

J-Horror, where its scares are built from an atmosphere of ever-increasing dread and deaths that could have been ripped straight from *Ringu*. It'll be a straight-up chiller for those that prefer psychological, creeping terror over gore and jump scares, so add this to your lists if that sounds like your kind of horror.

As a comment on mental health, *The Dead Center* keeps itself grounded and never teeters onto the side of melodrama or exploitation. Its exploration is organic, natural and moulds easily into the film's supernatural side, neatly balancing the horrors of reality with one that is far more mystical. We get brief insights into the minds and lives of those in the psychiatric unit, but it is the fracturing sanity of Shane Carruth's Dr Forrester that is most interesting.

Dr Forrester is struggling with his own demons; a childhood trauma that has undoubtedly shaken him more than he lets on. Although the friction between him and colleague Dr Grey (Poorna Jagannathan) is not entirely fleshed out, it adds an intriguing layer to his personality and one that mostly satisfies why he's so intent on solving the mystery of Mr Doe. As he becomes increasingly caught up in the madness, his sanity takes a whacking and Carruth wonderfully portrays a man teetering on the edge of rationality.

*The Dead Center* is a creative and thematic masterclass, a horror that grips you like a vice and lingers long after it's over. All horror-loving eyes should be on director Billy Senese. I, for one, can't wait to see what terrifying treat he unleashes next.

**Rating:** 🧟🧟🧟🧟

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** The special features on this Arrow Video edition are a brilliant addition. They include an intriguing set of deleted/extended scenes and an alternate ending that could rival the one we officially get. On-set interviews and a commentary with writer-director Bill Senese are enlightening and interesting; it's always great to hear how a film comes together. It is also a nice touch to include the original, eerie short *The Suicide Tapes*, which was the inspiration behind *The Dead Center*. If you loved the film, you'll definitely love these special features.

**Rating:** 🧟🧟🧟🧟

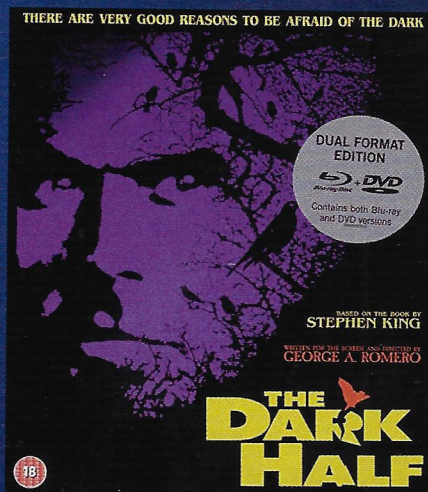
*THE DEAD CENTER* is out now on **UK DVD, Blu-ray and Amazon Prime Video** courtesy of Arrow Video.

REVIEWED BY JESSY WILLIAMS

## THE DARK HALF

**THE FILM:** In George A. Romero's adaptation of Stephen King's *The Dark Half*, author Thad Beaumont is mentally terrorised when his pen name alter-ego George Stark comes to very scary life. Played by Timothy Hutton, Stark goes on a murderous rampage when he is figuratively slain by Thad, who is also played by Hutton.

Under the name Stark, Beaumont is able to write hardened crime fiction starring Alexis Machine, which has proven to be his most successful works of fiction. However, Stark is literally Thad's dark half; he drives a black Oldsmobile Toronado, smokes cigarettes, drinks heavily and has an attitude that does not take kindly to being murdered.



Spawned from the mind of Stephen King, who has written under the guise of Richard Bachman, it's safe to say that *The Dark Half* was birthed by King's own experiences of writing under a pen name. But, obviously/hopefully to an extreme. The film explores the struggles of creativity and the impact that can have on one's sense of identity. If we write under a different name are we as responsible for what is written? Is that the reason we want to do it? Thad hides behind the guise of Stark, because he's embarrassed of what he writes and feels it is not worthy of being associated with his real name.

It's an intriguing concept and *The Dark Half* touches upon it well, if it is a little lacklustre. At close to 2 hours long, it does edge closely to over-staying its welcome as the most exciting part of the film is Hutton's performance in both roles. His stuck-on eyebrows are a must-see and he, undoubtedly, gives his all to his dark half and his lighter side. However, I did find myself checking the time and eager to see the inevitable face-off between Stark and Beaumont. (It's almost worth the wait).

With such an iconic director at the helm, it's no wonder that *The Dark Half* almost goes forgotten when thinking of Romero's filmography. Romero also worked with Stephen King on the excellent *Creepshow*, so this isn't even their best collaboration. There are some creative flairs within the film that help to heighten the eerie atmosphere; the onslaught of sparrows is easily comparable to Hitchcock's own avian nightmare and there is a lot to praise with the film's gruesome kills. Practical effects will always get a thumbs-up from me and Stark's gruesome deterioration is extremely, wonderfully icky.

*The Dark Half* is a solid slasher-thriller that soars thanks to Timothy Hutton's energetic, Jekyll and Hyde performance, but it is without the lasting terror that would elevate it above other King adaptations or George A. Romero features.

**Rating:** 🧟🧟🧟🧟

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** There's an epic audio commentary with George A. Romero and a Making Of, where Romero discusses the lack of real birds in the movie. He's such a gem, it's always a joy to listen to anything he says and it's no different here. There is also a mini documentary which originally aired in 1987 called *The Incredibly Strange Film Show* (before my time, sorry everyone!), which follows Jonathan Ross exploring the importance and cultural impact of George A. Romero's ground-breaking *The Night of the Living Dead*. Mediocre film, excellent special features.

**Rating:** 🧟🧟🧟🧟

*THE DARK HALF* is out now on **UK Dual Format edition DVD and Blu-ray** courtesy of Eureka Films.

