

## "URBAN EXPLORER" (Screamfest Review)

Written by Bekah McKendry  
Monday, 24 October 2011 09:01

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First, a disclaimer: URBAN EXPLORER played Screamfest this week, and there was an error. The version that screened had no subtitles, with the theater even stopping the film for five minutes to attempt to fix the problem, to no avail. That said, the large majority of the movie was in English, body language and inflection came across clear and I'm not sure if the subtitles would have actually improved the movie any.

Directed by Andy Fetscher, URBAN EXPLORER seems like such a cool premise. I even stood in the lobby speaking with peers about the excitingly creative concept: A group of international travelers visiting Berlin hire a German native to give them a tour of the endless tunnels and networks under the city. Historically, the city bears a huge underground system constructed by the Nazis and again during the Cold War. The group sets off exploring, and amidst SS bunkers and passageways they discover something far more terrifying than imagined. Brilliant, right?

Steeped in a real-life historical background, it takes the viewer to a place they have never seen before, exposes them to Nazi folklore and ghost stories relatively unknown here in the States, and allows for some creative technique in the dark and shadowy underbelly of the city. This was what I had hoped for. The result was not quite so positive.



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URBAN EXPLORER has a great start. Sure, the characters are a little annoying and trite—almost like a Benetton ad with a rainbow of international hip stereotypes—but as soon as the group enters the tunnels, it got fascinating, with their German guide full of knowledge of aforementioned fascinating history and folklore. This first act serves to possibly set up half a dozen horror plots that could logically follow, including everything from Nazi medical experiments to ghosts to aliens to giant eels living in the underground waterways, all carefully woven in and creating a nice chilling mood. The visuals are gorgeous, a low key, high contrast mix of sharply divided shadows and flashlight beams highlighting the cramped, damp stone passages.

As is often the case, once URBAN EXPLORER's actual terror is revealed, the whole movie falls down face-first, on the slimy bedrock, with the threat turning out to be absolutely nothing new. Actually, if you had polled the audience in the lobby FAMILY FEUD style as to what the most predictable thing that could be going on in the tunnels, this would be the number one answer. Survey says it's been done before, a lot.

What's more, is that the exhilarating camera-work comes to a halt in the second half, in lieu of close-ups on some rather boring carnage. As far as thrills, there were minor scares throughout, but whereas the remarkable moments in the first portion were built out of atmosphere and creativity, those in the second half just seemed lazy by comparison. Ultimately, URBAN EXPLORER was hard to swallow, with a very decent beginning that transforms into an overdone hot mess.

