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Getting up after a fourth night, following the THEATRE BIZARRE after-party, was ridiculously painful, but writing and screenings beckoned. After a rough morning of coffee and decongestant pill abuse—which, aside from keeping my sensitive nose unclogged, conveniently act as a mild stimulant—I finally got to the Hall Theatre in time for Mike Cahill’s Sundance winner ANOTHER EARTH, which opened the day to varied, yet consistently solid works of fantastical cinematic entertainment. After catching a tiny bit of the Bloody Breasts Presents: Women in Horror panel—moderated by Kier-la Janisse and featuring speakers such as Jovanka Vuckovic and Izabel Grondin—I made my way to the theater, beating myself over the head for not getting out of the house earlier to attend what looked like a great conference.

ANOTHER EARTH

Cahill’s philosophical character study falls right in line with the cerebral science-fiction trend pioneered by Andrei Tarkovsky’s SOLARIS (1972) and brought back in force with recent films such as PRIMER (2004), THE CLONE RETURNS HOME (2008) and MONSTERS (2010—which, while far less philosophical, shows similar ambition and manages to give life to big ideas with very limited means). When promising MIT student Rhoda Williams (Brit Marling) causes a deadly accident, her life falls apart. Flash-forward to four years of juvenile detention later, and she is profoundly changed, in search of forgiveness and faced with a whole new world. A new planet, in fact: Earth 2 has entered our Earth’s orbit and made contact with us, revealing it to be absolutely identical to our world—down to its timeline and inhabitants.

ANOTHER EARTH suffers from the same issues as many of its indie contemporaries—excessively lingering progression, occasionally hollow philosophical riddles and so on—but is set apart by a wonderful performance from breakthrough actress and co-writer Marling, who shows incredible depth as the fragile, pained and quite possibly mentally ill character. Her performance alone makes the film worth seeing, as one can’t help but crawl under her skin and embark on her tragic journey of redemption. While it’s beautifully shot and

features an excellent score by Fall On Your Sword, the main problem with ANOTHER EARTH is that, as a viewer and fan of high-concept science-fiction, I found myself infinitely more fascinated by the staggering philosophical, scientific and theological questions that the existence of Earth 2 raises than by the drama and character study at hand. The film fails to address any of these questions—instead brushing over them to add an illusion of depth to the simple narrative—and going out, I found myself thinking more about cosmology, the existence of God and fate than about the character arc at the core of this picture. The conclusion, which is conceived to seem open-ended at first glance, is, after a bit of thinking, an extremely simple twist that will strike you as reductive, resolving every possible interpretation of the narrative’s outcome.

Ultimately, ANOTHER EARTH is more about its characters than its extraneous sci-fi ideas, and while that is arguably a good thing, and will please many, I left this film wanting more, past the beautifully interpreted broken character of Rhoda Williams.

A LONELY PLACE TO DIE

In a word, Julian Gilbey’s A LONELY PLACE TO DIE is intense. Incredibly, exhaustingly intense! It follows a group of mountain climbers (headed by the wonderful Melissa George) who, after discovering a young Serbian girl trapped in a box buried in the ground, find themselves in the middle of an international kidnapping scheme far beyond their understanding. The manhunt begins, and what Gilbey puts his actors through is truly remarkable. The smart ways the dangerous environment is used—boulders, trees and steep hills posing as much of a threat as the trigger-happy men pursuing the characters—is truly staggering. The gorgeous George shines throughout, giving her all in an extremely physical (and undeniably attractive) performance.

I went into the film extremely tired and loop-headed, but A LONELY PLACE TO DIE woke me right and didn’t let me go. Some might be disappointed with the film’s change of setting in its third act, but I found it to be a brilliant conclusion, as brutal as it is gripping. The use of slow-motion throughout is beautifully ingenious and so is the editing and kinetic cinematography—one of the main reasons the film succeeds so well at building tension and grabbing its audience, who didn’t fail to gasp, groan and sigh at every twist and turn of the narrative.

Gilbey showed great wit and intellect during the Q&A, which came as no surprise: Extremely smart in its writing and execution, his film progresses with flawless pacing and logic and shows immense talent. Every shot fired, falling boulder and death resonates deeply, and you will have no time to catch your breath. A LONELY PLACE TO DIE is one of the most effective and intense films I have seen in a while and an immediate survivalist cinema highlight. Highly recommended!

THE TROLL HUNTER

Preceded by THE LAST NORWEGIAN TROLL

Found-footage is one of my favorite subgenres, so I went into THE TROLL HUNTER with great enthusiasm. Much-hyped, the film is constructed as the greatest episode of Discovery’s DIRTY JOBS ever and centers on the eponymous hunter (a great Otto Jespersen), followed by a young, enthusiastic and never-heard-of-again crew of documentary filmmakers in his various

misadventures to control Norway’s troll population. Endearingly funny, THE TROLL HUNTER is filled with great insights on Norwegian folkore and mythology as well as great characters who carry the film well beyond its initial mockumentary gimmick. CGI abounds but is craftily concealed in darkness. One has no trouble believing the trolls’ presence on screen, due to the great amount of care given to their design, behavior and textures.

THE TROLL HUNTER’s only real flaw comes in its running time, which could’ve been shaved of a good 10 to 15 minutes in order to make it as tight as it is slick to look at. Smart in its ideas and extremely inventive (ultraviolet weaponry and more surprises await you), this film will delight atheists, amateurs and fans of endearingly dumb giant monsters, as well as offering a comedic twist on the archival anxiety-filled cinema pioneered by THE LAST BROADCAST and THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT in the late ’90s.

Preceded by Pjotr Sapegin’s charming short film THE LAST NORWEGIAN TROLL, which I highly recommend tracking down and features beautiful stop-motion animation as well as the soothing voice of legend Max Von Sydow, this screening ended a near-perfect day of Fantasia stimulation. News of a karaoke party was going around, and despite quickly swinging by and briefly chatting with teacher, friend, filmmaker and *Rue Morgue* scribe Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, I decided to make it an early evening, skip the karaoke madness—a traditional Fantasia occurrence—catch the last metro and go home, write and sleep. Apparently the party was great—and led to many things, such as the last-minute programming of THE INNKEEPERS (!), but the early night didn’t hurt at all.

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