

“THE RAID: REDEMPTION” (Movie Review)

Written by Walter Bonner

Wednesday, 14 March 2012 10:30



Every few years, a foreign film crosses the pond to remind us how a genre movie is supposed to be. THE RAID: REDEMPTION, an Indonesian flick starring Iko Uwais and directed by Welshman Gareth Evans, doesn't just give the action genre a swift kick in the nuts, it attacks your jaded moviegoing sensibilities like a machete to the face. (Those on the East Coast can check out our free FANGORIA screening tonight; see details [here](#).)

As THE RAID opens, an elite police team is in the back of a van traveling deep within the crime-riddled depths of Jakarta's slums. Their destination: a 15-story apartment building that has become a fortress for ruthless crime lord Tama (a sinister Ray Sahetapy). As unit leader Jaka (Joe Taslim) explains to his men packed into the back of the transport, the kingpin has turned the building into an impenetrable dwelling place for psychotic killers, rapists and drug addicts—a home to Jakarta's deadliest gangs. For years, not even the toughest of cops dared go near, let alone enter, the building. But now they've been given the go-ahead to snatch Tama from his penthouse lair, and their mission's success hinges on their stealth and not blowing their cover. “I don't want to see any empty seats in here on our way back,” Jaka tells them. Experienced officer Rama (Uwais) looks to the officer seated next to him, surprised to find the young man's hands shaking.



At first, everything seems to be going smoothly as they silence and subdue tenants on one floor after the other. However, something happens when they get to the heart of the building, a moment's hesitation making their presence known. The building's lights are shut off as Tama's voice comes over the intercom, offering free rent for life to whoever deals with this “infestation.” Now the men must battle their way out of the building against hordes of machine-gun-toting mobsters and machete-wielding maniacs.

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THE RAID is one of those movies that kick your ass from the beginning to end, rarely pausing for air. The fight scenes, showcasing the Indonesian martial art pencak silat, are relentless and superbly executed; there's no confusion as to where a punch, a kick, a chair or a machete lands, as is often a problem with action films today. It must also be said that, even though THE RAID is an action movie, it provides more suspense, blood and guts than many a scare flick of recent memory. The forces the good guys face aren't CGI'd zombies, vampires, werewolves or aliens—these are real people, stone-cold psychopaths driven to kill these cops at any cost. The film is reminiscent of some of John Carpenter's best work (right down to the pulsing new score by Joseph Trapanese and Linkin Park's Mike Shinoda), particularly ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13, where the gang members have a sinister, almost otherworldly presence.

The actors are all perfectly cast, the principals giving their all amidst what had to be a difficult shoot. Star Uwais does a standout job as Rama, the hero who has to survive if he's going to see the birth of his son, but the performances are great across the board. The script is tightly written and the characters are all, for the most part, believable, making the insane action sequences all the more intense and involving. Two fights in particular, both involving Tama's small but deadly henchman Mad Dog (Yayan Ruhian, who choreographed the martial arts with Uwais) are ones for the ages.

THE RAID sets a new bar for action films, with director Evans emerging as one of the new masters of the genre. Word on the street is that Sony Pictures (which is distributing the film in the U.S.) subsidiary Screen Gems is in negotiations for an English-language remake. The only shocker there would be if the American version turns out even half as good as the original. (THE RAID: REDEMPTION opens Friday, March 23 in New York, LA, San Francisco and Washington, DC, with more cities to follow.)

