Independent zombie movies are a dime a dozen—and 10 pennies are what a lot of them are worth. That’s why undead flicks with a bit of creativity and inspiration should be celebrated. I don’t want to mislead you into thinking that HELL IS FULL, from Big Biting Pig Productions, is some new classic of the subgenre—it isn’t. But it does try to tell a walking-corpse story in an interesting and fresh way, and for that, it deserves some praise.

Like a zombified version of the telephone game in reverse, HELL IS FULL tells many interconnected tales of how a zombie virus is spread from a crashed meteor site, revealing the origin of the plague as the story goes on. This is a pretty complex way of telling a story and it could have easily gone off the rails, but writer/director/producer Steve Hudgins keeps it all together with his meticulous attention to detail. It feels like making this film must have involved the use of some kind of continuity flow chart (something that, if it indeed existed, would have been cool to see as a bonus feature, but is sadly not included). But Hudgins does a good job of juggling the various plotlines and connecting them into one cohesive story. The result is an original approach to flesheater fare, a mystery whose solution is patiently pieced together as the minutes pass, culminating in a pretty satisfying conclusion.

HELL IS FULL seems like a collaborative effort by people who love the genre. The actors don’t need to prepare their Oscar speeches any time soon—it seems likely that the cast is made up of friends and family of the filmmakers—but they do a decent job and seem to have had a blast zombie-ing it up for the cameras. Hudgins has written a pretty complex script dealing with an array of emotions and backstories; at times the performers are able to pull them off, but occasionally, the lengths to which Hudgins’ script asks them to go just aren’t within their range. Still, for the most part, their efforts are endearing. I can envision this movie opening in its creators’ hometown, with everyone gathering and guffawing at their involvement in this project.

The FX are pretty simplistic, but Hudgins does a great job of making do with what he’s got. He seems to know that less is more, and simple scenes like a zombie scratching on a bloodstained window are done very well. There are other effective sequences that show off Hudgins’ talent as a director, specifically one lensed in a hospital basement as a maintenance crew flees from a zombified patient. There’s another truly scary bit where an elderly man is being treated by a doctor; he’s obviously turning into a ghoul, but as Hudgins himself passes by the room, the elderly soon-to-be-zombie simply stares into the camera. The audience knows what’s going to happen next as the oblivious doctor patters around the room, treating the patient with that non-caring manner we all have experienced. This well-shot scene is one of many that elevate this grassroots low-budgeter to a higher level.

The special features on Big Biting Pig’s self-distributed DVD (available from the official website) include a deleted-scenes reel that, as usual, points up the reasons they were deleted in the first place. Much of this stuff is simply longer versions of existing scenes or redundancies. A blooper reel is kind of fun to watch, especially when the zombies break character to laugh at whatever goof-up just occurred. The disc also offers previews of Hudgins’ previous MANIAC ON THE LOOSE and GOATSUCKER, both of which look promising. A commentary by Hudgins and his fellow producer P.J. Woodside offers insight into the painstaking detail the two undertook to tell this story, highlighting the passion both had for this project and endearing the viewer even more to this little zombie flick, given the amount of time and effort put into it.

HELL IS FULL doesn’t have a big budget or big-name actors, but it does have big ideas. Hudgins did a fine job with what he had, proving you don’t need a monster budget to make an effective monster movie. This one moves pretty quickly and is smartly put together—something that can’t be said for many zombie films, including some that cost 100 times the budget of this one. For that reason alone, HELL IS FULL is worth checking out.

MOVIE: 💀💀💀💀

DVD PACKAGE: 💀💀💀💀

{jcomments on}