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Wednesday, 23 May 2012

## Bong of the Dead

Certificate: 18

Running time: 91 mins

Director: Thomas Newman

Starring: Mark Wynn, Jy Harris, Simone Bailly

Genre: Horror

Country: Canada



The world has tipped beyond breaking point, when farmer Victor Hoagan (Vince Laxton) becomes patient zero to a living entity inside a meteor at the bottom of his garden which turns him into a zombie. Six months later and the world is now over populated by groaning flesh eaters. Professional stoner and horticulturalist Edwin (Wynn) has stumbled upon the realisation that zombie meat makes for potent fertiliser for his

green buds. Teaming up with fellow stoner and friend Tommy (Harris) the pair head out from the safety of the militarily cleansed "Freedom Town" in order to find zombies to help grow some truly excellent weed.

In recent years there's been a seemingly conscious and continuous effort to reinvent the zombie horror. We've had the Western (*Cowboys & Zombies*), the Adult (*Big Tit Zombies*) and the current affairs (*Ozombie* – the Osama Bin Laden zombie film) and in *Bong of the Dead* we have the Cheech and Chong meets Fulci aspiring offering from Thomas Newman (who was most famously the model maker for *Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer*). Can the film live up to the downtrodden groan fests which inspire it? No is the short answer.

The initial phase of giddy endearment during Wynn and Harris' first scene together gives the film a degree of promise which surpasses the constructional shortcomings. The narrative is rather silly, the effects wanting but the enthusiasm of the duo, in particularly Wynn who seems to wear the stoner long hair and handle bar moustache like he was born with it carry you along a wave of excitement that eventually dips, dives and drops when they leave for the Danger Zone (which is when it should be ramping up). The film's aesthetic is plain and extremely uncomplicated, the use of colour, lighting and sound all straddle the superficial



### My bit



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which is disappointing as one of the ways a good Independent film can make itself feel bigger than what the budget allows is with a rich visual palette.



Narrative silliness is part and parcel of the horror genre, it demands a suspension of disbelief that fans are all too willing to provide but *Bong of the Dead's* initially silliness becomes frustratingly unfocused, random and incoherent. Barry Nerling's (*True Justice, Alcatraz*) presence in the film is, unfortunately, the messenger of the doom for the films storyline. His character (Alex – leader of the zombies) somehow still has the motor

functions to be able to speak, is (for some unknown reason) a Nazi – this is in no way relevant to the narrative, and is little more than a central antagonist who's screen time is so mismanaged that he's ineffective.

Director Newman, thanks to detailed lessons from Andrew Kramer, learnt how to create his own effects. It's an incredible dedication and something that will, no doubt, hold him in good stead in later projects but it might have been beneficial to the film if they had hired someone with experience in the skilled art as the effects are wanting and ultimately show too much.


Wynn (as mentioned before) is strong casting, he has a screen presence and a performance style that relaxes you into his character and is wonderfully believable. Wynn's career to date sports small roles on shows like *Supernatural* and *Fringe* and is surely only a matter of time before he makes the leap to that of a sizable lead. Harris is a good piece of casting and a solid performer but sharing the majority of his scenes with Wynn leaves him fighting just to keep up. The radiating star of the show is Simone Bailly. I have never encountered her before but based on what she was able to accomplish with what she was given she is a bona fide star... without question. Her look, screen presence and delivery are all perfect. The monologue she gives about the day the meteors hit was of a quality that far surpasses anything I've seen in the indie zombie scene recently and reminiscent of a young Linda Hamilton. Not only does she have the acting chops but the action physicality and comedic timing are also there which is evident for all to see, especially in her scenes with Harris.




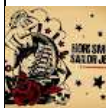
Bailly's talents are, unfortunately, not enough to save the film let alone the world as the film descends into a lost daze of set pieces that without direction leave you uninvolved in the action. By the time the final scene arrives you're simply waiting for the credits only for it to come back with one last scene that promises a sequel that few will want and the film hasn't earned.




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