

Long Live the New Flesh: Astron-6's "MANBORG"!

Written by David Pace

Wednesday, 02 November 2011 12:43



I might never live down missing Astron-6's FATHER'S DAY at Toronto After Dark 2011. By all accounts from sources I trust, it was the highlight of a festival filled with highlights. With so many great movies to see and personal commitments that not even FATHER'S DAY could get me out of, I really had to prioritize and see what I thought would be most relevant to readers of Long Live the New Flesh.

I take a lot of comfort in the fact that I didn't miss Astron-6's MANBORG.

In a nearby retro-future, in the aftermath of the Hell Wars against the vile forces of Count Draculon, only one man can save humanity. One man...borg.



Assembled from the shattered remains of a brave human soldier who stared in the face of Draculon himself and swore an oath to his fallen brother that he would have revenge, Manborg is reluctantly joined by fellow prisoners and gladiator-arena cannon-fodder Number One Man (the kung fu master), gunslinger Justice and his sister Mina. Will this group of unlikely heroes overcome their differences and lead humanity to victory against Draculon and his henchmen?

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Well, if you've seen movies like this before, then you know that yeah, they probably will. The magic of MANBORG is in watching how they do it.

Steve Kostanski delivers another incredible piece of pop madness: Part homage, part satire and all dorky love letter to cheap direct-to-VHS epics of the '80s.

See what I did there? That's what Kostanski and the Astron-6 crew do with MANBORG. They take familiar pop clichés and imagery and shoot them back at us in a way that is fresh, exciting, wickedly funny and pure fun. The genius of what they do isn't remixing these retro-pop ideas, but doing it in a way that doesn't feel dull and contrived, and the secret sauce is that they really love the movies they're riffing on, just like I do. They aren't making fun so much as they are making fun, if you follow my meaning, and the joy is infectious.

Lo-fi and low-budget (Kostanski says the movie cost about \$1,000 to make), MANBORG captures the look and feel perfectly. Performances are great throughout, with Conor Sweeney chewing up scenery as the hilariously überserious antihero Justice and Kyle Hebert providing ridiculous voice dubbing over Ludwig Lee's Number One Man. Jeremy Gillespie steals scene after scene, though, as the neurotic and melancholy Baron, a terrifying and brutish minion of Draculon who runs the gladiator arena with an iron fist—and, underneath the leather and the jackboots, has a heart of gold and is looking for love in the shattered Earth beyond the Hell Wars.

I loved playing spot-the-influences, not because they were so obvious but because of how well they captured the appropriate feel. I was vividly reminded of films from my wayward youth like FORTRESS, CIRCUITRY MAN, AMERICAN NINJA, THE EXTERMINATOR and perhaps on the only really obvious influence, ELIMINATORS.

Look, I'll be honest: This is a movie you will either get or you won't. If you get it, you will love it and recognize it for the amazing piece of crypto-retropop that it is. If you don't, well, then you can't dance and can't be part of our revolution.

{youtube}3GBscqaCWf4{/youtube}

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