

and he also does a wonderful job with editing cuts from the past to the present. Cuts into the past, 1979, are marked by brighter colors and filming through what seems like a handheld camera, to make the action seem a bit jumpy and ethereal. In addition, the editing cuts between the world of the living to the world of spirits are done very smoothly, which is important as this keeps the audience from becoming confused.

The special effects were not only quite frightening, but were also extremely clever and professional. An amusing touch, for example, is Bones' ghostly presence being announced with *black* rather than the traditional *white* ectoplasm. However, Dickerson avoided allowing these special effects to take over the film, as so many bad directors have done and continue to do with other films (see *Thirteen Ghosts*). There's an actual story here. It may be an old, familiar story as far as horror film goes, but it's an archetypal one that bears being repeated every so often. But then again, the ghost story itself isn't something new. The ghosts in these stories we love to tell remind us of what we should not have forgotten. Bones is the ghost of urban blight, or of a gentler time. He rails against Buppies who have forgotten their roots, and perhaps prospered at the expense of those less fortunate. And he lashes out at privileged whites and black gangsters who would also destroy the lives of the urban poor by selling them drugs (Bones' first on-screen victims are a couple of hapless white fraternity brothers come to the hood to make a drug deal).

Snoop Dogg, Pam Grier, and Michael T. Weiss all gave noteworthy performances, and it is shame that this film will more than likely be entirely overlooked come Oscar time. Michael T. Weiss is absolutely brilliant, for he is almost unrecognizable in a fat suit, and his portrayal of Lupovitch makes the officer's sleaziness so realistic that audience members will want to shower just from having been in the theater. Pam Grier is as usual a paragon of consistency: she convincingly plays a woman 20 years younger than her actual age in the 1979 scenes. But what stands out most is that Snoop Dogg brings a certain charisma to the role of Jimmy Bones, with his smooth voice, his pimp walking cane, his swagger, and his two-tone shoes. He is style personified, and he delivers his ironic revenge lines with a gusto and flair not seen since Robert Englund created Freddie Krueger.

No bones about it, *Bones* is destined for obscurity, for it has three strikes against it: it stars a rapper, it is a thoughtful horror film that does not depend upon special effects for its appeal, and it is a film whose cast is almost solely African-American (and not directed by Spike Lee). This fact, however, is a sad reflection on both Hollywood and on theater-going audiences. The truth is that our great melting pot society needs a lot more stirring where film is concerned (as it undoubtedly does in other areas). After seeing *Bones*, we speculated as to whether we were the ONLY white people in Baton Rouge who did. We certainly hope not, for it is a film worth seeing, and we sincerely would like to see it draw a bigger and broader audience.

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Style and Substance: A Review of Ernest T. Dickerson's *Bones*

by June Pulliam and Tony Fonseca

We almost missed seeing Ernest R. Dickerson's *Bones*, since there was very little advertising about this film. In fact, we wouldn't have known about it at all if we hadn't seen a 30 second trailer for this new Snoop Dogg ghost flick just last week, thrown in with countless other previews before The Hughes Brothers' masterful *From Hell*. And Friday night, when we finally saw *Bones*, we were the only white people in the theater, which was a shame, because it is a fine film. We certainly hope that others will not let the lack of publicity, or Snoop Dogg's being cast into the lead role (which also caused us to wonder at first), put them off of seeing *Bones*, easily one of the better horror offerings this Halloween.

Dickerson's film is a stylish Blacksploitation ghost story reminiscent of many earlier horror classics such as *Carrie*, Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Hellraiser*. Snoop Dogg stars as the title character, Jimmy Bones, a benevolent O. G. who makes his living running numbers in his small black urban neighborhood. Bones declines the chance to increase his income and move out of the neighborhood by becoming one of the first crack dealers of the 70s, since no amount of money could possibly increase his happiness. Bones is living large, in his own gothic manse in the middle of the neighborhood. He has a diamond ring, a chauffeur-driven Lincoln Continental, a superior sense of style, and the love of a good woman (Pam Grier).

But a couple of the people who share Jimmy's wealth, his best friend, Jeremiah, and a crooked cop named Lupovitch (Michael T. Weiss), point out that this situation can't last. It's 1979, and numbers runners are about to be made obsolete by the state when the lottery becomes legal. Bones' friends think it's time for him to branch out into distributing recreational drugs, namely crack cocaine. When Jimmy refuses on the grounds that he doesn't want to hurt the residents of his neighborhood, he is murdered by Lupovitch and a couple of his confederates.

Flash forward twenty years later. Jimmy Bones' house is boarded up, his gutted Lincoln parked out front. His killers have moved on. Lupovitch continues to let drug dealers bribe him to look the other way, and Jeremiah now lives in the suburbs with a white wife and a Lexus, as well as sons who are aspiring DJ's who just happen to have bought Jimmy's old house to rebuild it as a nightclub. However, the presence of the Resurrection Brothers, as Jeremiah's sons call their act, awakens Bones, whose spirit walks the earth once again seeking vengeance on his murderers and their families. As is the case with most black horror films, the monster isn't always the true villain (see *Tales from the Hood*, *J D's Revenge*, *Blacula*, or *Blade*). Jimmy Bones' revenge does get a bit out of hand, but he's not as reprehensible as his killers, who wanted to unleash crack on the black community.

Granted, the story line of *Bones* is fairly predictable, but then again most revenging revenant tales are. We knew what was going to happen after about the first ten minutes of the film, but this knowledge didn't diminish our enjoyment. The camera work in Dickerson's film is gorgeous,