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If pressed for time, TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL could be reviewed with one word: “brilliant.” Lacking chronological constraints, the words “hilarious,” “genius” and “the best horror/comedy in years” would fit right in as well. It’s that good, and it deserves a much wider audience than it’s currently getting.

TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL, the first time out for writer/director Eli Craig, is the calamitous tale of a couple of lovable West Virginia rednecks, played to a T by Alan Tudyk (from FIREFLY and DOLLHOUSE) and REAPER’s Tyler Labine. They simply want to enjoy a relaxing weekend fixing up their new vacation home (a rundown shack in the woods), but their plans begin to go horribly awry with the arrival of a group of college friends heading into the mountains for a wild campout vacation. Without giving too much away, a misunderstanding over a skinny-dipping accident quickly escalates into a deadly back-and-forth between the hillbillies and the college kids, with a fairly impressive body count. On top of that, after a couple of hilariously misguided attacks by the latter group, there is indeed a titular evil that makes itself known.

Despite some fairly gruesome deaths (woodchipper, anyone?), it’s amazing how deftly the film manages to elicit a chuckle every time someone bites it. The humor is every bit as pervasive as the splatter, and it makes for one hell of an entertaining ride. The jokes come naturally and often, and are always delivered with impeccable timing. The youths themselves, led by the increasingly diabolical Chad (Jesse Moss), trip, tumble and mistake their way into just about every nasty, clichéd horror-movie death in the book. The initial reactions, from both the characters and the audience, are easily some of the film’s best moments. It’s a funny flick in its own right, but TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL is definitely one to watch with friends.

Several reviews have labeled TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL the next SHAUN OF THE DEAD, and while there are certainly similarities, it feels more like a natural successor to EVIL DEAD II, without falling headlong into the campiness of ARMY OF DARKNESS. Comparing it to any previous movie, however, almost seems inappropriate. There is a freshness and originality here that feels degraded by associating it with earlier works. It certainly does for campground horror films what the aforementioned features did for zombie flicks, and fans of any of those will want to check out TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL at their earliest convenience.

Convenience, however, is the only real issue with the movie. In what may be one of the most egregious oversights in recent film history, TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL has yet to receive a distribution deal in the U.S., playing its way across the country via small film festivals and local events, such as the recent Spooky Movie Festival in Washington, D.C. It won the Audience Award at this year’s SXSW Film Festival, and continues to garner acclaim with each new screening. It truly is one of the funniest, brightest and just all-around fun horror movies in recent years…so why isn’t Hollywood noticing?

{jcomments on}