

"IN THE HOUSE OF FLIES" (Movie Review)

Written by Dave Pace
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At first glance, audiences could make some unflattering assumptions about director Gabriel Carrer's latest outing IN THE HOUSE OF FLIES: Yet another indie movie about pretty people tied up in basements and hideously tortured by some sadistic lunatic with sinister motives. This is a popular well to draw from because it's inexpensive to shoot, and because despite all the voices out there condemning "torture porn" as a genre, audiences seem to continue to support it. Fortunately these assumptions about IN THE HOUSE OF FLIES would be quite mistaken. There is something much more sophisticated going on in this film than its trappings would suggest.

ITHOF is a period piece set against the backdrop of an idyllic 1988 summer. Steven (Ryan Kotack) and Heather (Lindsay Smith) are young and in love and ready to start their lives together, and that is all we really get to know about their backgrounds. There is an element of the generic George and Ann characters that auteur Michael Hanéké uses in several of his films (FUNNY GAMES, CACHE, CODE UNKNOWN) in Steven and Heather. You get the sense they are ciphers to some extent; blank canvases we can paint ourselves onto easily enough, and that is exactly what we do.

When Steven and Heather are kidnapped by the mysterious Voice (Henry Rollins) and condemned to a seemingly inescapable Panopticon of a basement, we begin to see the characters reveal themselves. It's said you never get to know what someone is truly like until you have seen them in crisis. The Voice pushes them well beyond the crisis point and into the realm of extreme human experience, the place we shed our personalities and pretty much anything else that isn't of survival utility. It's where we start to give in to our more craven natures, that dark reptilian core of our brains that knows well the stink of malarial swamps and cares nothing for our social conventions.



What is fascinating to me is how The Voice does this without the requisite drill bits in the

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kneecaps and razor-sliced eyeballs. If you come for SAW-style murder contraptions, you will be sorely disappointed. His weapons are simple and relentless: hunger, discomfort and hope. He starves them and then offers them chances to change their circumstances provided they make some terrible choices. There is even a point in the film where the movie demonstrates to us that, while it doesn't have the extreme torture violence one might expect, it is still willing to go just about anywhere and that brings a refreshing uncertainty to the proceedings.

IN THE HOUSE OF FLIES is intensely thought provoking and gut-wrenching. Throughout, I wondered where my own limits might be and recognized that past a certain point you aren't peeling back layers of person to get at some truth about them, you are pulling back layers of humanity to get to the animal inside. All this talk of really knowing people *in extremis* is only accurate to a certain point and after that, well you aren't seeing a person anymore, you are just seeing an animal who will do whatever it can to survive or to stop the agony. There is an element of meditation on torture, and how effective it really is at revealing truth, that I think would make an excellent presentation to any of the multitudes in political office who condone similar acts (starvation, stress positions, etc...) in the prosecution of our war on terror.

The Voice himself often comes off as our own inner voices do. His voice is a reminder of insecurity, guilt and self-loathing, and how all those feelings can mesmerize us into inaction and acceptance of a terrible fate instead of a rage at the dying of the light.

It is these themes, and watching in desperation as Steven and Heather are hollowed out from the inside by the simplistic sadism of The Voice, that elevate this movie far beyond mere "torture porn." Writer Angus McLellan has given us something far more sublime than we might have otherwise suspected and for that I am grateful. IN THE HOUSE OF FLIES leaves you with a dreadful feeling that is hard to shake; the feeling that you have just stared into the abyss for a while, and as predicted, it stared right back into you. It is certainly one of the most surprising indies of the year so far, and among my very favorites. There are depths hidden beneath the surface of this thing that audiences need to fear and respect, lest they are carried out into the blackness by the force of grim currents.

