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Following a friend’s enthusiastic recommendation, positive word of mouth and the gorgeous poster (pictured below) I kept seeing around the Fantasia festival , I made a point of getting out of the house early to see Evan Kelly’s cabin-in-the-woods film THE CORRIDOR—coming our way from the snowy land of Halifax, Nova Scotia (where HOBO WITH A SHOTGUN also notably hails from).

Following his mother’s death, Tyler (Stephen Chambers) has a nervous breakdown. Stumbling upon the messy scene, his friends Huggs (Glen Matthews), Everett (Jim Gilbert), Chris (David Patrick Flemming) and Bobcat (Matthew Amyotte) attempt to help him, but flesh is severed and their relationships crumble. Flash-forward to a year later when, in an attempt at rebuilding their friendships as well as helping Tyler cope, the group decide to spend a weekend at his mother’s country house. Her ashes will finally be scattered, and in the process, hopefully, these men find themselves and each other again.

If you’ve been reading this blog, you’re aware of my struggles with flaky characters and unrelatable plots. Thankfully, screenwriter Josh MacDonald does everything right in bringing these five friends to life, showing great mastery in crafting their interpersonal and group dynamics and giving the film an extremely strong emotional foundation. Each character has a specifically relatable type—without being overplayed—and while the emphasis is on the disturbed Tyler and the level-headed Chris, everyone has his very human moment, taking the film well beyond its initial focus point and into unexpectedly engaging ensemble drama, supported by excellent performances. The chemistry is apparent on screen, helping THE CORRIDOR address issues of struggling masculinity and machismo through the prism of friendship, illness and self-affirmation. Filled with quiet character moments, the film nonetheless builds steadily toward a rivetingly bloody second half (motivated by the friends’ discovery of the strange title phenomenon out in the woods) that will not disappoint horror fans or aficionados of tightly mapped-out, suspenseful plot progressions.

Using the cold Nova Scotia landscape—one which will be extremely familiar to any Canadian viewer—to maximum alienating effect, THE CORRIDOR is slow-burning and engaging, displaying great ambition on a restrained budget, heady and visually striking. Director Evan Kelly shows great talent in his pacing, intercutting and lingering shots as well. Going in knowing nothing, I found all my expectations subverted as the movie blends various genres in an extremely pleasing and highly personal piece of work. As with many films containing pure science-fiction concepts (2001’s monolith or even this year’s Earth 2 from ANOTHER EARTH come to mind), THE CORRIDOR uses its otherworldly idea wisely and economically. Indeed, the eponymous corridor—on which I won’t elaborate to keep the surprise intact—is used as a narrative device that drives the characters forward in meaningful ways, rather than becoming an overbearing showstopper and the film’s main focus. Some might find the lack of explanation for it somewhat frustrating, but given the investment in the characters, the unforgiving ending will most likely have you shaking for totally different reasons.

Keep an eye on Kelly and MacDonald, because THE CORRIDOR is one of the most impressive independent films of this year’s Fantasia, a masterful science-fiction/man-vs.-man thriller that also happens to one of the most emotionally resonant Canadian horror films I’ve seen in a long time.