

## "THE DIVIDE" (Chris' Review)

Written by Chris Alexander  
Friday, 13 January 2012 10:36

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In response to our own Bekah McKendry's positive review of the already controversial THE DIVIDE, this writer has opted to offer a different, less enthusiastic perspective.

Cruelty is a powerful tool in horror, used to exemplify how base we damn dirty humans can be when we shed the veneer of social mores that keep us in check. It should be painful and frightening to watch man's inhumane treatment to smaller creatures and each other, or in the case of something like, say the HUMAN CENTIPEDE films, it should be a device to go over the top into histrionic heights of absurdist hardcore fantasy. Credit Tom Six for being ludicrous and disgusting with his colorful villains but always keeping his victims and their plights the source of real trauma and shock.

But Xavier Gens' THE DIVIDE is an example of what's killing cruelty in horror; it's a pretentious, posturing and pointless wallow in tepid bad behavior done with no joy of the medium, yet littered with self-import and silliness. Not one second of it is believable, not one character feels like they belong in the same world together—let alone trapped in the dire predicament Gens forces them into in his epic in length slog through grime.

Ostensibly a post-apocalypse drama, the film begins promisingly, as nuclear missiles decimate Manhattan and traps that ragtag band of "types" in a filthy apartment basement, the lair of half mad building handyman Mickey (Michael Biehn, whose scenery chewing is the best thing about the picture). As soon as the wildly screaming Biehn seals the iron door behind them, Gens begins to pit his characters and their clichéd traits against each other. Never mind that nuclear fallout and atomic death vibrates above their heads, these poorly etched idiots start to spout wince inducing dialogue, make moronic decisions (like trying to leave the basement only hours after the bombs hit) and relate to each other in heavy handed ways that serve no other purpose than to foreshadow later behaviors.

Every second the audience is left shaking their head asking "why?" Why do a gang of bio-suited soldiers invade the basement and steal Rosanna Arquette's daughter? Why do they hang out outside of the basement and set up a lab? What would the ethereal Lauren German see in that whiny French boyfriend? Why, when wannabe hero Josh (Milo Ventimiglia) dons one of their suits to spy on them, does he come back and report to Arquette that her daughter is dead, when she is not? Why does Arquette go—in minutes—from despair to cross eyed sexual madness? Why do characters look fine one second then froth at the mouth, get red

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eyes and lose their hair the next? Why, why, *why*?!



Eventually, you stop asking why and just throw your hands up and settle in to watch these goons do bad things to each other, which they of course do, despite none of it being particularly shocking. Rather, it's just ugly and stupid stuff: forced sex, bathroom antics, off camera dismemberment. A scene where Arquette—who is one of the great actresses of her generation and gives this her all—begins to menstruate post-coitus while a few of the men bray at her and humiliate her is revolting and ridiculous. But you watch. You keep watching, hoping that eventually something resembling a plot or twist or reveal might rear its head. It sort of does, I guess, but it ain't no Rod Serling morality bender that's for damn sure.

There's no pacing, no sense of place, no feel of the passage of time, and hilariously phony existential shots of men putting on make-up while staring in mirrors rule the day while the relentless, tinkly score—a shameless rip-off of Clint Mansell's music from Darren Aronofsky's THE FOUNTAIN, in fact—swells away on the soundtrack trying to make us emote to people that probably should all have just been vaporized. Gens is a talented filmmaker (FRONTIER(S) is still one of my fave of that year), but this one is just dull designer misery.

Ultimately, THE DIVIDE feels like a glossier, less exploitive Bruno Mattei schlock fest from the early 80's. Hell, even the actors are oddly dubbed! But at least RATS moved, and had Geretta Geretta in it.

