

“EXIT HUMANITY” (Film Review)

Written by David Goodfellow
Friday, 14 October 2011 12:32



It should be understood that it is impossible to create a truly great horror film without a proper grasp and appreciation for all cinema. Exposure to a broader frame of reference provides a far richer palette to paint from, unlike the often enthusiastic but traditionally uninspired backyard gutmunchers made by filmmakers who cite other horror movies as their sole influence.

One genre that lends itself well and continuously bleeds into the finer works of our favorite filmmakers (such as George A. Romero and John Carpenter) is the Western. Heavy on characterization, with great attention given to cinematography, the Western has been the platform chosen for decades to chronicle man’s struggle against nature, and adversity in the face of hardship. True, this is the thematic core of many a horror film, but none more so than those that concern the walking dead.



Foresight Features’ John Geddes boldly throws down with his ambitious post-Civil War zombie epic EXIT HUMANITY. The descriptor “epic” has been used far too liberally in the past to describe fairly pedestrian efforts, but in this case, it is assuredly most apt. Geddes, with an exceptional cast and crew behind him, has written and directed a rare gem that transcends the genre, and sets a new standard for independent horror films. In truth, it sets the bar very high for horror films, period. If PARANORMAL ACTIVITY showed what brilliance could be achieved with limited means and shooting entirely in a house, Geddes and co. demonstrate the same—with a convincing period piece, something that frankly should have been impossible to manage to this level of success, taking into account the modest budget.

EXIT HUMANITY is not a typical zombie gorefest. There is no flesh-tearing and entrail-ripping to be seen; the onscreen violence is done by the living. This is not a movie that you wolf down like beer and burgers. Geddes painstakingly crafted a film that demands to be savored slowly, like a fine wine, sipping the breathtaking cinematography, the deft and touching score and the

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outstanding, heartfelt performances.

The theme of man’s inhumanity to man in the face of a global crisis is not new territory, but rarely are we shown hardship on such a personal level as that visited upon HUMANITY’s Edward Young (Mark Gibson), a weary veteran of the Civil conflict who survived the horrors of war by focusing on the desire to peacefully live out his remaining days working the land with his beloved wife and son. Not content to let him rest, however, the fates have other designs on Edward, who soon finds his future crushed by the same mysterious plague he witnessed the beginnings of while fighting in the war. With nothing left to live for save fulfilling a promise to a dead son, Edward begins a quest that will take him through a zombie-riddled countryside and into the path of a deranged southern general (Bill Moseley), who, along with his followers, are hell-bent on leveraging the plague of zombies as a means to recapture what was lost in the war.

Rarely, if ever, has the landscape played such a key role in an independent genre film. Shot on locations north of Toronto, much of EXIT HUMANITY takes place during the daylight hours—unlike many other films in this budget range (or higher), where the darkness of night is often used to mask less successful makeup and FX work. Not so in this case, where the unique and convincing zombie designs by The Brothers Gore (Jeff and Jason Derushie) are boldly presented in full light.

The footage has been bleached to create an aesthetic that both lends an air of authenticity to HUMANITY’s time period and mirrors the bleak soul of Edward Young. This in no way had a negative impact on DP Brendan Uegama’s grand capturing of the countryside, taking full advantage of every available natural accoutrement, including bogs, brooks, waterfalls and sunsets. This film does not rush to its conclusion; it is rich with long, quiet shots, the camera lingering on the landscape, confidently taking its time to provide the audience with a multilayered experience unique to the genre. There is a distinctive European feel to this movie, which flirts heavily with art-film sensibilities—in a sense, this is a more literal cousin to Jim Jarmusch’s DEAD MAN.

A relatively bloodless horror film moving at such an atypically relaxed pace is extremely vulnerable to the exposure a single poor performance would bring, but one of the brightest jewels in HUMANITY’s crown is the caliber of the onscreen talent. Not only were three solid, well-known actors cast (Moseley, Dee Wallace, Stephen McHattie), the entire company, without exception, attacks their roles with vigor, power and conviction. Adam Seybold is wonderful as Isaac, Edward’s unexpected ally and friend, as is Jordan Hayes in a smaller but pivotal role as Isaac’s sister Emma. Ari Millen is suitably reptilian as one of the general’s followers (along with Jason Brown).

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One of the strongest lasting impressions that will continue to resonate long after the credits roll and the lights come up, however, is Gibson’s portrayal of the tortured Edward. The actor occupies the screen for the majority of the film, dealing with myriad dire challenges that push him to every emotional extreme. Gibson shows great subtlety and restraint when appropriate, but fearlessly tears into the dark places of his soul in times of madness. It’s an unforgettable turn.

In addition to performing admirably onscreen as one of Moseley’s unsavory henchmen, Brown shines even brighter behind the scenes as production designer, proving integral in achieving the film’s authentic look. His meticulous attention to detail is invaluable to a period film, and again, virtually unseen at this scale for an independent production. The illusion of authenticity is enhanced by Jeff Graville, Nate Kreiswirth and Ben Nudd’s stirring score, a full-bodied work worthy of an independent CD release. In addition, the costume design by Alex Brown is spot-on and inspired. There are scenes with Edward trekking in his leather jacket and cowl that are reminiscent of Christophe Gans’ *BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF*.

An emerging watermark of Foresight Features (which also produced the very different *MONSTER BRAWL*) is the layering of textures to add additional visual depth above and beyond the camerawork. Montreal’s Snejhan Budorov provided several stylish animated clips interspersed throughout the film, and the talents of Phantom City Creative were enlisted to create the animated sketches that began each chapter start. Edward’s story unfolds through the pages of his diary, passed down to future generations as a warning. A distinct voice was required to narrate these words, and screen legend Brian Cox (*MANHUNTER*, *RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES*) provides a perfect vocal representation for the film’s tone.

There is no doubt that *EXIT HUMANITY* will forever be classified as a zombie/horror film, and fair enough, it does feature the walking dead—but it is so much more. It is a movie about the resilience of the human spirit, how a desperate and doomed world will draw out out a man’s true

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nature, and how it is possible to find hope and a reason to go on living in the face of blackest despair.

Geddes, with the support of his cast and crew, has pieced together something special with EXIT HUMANITY, a project that everyone involved will be proud to have on their résumés. They may have set out to make a movie, but they created cinema.