REVIEWED BY JESSY WILLIAMS

## AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

**THE FILM:** Werewolves have become harder and harder to come by in recent years, which is why for the majority of horror fans John Landis' 1981 film *An American Werewolf in London* is a classic that deserves preservation throughout the years. Which is exactly what Arrow Video have done with their recent 4k restoration and limited edition release that has been designed with furry fans in mind. Even after years of advancements in special effects and cinematography, this exceptional monster movie still stands the test of time, and now we're lucky enough to see those horrific transformations in even more graphically gory detail.

David and Jack are two young Americans who find themselves in the UK for a trip of exploration, starting with the desolate yet beautiful countryside. As they wander the landscapes they happen upon a pub where they take refuge from the miserable weather, however, after not reading the mood and accidentally upsetting one of the locals, they are abruptly forced to leave the pub. This leaves the pair stranded in the dead of night, with no other option than to hike through the marshlands to find another shelter, even though they were warned not to stray from the road. Soon enough the pair are attacked by a werewolf, killing Jack and leaving David wounded. After being transferred to London, it's not long until David and everyone else realise he may have become more like an animal than they thought.

There are memories of *An American Werewolf in London* that have lingered within my mind since my first viewing, always the recollection of sheer fright and horror at seeing how a man can transform into a creature within the blink of an eye. However, upon a second viewing, it was clear that this film is far more than pure horror, it has such a balance between the beloved werewolf genre and also comedic value. Some creature movies take themselves too seriously and therefore falter in the execution and getting the audience to fall for it, but Landis clearly recognised the audacity of such a myth like a werewolf and plays upon it through the entirety of the film, allowing the audience to feel more relaxed while watching a somewhat out there concept. The comedy is continuously well-paced and never feels forced or too much, which really means we're able to connect with every scene.

David Naughton gives an impeccable performance as David, and never once gives the audience an opportunity not to love his personality. Although goofy and a little strange, he's an easily relatable character which helps us to sympathise with his position and only wish for the best outcome for him, even though we know that's not possible due to the fact that he keeps on brutally slaughtering people under the full moon. The only downfall of David's character is how quickly he seems to get over the death of his best friend Jack, which is perhaps down to apparitions of Jack as he constantly reappears, becoming more and more decayed with every visit, but it feels a little out of character. Regardless, he is the hero of the story and also the villain which means were destined to hate him through his actions towards innocent



people but also have an undeniable liking for him because he's just a regular guy that unfortunately becomes a monster.

Something that feels very intelligently done in the film is how all of the characters recognise and don't even particularly dispute, that David being a werewolf could be a real possibility. From the very beginning of the film the villagers know that demons hunt the moors and even try to warn the pair without being too direct. Afterwards, it's quite a quick conclusion for Dr. Hirsch to come to that David could have been bitten and now transforms into a hairy demon once the full moon comes out - and he doesn't even have to talk around Nurse Alex Price who is romantically involved with David. Horror films often make their characters battle against the realms of anything out of the norm, but Landis' film just runs with the aspect that people would think it's possible that a man could turn into a werewolf. This somehow gives *An American Werewolf in London* a realistic tone to it, and the audience can easily submerge themselves in the fantasy.

One of the most iconic scenes is David's first real transformation into a werewolf; it's one of the greatest werewolf transformations and features some stunning special effects work. As his hands begin to break and stretch and his feet begin to grow to an abnormal shape and size, we see his body sprout more hair, develop fangs and become a terrifying creature straight from the nightmares of hell. It is this sequence that even though should feel a little dated because it's from the 80s, still feels as fresh and horrifying as the first time it was released. Werewolves aren't an easy universal creature to recreate and show how they are birthed but Landis really understood how the mechanics of changing might happen, and brought that horror to life on screen. The film

goes on throughout to show more werewolf monstrosities and bloody carnage that shows this film isn't just intended to make the audience laugh.

*An American Werewolf in London* has a nostalgic vibe for me as something watched at an age where the only part I would ever remember was that damning and inhuman metamorphosis. However, this comedy horror film has a lot more than just one horrific scene; there's believable comedy, likeable characters and a very iconic yet particular charm to it. This film manages to fight the changes of technology to still look exceptionally well-made, and hold its place as one of the most iconic werewolf films ever made.

**Rating:** 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** Arrow Video have treated their audience with the edition they have released for *An American Werewolf in London*. The extras feature an incredible amount of interview footage with the likes of David Naughton, John Landis and other cast and crew members. There's a documentary in there, video essay and even interviews with make-up artists about how a lot of the inspiration came from the Universal monsters Wolfman films. For fans of the film this is a special edition must-have that cannot be left behind, because it truly delivers all the extras you would want to see and then pulls the guts out, runs another mile and gives even more.

**Rating:** 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

*AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON* is out now on **UK Blu-ray** courtesy of Arrow Video.

REVIEWED BY ZOE SMITH

## TWO EVIL EYES

**THE FILM:** Blue Underground is back at it again with an amazing three-disc limited edition 4K restoration of the George A Romero and Dario Argento's collaborative masterpiece, *Two Evil Eyes*. Split into two parts, each directed by one of the filmmakers and are based on short stories by Edgar Allan Poe. So that means audiences can look forward to two tales of horror fuelled by betrayal, mistrust and murder. Everything you'll need to send icy chills down your spine.

In Romero's *The Facts In The Case Of Mr Valdemar*, Adrienne Barbeau plays a gold-digger who teams up with her lover to plot a scheme to take the money from her old terminal husband Mr Valdemar. However, when her husband dies sooner than expected, the lovers soon discover that Valdemar has been possessed by evil forces.