

“REEL ZOMBIES” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Sunday, 16 May 2010 07:29



There have been countless grassroots undead movies in the last couple of decades, and more than a few indie flicks that applied the THIS IS SPINAL TAP mockumentary approach to the horror genre. So it's a nice surprise that the Canadian indie REEL ZOMBIES combines the two subgenres in ways that are fresh and funny.

Directors David J. Francis and Mike Masters also star as themselves, the director and producer respectively of ZOMBIE NIGHT, which is described on screen as one of the worst movies ever made. (In truth, it's among the better of the endless attempts to recreate the George A. Romero mythos on a nothing budget.) They followed it up with ZOMBIE NIGHT 2, and this feature is presented as a documentary following Francis as he decides to create a third entry to round out the trilogy, and convinces Masters to rejoin him in the endeavor. The duo set out to round up the rest of their previous team (those who've survived, anyway), fill in the crew blanks with willing newcomers and cast their latest opus. There's just one little wrinkle that's both a problem and an advantage: The world really has been overrun by the walking dead, and Francis, Masters and co. will be staging fake zombie attacks while dodging bona fide ones, and incorporating genuine ghouls into their production.



This is obviously a recipe for disaster, and REEL ZOMBIES is as much about the Murphy's Law world of microbudget filmmaking as it is a spoof of undead-cinema standards. Having made two flesheater cheapies themselves, Francis and Masters are in the perfect position to riff on both, and their latest is chock full of both knowing moments and exaggerations that remain plausible in the context of this scenario. All the DIY traps come into play as the director and producer wrestle with the nonexistence of funds, actors of questionable ability (a funny audition montage

“REEL ZOMBIES” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Sunday, 16 May 2010 07:29

is composed of clips of people actually trying out for this movie), a cinematographer who speaks no English, an editor exasperated by the crappy footage he’s given to work with and assorted interpersonal conflicts among the well-sketched characters. I have no idea how much the personalities of those on screen (most of whom also play themselves) are based on what they’re like in real life, but I can say that very few of them seem to be self-consciously “acting.” The movie even features the funniest of the many recent cameos by Troma founder Lloyd Kaufman, whose own reading for a role leads one of the team to suggest he might be hired for craft services instead.

In the midst of somehow getting their magnum opus on tape, the group also has to deal with the living corpses both inside and outside their shoot. A biker turned “zombie wrangler” and his assistants have corralled a bunch to be used as extras, and since these are the traditional slow-walking kind, the living actors won’t be in too much danger...right? (Their presence is especially necessary considering the weak attempts at ghoulish facials by the makeup girl played by Sarah Woodcock, hired because of her previous job at a mortuary; the FX actually created by Woodcock and others for REEL ZOMBIES are good enough to make the joke work.) Snafus of the biting-and-infecting kind can only result, yet are sneaked into the narrative in ways that feel organic to the story instead of predictably inevitable.

REEL ZOMBIES is a mix of big laughs and smiles of recognition, and will likely be most appreciated by anyone who’s spent time in the indie filmmaking trenches themselves. Some of the jokes and references might be too “in” for the casual viewer, but there’s enough to amuse anyone who’s into the genre—a particular highlight finds the guys discussing whether their undead opus will appeal to audiences who have experienced the real thing—as well as sufficient mayhem to satisfy those craving the subgenre’s basics. (It may not have been a result of the onscreen gore, but one girl actually puked during a screening at Montreal’s Fantasia festival last year.) Through it all, no matter how many foibles and fumbles it documents, REEL ZOMBIES also finds time to celebrate the tenacity and dedication required to see a movie through to its completion—whether those involved are facing being eviscerated and devoured or not.



{comments on}

“REEL ZOMBIES” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Sunday, 16 May 2010 07:29
