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The foreign names of the director and star of EDDIE THE SLEEPWALKING CANNIBAL suggested there might be a European art-house flavor to the piece. Instead, this Canada-lensed feature is a traditionally told tale, albeit one possessed of a peculiar personality that allows it to successfully juggle satire, slapstick and splatter.

The film (making its North American premiere tonight at New York City’s Tribeca Film Festival) is simply titled EDDIE on screen, though he’s not the main character. That would be Lars Olafssen (Thure Lindhardt), a former celebrity on the art scene who has hit a creative slump. His agent (the always welcome Stephen McHattie, who here feels like he’s channeling Lance Henriksen) has suggested he get away from it all and recharge his batteries by taking a teaching gig. And so, after an early scene establishing his squeamish side, Lars arrives at the Koda Lake Art School, in the middle of snowy nowhere. Lars is a fish out of frozen water at first, amidst a bunch of nice sketched supporting characters, but he begins to settle in and is asked to look after Eddie (Dylan Smith), a hulking mute whose last relative has died. Said relative has left a lot of money to the school, it seems, on condition that the school take care of Eddie in return.

At first, having Eddie share his house seems like an imposition, but Lars begins to warm to the big guy—and besides, taking him in allows Lars to score points with pretty co-worker Lesley (a charming Georgina Reilly). Then Lars discovers one of Eddie’s little quirks: In the deep of the night, he somnambulistically staggers out of the house, kills living things and eats them. Lars is understandably concerned about this, especially as Eddie moves up the food chain to two-legged snacks. But then he finds that witnessing the bloodshed gets his creative juices flowing again. Suddenly he’s able to create a canvas that wins raves from the school staff and approval from his agent. So now what does he do—or more to the point, what does he do, or not do, about what Eddie does?

How Lars deals with the Faustian bargain that has been handed him is the backbone of EDDIE’s comedy, and its heart is the interplay between the two leads. Lindhardt, who’s got a touch of Simon Pegg about him, responds to the odd and increasingly grisly events surrounding Lars with a winning deadpan and just the right way with a line reading. Conversely, Smith creates a complete character with Eddie even as he doesn’t say a word. Having apparently lost his speech due to some awful event in his childhood, Eddie’s not played as a big dummy or a simple monster, but as a man-child who’s basically decent at heart—at least when he’s awake. When Eddie slumbers and then sets off on his hungry nocturnal missions, Smith reveals a knack for physical humor as well; even as his character obliviously staggers through these scenes, you can never say the actor sleepwalks through them.

Writer/director Boris Rodriguez has some pungent points to make about the creative process, and what an artist must be willing to trade for personal fulfillment and financial success. EDDIE is a kind of Frankenstein story (and indeed, there are echoes of Boris Karloff’s classic turn in Smith’s performance), though here Lars hasn’t created a monster, he just enables him a little bit. Rodriguez’s skillful handling of tone ensures that the satire stops short of making statements at the expense of the fun, while also keeping the more blatant comic elements from tipping the movie over into outright silliness. The characters’ most extreme actions remain motivated by identifiable desires, and when the going gets gory (makeup FX by Liz Ciesluk and Dawn Grant), even when it’s over-the-top enough to get laughs, it isn’t so gross that it turns you against the perpetrator.

It helps in this regard that many of the bad things happen to bad people (say goodbye, obnoxious neighbor), which also means there’s a certain predictability to the victim roster. The circumstances of the climax, too, have a whiff of inevitability about them—which is not to say the ending is unsatisfying, and here as throughout the movie, Rodriguez eschews sacrificing the credibility of his characters for the sake of a joke. For all his morally questionable actions, Lars remains likable and relatable, and Eddie ends up a memorable addition to cinema’s

human-monster pantheon—the most personable flesheater since DAY OF THE DEAD’s Bub.