

“ATTACK THE BLOCK” (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Monday, 21 March 2011 16:35



ATTACK THE BLOCK is revelatory, in terms of the talent and poise of its young, mostly unknown cast; in terms of the style and assurance of writer/director Joe Cornish; and most of all, in terms of the idea that an incredibly funny, frightening and clever tale can still be made from the molds of both alien-invasion and kids-vs.-creatures films.

About midway through Cornish's directorial debut, the black leader of the pack, Moses (John Boyega), relays to Sam (Jodie Whittaker)—the white nurse he'd previously mugged and is now fighting alongside—that if he and his crew knew she lived in the same building (or “block”), they never would've assaulted her. It's a telling moment that happily reinforces the lack of laziness regarding the human conflicts in ATTACK THE BLOCK. Race (while still a serious and unfortunate cause for much hatred in this world) isn't the easy divide here, and wouldn't be appropriate as such, since the movie's themes are much more concerned with circumstance. Without knowing Sam terribly well, just the simple fact that she resides within the same conditions as Moses, Dennis (Franz Drameh), Biggz (Simon Howard), Pest (Alex Esmail) and Jerome (Leeon Jones) creates an unspoken bond, one that speaks to immediate distrust of outsiders as a potential and dangerous threat, be it police or—just marginally worse—vicious extraterrestrials.

During the aforementioned mugging, an alien shoots out of the sky and crash-lands right next to Moses and co., and upon their inspection, the being takes a swipe at Moses' face. Being as fearless as they are, the group sets off after it, claiming its life as their prize while failing to think about any otherworldly consequences. Soon, a full-blown invasion is underway, and the boys, along with Sam, clueless pothead Brewis (Luke Treadaway), charismatic dealer Roy (Nick Frost) and very angry drug lord Hi-Hatz (Jumayn Hunter), must face the ever-growing numbers.



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ATTACK THE BLOCK just exudes genuineness, and even those completely unacquainted with the culture of South London and its slang will find it easy to believe in these kids, their attitudes, sense of humor, recreational habits and general outlook on life. And as in any good ensemble piece, each member of the crew bears a legitimate personality that, no matter how hardened they might be, quickly endears them to the audience.

That endearment doesn't come cheap, though. Cornish crafts a tale with true stakes, where the danger is palpable, and when the attacks come, they're grisly and often far from humorous. There's also a wonderful misdirection when it comes to the invading aliens. The first creature, whose head gets kicked in and is carried around by the boys lightly, like a trophy, is forever spoiled in the eyes of an audience, and Cornish knows so. Thankfully, it's not the full extent of their visages, which, as gradually revealed, turn out to be scary and fascinating (thanks to stunning makeup FX work).

While ATTACK THE BLOCK would play terrifically well in any setting, it's wholly an audience picture. It begs for a collective embracing of the scares, giant laughs, subtle subtext (except for maybe that last chant) and real heart that accompanies the incredible work from cinematographer Thomas Townend and composer Steven Price (his blending of familiar sci-fi sounds and contemporary UK beats work seamlessly). Despite a few verbal genre references, ATTACK THE BLOCK eschews blatant homage, and in doing so, just may be the real deal in capturing the energy and spirit akin to the Amblin films so many cinema fans crave. But the movie is something all its own, and that something is truly great.



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