

“NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES” (DVD Review)

Written by Audrey Quaranta
Friday, 06 May 2011 16:23



I'll admit right off the bat (get it?) that I placed NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES (Vicious Circle/Breaking Glass) into my DVD player with a feeling of dread. I was expecting another ridiculous, “how did this even get funded?” excuse for a movie, one that took itself seriously for no good reason—the bane of every reviewer.

I was, however, pleasantly surprised. Writer/director Justin Timpane clearly knew what he was working with, and what he was doing with it.

Aaron (Jay Saunders), who is kind of sexy in a nerdy way (or nerdy in a sexy way?), is in love with his best friend Alex (Devon Marie Burt). When he finally gets up the guts to tell her, he is angrily rejected, and just when he's probably thinking he has never felt worse in his life, the pair are attacked by vampires. Luckily, however, they are saved by ninjas. Alex doesn't remember anything, and she's probably better off that way; Aaron, on the other hand, is both terrified and fascinated, and becomes consumed by his determination to get to the bottom of the situation and make sure no harm comes to Alex.



On a poorly executed spying mission, he discovers that Cole (Cory Okouchi), the owner of the

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local comic shop, is in fact a ninja. He and his friends Kyle (Daniel Ross), Ann (Melissa McConnell) and Lily (Carla Okouchi)—a vampire who refuses to feed on humans—work together to protect the innocents of their town from the bloodthirsty and power-hungry, led by Seth (Kurt Skarstedt). When Seth gathers the top guns of the vampire world and plans to destroy humanity, Aaron vows to help the ninjas defeat them so he can save Alex and hopefully win her heart.

Now, what makes NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES good is the fact that it doesn't try to be something it is not. This is a comedy with well-written jokes that pokes fun at itself and at the genre. The sense of humor helps add dimension to the characters and to the overall film. The plot is a bit thin, and the horror element exists primarily in satirical terms, but there is plenty of action, if you like hand-to-hand combat and, well, ninja stuff.

Much like a tired 9-to-5 worker lives from weekend to weekend, this film lives from joke to joke. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Well, we're not talking anything Oscar-worthy, that's for sure. However, the reason any of us would watch a film called NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES—the title says enough—is to have a good time and not have to think too hard. This movie intends to let us relax, to make us laugh and to show us some ninja kicks. Not a bad deal, if you ask me. It should be noted that this is a loose follow-up to Timpane's previous NINJAS VS. ZOMBIES, with some common characters, and while I haven't seen that film, this one played well for me on its own. The FX are pretty decent as well for a low-budget project, and while the sound fluctuates a bit too much, the 1.77:1 transfer looks sharp and well-lit.

The features on this disc are beyond generous. Timpane shares a commentary track with his wife Kelly, who produced the movie, and steers much of the conversation to her, claiming it might be interesting to hear things from the point of view of a filmmaker's spouse. She doesn't seem quite prepared for the spotlight, but her perspective is indeed good to hear. If you don't like this track, don't worry—there are two more. The actors' commentary features Timpane, Saunders, Burt, Cory and Carla Okouchi, Ross, P.J. Megaw (who plays top vampire The Bishop) and Daniel Mescarello. Needless to say, this one's a bit chaotic. Timpane attempts to mediate the discussion, with often goes awry (in a good way) but provides great perspective into cast chemistry and the experience of making the film. Finally, there's a track for the producers. Cory Okouchi, Mescarello, Megaw and Ross all have executive-producer credits (and took multiple other jobs on set), and they are joined by Timpane and Brian Anderson, who has a small vampire part as well. Timpane points out that his goal is to let viewers learn how NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES came to be, and including multiple tracks was a smart thing to do. In particular, hearing the same people from the actors' track speak as producers gives a very tangible sense of the independent filmmaking process.

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We also get an alternate ending and deleted scenes, all with optional commentary from Timpane, plus a blooper reel, photo gallery and footage from the theatrical premiere that both cast and fans attended. “Ninjas vs. Comics” is a short about Tom Chillemi and the illustrated works he created to accompany and expand on Timpane’s movies. “From Zombie to Vampires” is a brief but funny look at Cole’s background that sums up NINJAS VS. ZOMBIES for the ignorant. Two music videos from the soundtrack and some trailers, both for this feature and other Breaking Glass releases, round out the package.

NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES is not, indeed, a DVD to be afraid of; it won’t bore you with mind-numbing attempts to be serious and thought-provoking. It will be fun, it will make you laugh and it rewards those who enjoy it with a ton of extras.

MOVIE: 🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌

DVD PACKAGE: 🍌🍌🍌🍌

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