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DVD reviews: Zombie Twosome

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Images from the Internet



Aaah! Zombies!!

Directed by Mattahew Kohnen

Level 33 Entertainment / Wasted Pictures, 2010

90 minutes, USD \$16.95

Level33entertainment.com

MVDvisual.com

Zombie comedies are not new. They go back at least as far as Bob Hope's *The Ghost Breakers* in

1940; but that's voodoo kind. For the modern take, there's, for example, *Shaun of the Dead*, *C.H.U.D. II: Bud the C.H.U.D.* (which had zilch to do with *C.H.U.D.*), and *Return of the Living Dead II*. And now...

Actually, this is sort of a zombified zombie tale. It was originally released in 2007 as *Wasting Away*, and was resurrected from the dead shelf this year as *Aaah! Zombies!!*. Considering the number of indie awards its won at horror film festivals, I'm surprised it isn't better known.

Most zombie comedies are dead on arrival (sorry), but this one actually had me laughing at more than a few moments. Though there are holes here and there (including in a number of bodies), generally this is a well thought out, written, and acted film.

The basic premise is borrowed from some of the other films, such as *C.H.U.D. II*'s premise of trying to build the super-solider, and *Return of the Living Dead II*'s errant barrels of toxic waste accidentally being ingested. Even with that, the level of originality here is enough to more than bolster the plot.

There's four friends (not sure if they're supposed to be teens or young twenties), three whom work in a bowling alley, and their ever-hungry-for-weird-food friend who hangs around with them. They all have a bit of slacker in them, in varying ranges. After managing to ingest some of the toxic green goo via a beer and soft ice cream concoction, they are off after they're off'd.

Here's where the originality kicks in full strength. Part of the film is in black and white (except for the green stuff), which indicates real life and how everybody else sees the typical George Romero slow-moving, groaning creatures. But then there are the parts in color, which is how the zombies see us and each other, that is to say, normally. To them, they feel, talk, and walk normal, but others see them as drooling cadaverous beings. The image flips back and forth, with people seeing decaying corpses walking around in B&W, and they're just living their lives while being totally incomprehensible to only themselves (and any others infected).

It's taken a step further, which I believe is quite smart: zombies are slow and lumbering, and can't be understood, so it is put into play that uninfected people are shot in fast-motion, indicating normal brain function instead of the slower creatures, so the zombies can't understand them, and they can't understand the zombies – with the exception of drunks, who can both be understood and make out what is being said, as alcohol slows the brain, or zombies who drink coffee to speed them up can communicate with the uninfected.

The zombies are strong (unlike Romero's) if not fast, so they find themselves killing uninfecteds in self-defense, or just doing a "Lenny" and not realizing how strong they actually are. Please note that two brains get eaten, but in the least gory (though definitely yecky) ways. In fact, there really isn't a whole lot of gore, though there is some blood (mostly on clothing).

Obviously, the goo *is* doing something to their brains, because they don't really seem to get upset when a body part is disconnected, or when relatives perish; though they do seem to care about each other, which is touching.

The cast is good, filled with professional actors who seem to be doing a lot of work on television shows as regulars and guest appearances on the (*Law and Order* types, for example. One of the four leads is Betsy Beutler, who played Katie on *Scrubs*, Joanie on *The Black Donnellys*, and Son of Sam victim Stacy Moskowitz (someone I actually knew) in the series *The Bronx is Burning*. Here she plays perky very well, in a sort of cheerleader kind of way, while working the hell out of her very expressive facial muscles. Her boy-next-door-potential-boyfriend is portrayed by Michael Grant Terry, who portrayed Wendell on *Bones*. His goofiness comes across as charming rather than annoying, a fine line that is appreciated, and he makes a good pair with Beutler.

Julianna Robinson plays the other female lead, a more cynical, ambitious type who is hoping to get out of the local slacker scene. Having also appeared as the reporter in a bunch of *McBride* telefilms, she depicts snarky well, again without losing any of the character's likeability. Her foil is embodied by Matthew Davis, who has had a successful recent career as Josh in *Damages* and Alaric in *The Vampire Diaries*. His character is the type who is usually played by the Ryan Reynolds or Jack Black type actor, being the charming adult child who rises to the occasion when needed, and uses the word "awesome" way too much. As with the rest of the foursome, he remains charming throughout, and comes across with some solid laughs. Also, he gathers the most CGI effects.

There are a couple of name character actors here that if you don't recognize the name, you certainly would the face. His hard-edged solidier who guides the two couples through what is happening to them (albeit misinformed), is a turn done well, if a little over the top, by Colby French; he was Hank on the first season of *Heroes*. An evil general is done to a turn by Richard Riehle. He has over 230 credits in both television and films (as of this writing, 11 are in post-production), such as Walt on *Grounded For Life*, along with semi-regular roles in a number of *Star Trek* spin-offs. Last of note, is one of my favorite underrated character actors who has a cameo, Tracy Walter, a man from New Jersey who almost always plays redneck southerners. Though he has over 150 credits, including Angel in *Nash Bridges*, for me some of his special work was in the "Mummy Daddy" episode of *Amazing Stories*, the philosopher of *Repo Man* (who give the best speech – about UFOs – while burning clothes), and though I thought the series was only fair, I still think of as "Frog" in *Best of the West*. But I'm digressing here.

Anyway, this is a straight-out funny flick, and I'm happy to recommend this for Saturday movie night. It's got balls; bowling balls, that is, and it's a *strike!*