Simon Rumley is one hell of a filmmaker. He doesn't make easy films, and his stories aren't neatly confined to a genre, but they certainly are horrific and they'll most definitely stay with you late into the night. His last foray into cinema, THE LIVING & THE DEAD was a sort of Gothic, English manor tragedy infused with Lynchian madness about a mentally retarded young man's inability to take care of his terminally ill mother and the deteriorating consequences. For his latest feature, he's turned his eye to America in the ominously titled RED WHITE & BLUE, and the results are just as heartbreaking. The movie screens at Montreal's Fantasia film festival on July 21 with Rumley and cast attending.

Set in the oft-celebrated geek cultural mecca of Austin, Texas, RED WHITE & BLUE tells a tale that begins with Erica (Amanda Fuller), continues with Frankie (Marc Senter of Jack Ketchum's THE LOST) and ends with Nate (Noah Taylor). The film introduces Erica through her sexual promiscuity in a basically dialogue-less opening scene. Finally some of the first words uttered are her rules (she doesn't stay the night, doesn't fall in love and doesn't f*ck the same guy twice). As you'd expect, the two male protagonists become entwined through her nighttime actions, although on separate sides of it. Frankie, a partying guitarist in the Austin music scene who, like James in THE LIVING & THE DEAD, is taking care of his cancer-ridden mom, meets Erica on one of her nights out. Ex-military man Nate, however, moves into the apartment house where Erica cleans and takes an odd shine to her, attempting to become an actual friend to the broken girl.

RED WHITE & BLUE is billed as a revenge film and that it is, just an unconventional one. It's almost as if the exploitation subgenre mixed with a slacker/hangout film (except there's no comedy here). Anyone who's seen THE LIVING & THE DEAD will notice this film is much less

beautiful in its atmosphere and technical filmmaking. RED WHITE & BLUE is very rough and very raw, often switching between intimate and beautifully composed shots and very quick, indie and almost amateur-ish scenes. There are many moments of characters just living their lives, not necessarily moving the plot forward and it works slowly toward an unflinching climax that only adds to the harrowing nature of everything that came before.

[THIS BIT MAY INVOLVE SPOILERS, SO BEWARE] Even before any physical violence, RED WHITE & BLUE seeps under your skin when it's revealed that Erica is a carrier of HIV and has passed the disease to Frankie who not only must come to grips with his new reality, but the fact that he frequently donates blood to his mother. And this is where RED very much becomes a horror film. Watching the consequences, even just the introduction of a disease that is so palpable and relevant in today's society into the narrative, is incredibly unnerving—especially the subtle reminder that all it takes is once. When Frankie and his band mates learn of the news, they seek out Erica, and when they finally find her, Frankie's confrontation, reaction and thoughts make for incredible moments where Senter really shines (despite what I'll say about his performance below).

Without its title, RED WHITE & BLUE is already a film to mull over, but of course, its name is impossible to ignore. The three colors of the flag and three main protagonists have to meet somewhere. It seems Rumley is conveying to his audience his thoughts of America and they look to be non-too-pleasant. With Nate freely admitting his enjoying of the violence he inflicts on people (and smaller, weaker animals) and Erica's damaged sexual past (thanks to a mother's boyfriend), RED WHITE & BLUE paints us as a violence loving and sexually misunderstood people. Considering the constant battle between Puritan ethics and the scantily clad overexposure of young girls, he may not be far off. What's sadder is he just might be implying that those who try and reconcile these issues and move on to happiness will be met with failure and the sins of the past.

Taylor does truly standout work. His weather worn face and eyes and a mumbling southern accent are everything you need to know about what he's capable of, both good and bad. Senter

sadly isn't on the same level as Taylor or Fuller (who also does a beautiful job). There's something about his delivery that doesn't come across as a real person at times. He doesn't feel as immersed in Frankie as his peers do in Erica and Nate—at least not until much later in the film when he excellently portrays just what effects the breakdown of his life and surroundings has on his already fragile personality.

While it's hard to say you'll enjoy it, you'll definitely come out of RED WHITE & BLUE affected in some way. As I wrote earlier, Rumley is one hell of a filmmaker, one who should be getting much more exposure. If you're a fan of heavy, difficult cinema, you'd do well by seeking him and RED WHITE & BLUE out.

{jcomments on}