

“AFTERSHOCK” (TIFF Movie Review)

Written by Kelly Michael Stewart
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Some of the best horror stems from mining the paranoia of real-life situations. Part of the power of a film like Eli Roth’s *HOSTEL* stems from the thought that somebody might actually be sick enough to put something like the Elite Hunting club together. The background of *AFTERSHOCK*—which stars Roth but is not directed by him—lies in truth, specifically the devastating 8.8 earthquake that struck Chile in 2008.

Within a few minutes, much of the country was reduced to rubble, and the entire infrastructure completely collapsed, to the point where prisoners escaped from the jails to wreak havoc in the streets. *AFTERSHOCK* (which world-premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and was picked up by Dimension for U.S. release) fuses that reality into an intense fictional horror film that is quite unsettling.



Roth plays Gringo, an American tourist visiting his Chilean friends Ariel (Ariel Levy) and Pollo (Nicolás Martínez). While nightclubbing, they meet Irina (Natasha Yarovenko), nonstop party girl Kylie (Lorenza Izzo) and her strict sister Monica (Andrea Osvárt), who join them on a tour of the coastal town of Valparaíso. On their last night of partying, the earthquake hits and all hell breaks loose. A tsunami warning is issued, and the race is on for the survivors to try and make it to higher ground before it’s too late.

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Chilean filmmaker Nicolás López directed AFTERSHOCK from a script he wrote with Roth (also one of the producers) and Guillermo Amoedo, and the unlikely pairing of López (known primarily for Chilean comedies like PROMEDIO ROJO) and Roth’s sensibilities makes for an interesting mix of cinema styles. Much like in HOSTEL, López and Roth take their time to let you get to know the characters; the lighting and mood of the first hour is bright and sunny, and you’d swear you were watching something like an Adam Sandler film. Once the earthquake hits, of course, everything gets dark and the tone instantly changes.

Roth has had supporting roles in the likes of INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS and GRINDHOUSE, but this marks his first chance to play the lead in a feature. He shouldn’t be quitting his day job anytime soon, but he holds his own in the role, and it’s fun to watch him strike out with the ladies and basically be a geek on screen. As Pollo, Martinez is the real breakout star here, and he’s often hilarious to watch.

For the most part, AFTERSHOCK comes highly recommended, but one major—almost fatal—flaw crops up during the film’s final act. It won’t be given away here, of course, but it’s a plot turn that makes the action of the previous 20 minutes seem even more unlikely. It feels like this twist is there for the sake of having a twist, rather than being logical to the situation. Which is a shame, because the film is an otherwise solid horror debut. What does work brilliantly is the sense of dread and doom that piles up in scene after scene once the earthquake hits. López and Roth are clever enough to give you false hope that things are going to get better for the characters, only to have the situation fall even deeper into despair at every turn.

AFTERSHOCK is a pretty intense and chilling experience. It is first and foremost a popcorn film, of course, but it’s also a brutal reminder that the breakdown of civilization and the advent of chaos is just a rumble away.

