Written by Michael Gingold
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The important thing to remember about Emily Hagins, the budding filmmaker at the center of the documentary ZOMBIE GIRL: THE MOVIE (which has been playing the fest circuit for the last year or so), is that she's a 12-year-old. A real 12-year-old, not a miniature adult of the type we've been conditioned to expect from the cinema, and that no doubt would have taken center stage if this were a calculated reality-TV program.

In that type of show, ZOMBIE GIRL's opening scene, in which Hagins appears confused by an interviewer's query about how many shots she plans to do that day, might seem intended to mock her inexperience. But this much more empathetic portrait makes a different point: Emily is not so concerned with all the technical specifics that grown-up moviemakers busy themselves with; all she knows is that she wants to go out there and make her own zombie feature, like the one that made such a strong impression on her when she caught it at a screening at the Alamo Drafthouse in her native Austin, TX. (Get ready to feel old, folks: The flick that inspires her is not a George A. Romero or Sam Raimi classic, but the Spierig brothers' UNDEAD.)

Which is not to say that Emily doesn't devote her every effort and plenty of planning to putting her 90-page undead script PATHOGEN before her Handycam, with the (almost) tireless assistance of her mother/de facto producer Megan. As much as the specifics of PATHOGEN's homegrown production, directors Justin Johnson, Aaron Marshall and Erik Mauck make this relationship the linchpin of ZOMBIE GIRL. A graphic designer and movie/TV devotee herself (to the point of having the STAR TREK theme on her cell phone), Megan encouraged her daughter's cinemania from a young age, and goes above and beyond to support Emily's vision, from assembling a microphone boom out of a paint roller to creating kitchen-table makeup FX. As the weekend-and-school-holiday shoot rolls on, the inevitable tensions crop up and Emily and Megan squabble like any parent and child (or director and producer), but the closeness and warmth between them always wins out.

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{jcomments on}