are speaking here of 'Night of the Living Dead' by George Romero. It that premiered on October 1st of 1968. The pitch dark collective mood of 1968 created a Zombie movie unlike any other Zombie movie. In fact there may have never been a movie more evocative of deep seated negativity and out of control social tensions.



The Night of the Living Dead - 01 Oct. 1968

If monsters are born of our fears and reflect our deepest anxieties then Romero's 'Night of the Living Dead' makes very clear that, in 1968, there was very much to be feared. Romero's Zombies were not mere lobotomized automatons waiting for their next command. These Zombies were active agents of evil that combined the worst of Zombies, Vampires, Were-wolves, and then something extra. They are both dead and alive like Zombies, but they have the appetite of Were-wolves and the need for blood of Vampires. And like Vampires their bite spreads the contagion. Romero's Zombies are hybrids. And they are completely devoid of any morals or scruples. In this movie a daughter eats her father's corpse and then kills her mother, and a brother eats his sister. We thereby have here a rather graphic depiction of the death of the nuclear family. And a pun is intended here at these Zombies were the result of a nuclear accident. Also noteworthy is that this movie is completely devoid of heroes. The small circle of survivors this movie tracks are constantly bickering with each other when they are not battling Zombies. And in the end they are all killed. The only person to survive the Zombies is, at the end of the movie, shot in the head by a sheriff who mistakes him for a Zombie.

How bad did things get in 1968? Bad enough to give birth to the unprecedented intensity of horror that was the 'Night of the Living Dead.'

Romero's Sequels and Others

Romero wrote and directed two sequels, the 1978 'Dawn of the Dead' and the 1985 'Day of the Dead.' The Dawn of the Dead was notable for its jabs at consumerism - Zombies hang out at the shopping mall because that is what they did as humans. And the survivors that the movie tracks see the shopping mall as their best hope for survival. In fact the movie turns into a battle for the shopping mall, a battle between the Zombies, the small band of humans the movie tracks, and a gang of survivalists. The Zombies of course win. And the Zombies win again in Day of the Dead. There were two other Zombie movies in this same time period, Zombie from 1979 and Return of the Living Dead from 1985. We should also include the Michael Jackson 'Thriller' from 1984.

The Financial Markets and Zombie Movies

We have already noted that Zombie movies tend to occur either during financial bear markets or during periods of heightened fears, or both. This was clearly the case for every Zombie movie from 1932 into 1968. We just cited two back to back Zombie movies from 1978 and 1979 and two different Zombie movies in 1985. Regarding the financial markets and these four movies, The Dow Industrials fell from 1,026.26 in September 1976 to 736.75 in 1978 - and by late 1979 was still only trading around the 792.00 area. It had fallen and could not get up. And regarding the 1984 - 1985 time period, the Dow had fallen from 1300.00 in 1983 to 1080.00 in 1984.

There were two Zombie movies from 1988 - Evil Dead 2 and Return of the Living Dead 2. Going into 1988 the Dow had just tumbled from 2746.65 to a 1616.21 low.



Shaun of the Dead - 9 Apr 2004

The innovation that Shaun of the Dead brought to the Zombie movie was that it was now possible to continue a somewhat normal life - even with Zombies. For Simon Pegg the Zombies are an inconvenience as he tries to patch up relations with his girlfriend and his Mom. And in the end, his best friend Ed, now a Zombie, is shackled in the backyard, in a shed. Ed is useful whenever Shaun needs to play a video game with someone. This 'warm, fuzzy, my best friend is a Zombie' movie was released into a peak of positive, up beat, ebullience. It was all good. The stock market was rallying, and the real estate market was on a tear. So into this brief moment of good will before the markets crashed it was possible to get along with Zombies. But this good will was not to last. The co-existence of human and Zombie in this movie was to prove the exception, not the new rule. Once the stock market tumbled and the real estate market crashed Zombies regressed right back to their off the charts malevolence.

