Reality TV made a name for itself based largely upon the people involved and their propensity to eat each other alive for an audience. The five-part British zombie-apocalypse miniseries DEAD SET, airing this month on the Independent Film Channel (IFC), takes that brutality to a whole other level.

The series follows the cast and crew of the UK version of BIG BROTHER while zombies eat their way through the British public and the stars and staff of the show fight to survive. The cast is familiar: there's the athletic guy who says and does what he wants, the hot blonde who yearns to be a star, the tough but redeemably smart kid, the dizzyingly dumb but well meaning girl, the flamboyant performer and his wallflower friend, and the older, somewhat lecherous, bore. They bicker, outright fight, have trysts, and form and break alliances. Brits are set to watch the live eviction show even while breaking news coverage threatens to cancel the broadcast and since the network favors ratings, BIG BROTHER stays on air.

Then, without explanation, Britain experiences a fast spreading zombie outbreak. In fact, the outbreak may be worldwide but television and radio news are soon extinct and there's no way to know for sure. All that's on is the live feed of what started as the eviction of one member of the BIG BROTHER house. The vapid and annoying members of the cast remain unaware of the world outside until a member of the crew gets into the house and shows them first hand. Once made aware situation's gravity, one would the cast would snap out of the alternative reality of TV and cowboy up for the fight for their lives. The six contestants, however, live up to our expectations of the shallow celebrity-seekers we come to know and loathe. The crisis reveals what the characters are made of, bringing out the best, but more often, the worst.

Apart from the experience of the on camera cast, DEAD SET also follows the show's stereotypically rude producer, a production assistant who is cheating on her boyfriend and that same boyfriend as he tries to get back to her. The producer, while managing to make just about every interaction uncomfortable, also helps answer some of the more mundane questions about how to cope in a zombie situation; what do you do when zombies trap you in a room for hours with no loo? Improvise.

DEAD SET was written and produced by Charles Brooker, a British media maven and sardonic critic, and directed by Yann Demange. The show's cast is a group of seasoned English actors who make the trite reality stars look believable and imminently revolting. Dripping in gore and obscenities, DEAD SET is scathing critique at its core. The reality show that attracts so much interest and attention from the public is about as unreal as it gets, yet it's aired in place of news that might offer people a chance at survival. We see the zombie outbreak come from the outside world and then into the house where all is broadcasted live. The suggestion is the "art" (used here loosely) imitates life. Reality TV only becomes real after no one is watching.

DEAD SET is a well-made, self-reflexive miniseries and gets everything right as a zombie flick.

It’s real people doing their best in an extraordinary situation where fairness is not a part of the equation. Unafraid to be harsh and downright gross in its depictions of violence and human interaction, the series is worth a watch from start to finish. So don’t let thick accents deter you, DEAD SET should have a permanent place in the genre.

DEAD SET airs on the Independent Film Channel starting October 25 at midnight for five consecutive nights, then back-to-back starting at 8 p.m. Halloween night.

{jcomments on}