Genre is a perfect means of expression. Heightening real world anxieties by way of darker, fantastical material is artful, creative and exciting. But what happens when a filmmaker's personal exploration of their own illness, by way of demonic violence, is almost too literal? CITADEL, an Irish film from newcomer Ciaran Foy is such a work. A heavy, by all means eerie, atmospheric and strong debut, weighed down by its obvious intention.

As most that saw the film this past week in Austin discovered, CITADEL was born out of Foy's own battle with a vicious assault and his resulting agoraphobia. Thusly, the film sees young father Tommy (Aneurin Barnard) shut himself in from the world following the brutal murder of his wife in their condemned and decrepit tower block. As he struggles to care for his infant daughter, and face the outside, Tommy and the baby soon become stalked by hooded adolescent assailants—the same responsible for the his wife's death—who may be less than human.

Interestingly, the film shares some serious parallels with last year's South By breakout ATTACK THE BLOCK. Both are entrenched in working class culture and tower blocks, as well as the highly publicized issue of UK hooded violence, and neither is concerned with an outsider coming in and battling their way through the environment. CITADEL has much less of an issue of race on its mind, and is also trying to steer clear of larger statements about the society and politics it lives in however; an intention that's not entirely successful. It's doubtful audiences will not be prompted to read in to Tommy's guiding forces throughout; a gentle, warm nurse (Wunmi Mosaku), and an abrasive, "kill 'em all" crusading priest (James Cosmo) which read as an angel/devil device of kindly liberal, or aggressively conservative/intolerant. Of course, as Foy isn't so much concerned with these ideas, any inspection will find a muddled viewpoint.

CITADEL is also much less humorous. Foy is working through issues onscreen for the world to

see, and in doing so crafts a truly scary environment. His assured visual sense lays a truly sickening greenish hue over the proceedings, adding a melancholic and frantic tone to Tommy's daily life, one full of constant paranoia. The children are positively intimidating tiny, hooded monsters, whose ghastly faces come in and out of shadows. They're vicious and, possibly most unnerving, armed with filthy syringes. Tommy is of course, terrified of the prospect of his child being taken, and himself being devoured by the world he comes from.

What's odd about CITADEL, and what leaves the viewer feeling this otherwise very good film didn't click, is its seeming path in one direction, while eventually (thankfully) and still wholeheartedly giving itself over to pure horror. The violent, loud and quite pulpy Priest often ends up feeling out of a different movie, and it's a strange case of both the surface and sub textual levels of a film being so tightly knit, the story doesn't feel balanced. It's something that may work itself out on repeat viewings however, which CITADEL absolutely warrants.

What brings the mostly quite strong CITADEL down is that in hewing so close to Foy's experiences, and discarding the larger societal aspects of them, there's not much left aside from the film's message of overcoming one's demons. It's an admirable and certainly well executed one, but mainly very surface value.