I am Legend - 14 Dec 2007

This movie was a "do-over" of the 1971 Omega Man starring Charlton Heston. In the 1971 version the Zombies are the inadvertent result of an apocalyptic biological warfare. This movie was released a few months after the Dow Industrials had plummeted from an 819.23 high of 9 Jan 1970 to the 627.46 low of 29 May 1970.

From a 14,198.10 peak of 12 Oct 2007 the Dow Industrials fell to a 6,469.95 low of March 2009. One of the offspring of this collapse was the Will Smith film "I am Legend." There is no peaceful co-existence here. There is no playing video games with the local Zombie. This is complete and utter apocalypse. This is the end of civilization and there is only the tiniest ray of hope at the end. What is the difference between 'Shaun of the Dead' and the movie 'I am Legend'? It is the difference between a bull market and a bear market.

Zombieland - 2 Oct 2009

"...the Woody Harrelson picture has an impressive 88 percent fresh rating on [Rotten Tomatoes](#), along with a glowing consensus that it's "wickedly funny and featuring plenty of gore, proof that the zombie sub-genre is far from dead." (Sara Cardace)

"The first [American] horror comedy in recent memory to find significant theatrical success." (Brandon Gray)

Zombieland is a hybrid - a cross between the humor of 'Shaun of the Dead' and the hopelessness of 'I am Legend.' Despite the zany humor Zombieland if life post-apocalypse and there is no turning back. So what to do? "Enjoy the little things." In other words, down-size your expectations. And move fast, because it was the slow and overweight that were eaten first.

There is already talk of a couple movie sequels, and even a TV series. Zombies have gone mainstream. And all the credit is due to the "Longest Recession since the Great Depression."



Zombies, Myths and Markets - the Symbolism and Metaphysics

The myth of the Zombie began as an allegory of slavery. The Zombie arose from the fear of a loss of free will. This fear was given new urgency by the widespread loss and devastation of the Great Depression. Half-dead and half-alive was the status of those who had lost their jobs, their homes, and all hope for the future. The situation was beyond anyone's control. All were powerless before the onslaught of the crushing deflation. The transition from active, productive, happy human beings to inert, lifeless Zombie was symbolic of the turn from the roaring twenties to the 'Great Depression'. The attack of the Zombie was an attack by our own powerlessness and mortality. The Zombie are mankind's deepest fears looking back at us.

As the horrors of World War II yielded to the apocalyptic threat of nuclear annihilation that was the Cold War, the nature of horror and of the Zombie movie evolved accordingly. Zombies were no longer merely passive. They became active agents of annihilation. And it was no coincidence that the spread of the Zombie contagion moved as quickly and as irreversibly as a nuclear chain reaction. And in virtually all of this new apocalyptic brand of Zombie movie the contagion was of human origin. It was a self-inflicted wound. It was self-destruction and it arose from the exercise of our own free will. This theme of 'we have brought this catastrophe down on our own heads' continues right up into the just released *Zombieland* and a human created variation of mad-cow disease.

The threat of nuclear obliteration may have subsided but new fears have arisen to keep the Zombie genre alive. The movie *Zombieland* cites mad cow disease, but there is still AIDS, and now there is the Swine Flu virus, and the very real threat of economic apocalypse. Financial bear markets and Zombie movies arise from the same source - an upsurge in negative social mood, the collective triumph of fear over hope. So the fact that '*Zombieland*' is meeting such widespread success and acclaim - well it does not bode well for the financial markets.

One final point should be made regarding the contrast between the Zombie free zones that are financial bull markets and the Zombie infested periods that are financial bear markets. Before human beings are turned into Zombies they have families, employment, homes, possessions, a daily routine, regular meals, and farms. However as Zombies they lose all of that. They live outdoors like animals, they feed on the weak and the dead like jackals and other scavengers. They have no families, no homes, and have even lost the ability to think and reason. Zombies are a mindless herd of wild animals. Perhaps the real fear here is that without a functioning economy we will revert to the condition of wild animals, an 'every man for himself' violent chaos.



"Cash, Jordan. That's what separates man from the apes."