

Tony Scott: Remember "THE HUNGER"

Written by Chris Alexander
Monday, 20 August 2012 11:35



Waking up to the news that director Tony Scott had, at the age of 68, committed suicide is no way to wake up. Long referred to as the “lesser” of the Scott brothers, Tony may actually have been the less decorated, but more commercially successful of the two siblings. I mean for every horror/sci-fi freak who kneels at the temple of ALIEN, I can cite a dozen regular joe movie guys I know, who think TOP GUN is the greatest film ever lensed; towel snapping, Berlin hit single and all. And for what it’s worth, it made more money.

And I know hundreds of vampire lovers and former and current Goths who speak in hushed tones about Scott’s debut feature THE HUNGER.

Remember THE HUNGER? Let’s refresh....

Released in 1983, and based on the best selling same-named Whitley Streiber book, perhaps no other film signifies the coming cold edge of the 1980s better. That the film was a flop is irrelevant as, let’s face it, many masterworks of horror are met with box office and critical indifference upon release—brother Ridley’s immortal BLADE RUNNER included. THE HUNGER casts French acting legend Catherine Deneuve as Miriam Blaylock, elegant, beautiful, cultured vampire goddess. Her familiar is played by pop icon David Bowie, a bloodsucker of her creation that, after centuries of killing with his Queen, is faced with his own ultimate fate, one shared with the countless men and women Miriam has groomed through the centuries. He is dying. Not just dying but—thanks to Dick Smith’s alarming makeup FX—disintegrating. His attempts to halt the process is met with Miriam’s soothing arms as she boxes his husk of a body into a coffin and places him in a room with the rest. But when a young doctor (played by a gorgeous, nubile Susan Sarandon) doing experiments on the aging process tries to track down Bowie, she finds herself on the lust, love and blood obsessed vampire’s radar, and is immediately targeted as her next “pet”.

Dismissed by some as a pretentious extension of Scott’s perfume commercial and video clip weaned, overly arty sensibilities, THE HUNGER is indeed an abstract, succession of mood, music, imagery—who can forget those bloody ankhs and screaming monkeys—and sensuality,

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whose visceral power put it at commercial odds with the greasy, brainless slasher crap cluttering the marketplace. Nowhere is THE HUNGER's power more impactful than in its dynamic, art-porn opening in which—and here's the chief reason every single Goth at the time put it on a very high pedestal—the band BAUHAUS and their spindly frontman Peter Murphy perform in a strobe saturated cage over the opening credits to their signature tune "Bela Lugosi's Dead". While Murphy screams into the camera, his white face and black eyes terrifying, we are treated to a flashy montage of the fashionable Blaylock in sunglasses and club clothes seducing a tattooed young couple, first on the dance floor, then in their chi chi Manhattan apartment, spreading legs, unzipping flies, kissing hungry mouths and eventually...slashing throats and drinking blood.



It's an opening so sexual and stylized that many audience members were let down by the slow, somber sequences that follow. That goes for the highly touted lesbian scene between Deneuve and Sarandon, which is far less explicit or exploitive as the press at the time played it out to be. In fact the scene, in which Miriam passes on her vampirism, is gorgeous; white curtains blowing over nude bodies while Madame Butterfly plays on the soundtrack.

After the poor performance of THE HUNGER, Scott decided to sharpen his narrative, abandon the abstract (though his 2002 weirdo thriller DOMINO is just as bizarrely assembled, with radically different results) and when the high octane, empty calorie TOP GUN became a smash hit, he opted to stay on the good side of Hollywood machine, churning out such hits as the Tarantino penned classic TRUE ROMANCE, the Tarantino doctored CRIMSON TIDE, a flurry of Denzel Washington thrillers like MAN ON FIRE and THE TAKING OF PELHAM 123, the Tom Cruise vehicle DAYS OF THUNDER, not to mention the myriad of television projects, some produced with his brother under their Scott Free banner.

The list is long and filled with populist work that entertained audiences and pleased their senses.

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The lesser of the Scott boys? Is THE HUNGER a lesser film than ALIEN or BLADE RUNNER? Perhaps less influential to the pop culture fanboy populace, but it is most certainly, inarguably the work of an artist, a visionary who had the "pure cinema" knack for telling stories and emotionally affecting an audience with imagery. That Scott chose to eventually lend that genius to conventional mainstream cinema, is not a crime on any level. He made films that people responded to, genre pictures that people will remember. He was a craftsman.

Why Scott chose to end his life is, of this writing, a mystery. But the decision was his.

Oscar Wilde famously said "Life is a *moderately* good play with a badly written *third act*."

Perhaps Scott decided to write his own.