

BONG OF THE DEAD

Aged gardener Victor (Vince Laxton) is busy tending to his latest gnomes when a meteor falls on his lawn. He approaches the glowing rock and touches it gently with his gnome's hat, inadvertently breaking it open and inhaling the toxic fumes contained inside.

Six hours later, strange things have started happening to Victor ... so strange, that this vignette culminates with he and his wife chomping on each other's intestines ...

Fast-forward to six months later, and whatever infection Victor got from that meteorite has spread. Not that stoners Edwin (Mark Wynn) and Tommy (Jy Harris) are that concerned: they're too busy growing dope and getting off their tits through their bong. Cue some broad, crudely sub-Bill and Ted performances.



Their pot plants aren't growing as they should (though I'm surprised they noticed, in-between getting high and farting a lot). However, when they procure a jar of green slime taken from a zombie, they pour it onto one of their plants and it instantly grows by three feet. Indeed, the boys have discovered the perfect recipe for cultivating "killer weed".

They celebrate by getting pissed in their underpants while some lousy metal song muddies the soundtrack.

Fast-forward again, another 21 months, and the boys have smoked all of their pot without even realising it. Sensing a crisis even in their stoned state, they realise they need to take to drastic measures in order to replenish their dope supply.

And so, the map comes out and a zombie hunt is planned. Badly ...

No, this isn't the latest ill-advised Undead film from George A Romero. It is, believe it or not, something far more disturbing. A film whose tagline is "There will be Bud!". I mean, how do films like this get made when there are loads of talented filmmakers with great ideas going on, but they can't get financing for their movie?

Okay, I have to tip my hat actually to writer-director Thomas Newman for proving his nay-sayers wrong and making a zombie film on virtually nothing, shooting on one camera (apparently 350 shots were utilised) and editing it all together on his Apple Mac. That the film looks pretty good, amazing at times – as in the opening meteor shower – is a huge achievement on the clearly talented Mr Newman's part.

Performances are uneven, as you'd expect from a no-budget zombie flick, but the camerawork and editing are as stylish and inventive as the righteously gory FX work. Fans of films such as Peter Jackson's BRAINDEAD may well have found a worthy successor in the outrageous splatter stakes here. You just have to hang around for a while before the really gooey stuff occurs.

But the constant desire to impress aesthetically does hamper any chance of compelling storytelling. Instead of getting into the characters and plot, we're constantly pulled out of what's happening by an overt focus on visual gimmickry, stylised photography and 'clever' tricks such

as stop-motion animation. Newman is talented – did I mention that? He certainly won't let us forget it.

The shame of this last fact is that his film has been conceived as a comedy horror. It simply doesn't work as such, because (a) the humour is painfully juvenile, and (b) there's a paradoxical smugness to each edit, each composition, that doesn't allow for punch-lines to register as they should.

At 99 minutes long (20 minutes TOO long), BONG OF THE DEAD ultimately becomes an undeniably stylish and imaginative exercise, but one that is almost fatally flawed by its own over-reaching ambitions and lack of restraint.

Still, the gore will knock your socks off, if you like it red, runny and laced with black humour.

BONG OF THE DEAD comes to UK DVD courtesy of Left Films. It's presented fully uncut and looks very good in a 16x9 widescreen presentation which preserves the original aspect ratio. Colours are strong but a tad unnatural looking in lighter scenes due to the lo-fi origins of the film's genesis. However, images are sharp and textures are nicely clear throughout.

English 2.0 audio is, as you'd expect, well-balanced and impressively clean.

An animated main menu page leads into an extremely colourful, animated scene-selection menu allowing access to the film via 11 chapters.

Extras kick off with a hyper 3-minute montage of behind-the-scenes footage hosted by Thomas Newman. It's an amiable, fast-paced featurette.

Newman returns for a 4-minute chat through the film's visual effects.

The disc is defaulted to open with trailers for MONSTRO!, BLOOD CAR, COWBOYS AND ZOMBIES, DEVIL'S CROSSING, STAG NIGHT OF THE DEAD, ALIEN UNDEAD and THE BOOK OF ZOMBIE – all of which set the tone perfectly for the main feature. You can also access these trailers individually via a sub-menu on the disc.

Are you a fourteen year old virgin male with an under-developed sense of humour and a penchant for sub-Troma gags set to bad rock music? If so, you're going to adore BONG OF THE DEAD.

Everyone else may well be tempted to give the film a wide berth. If you have even a modicum of humour about you though, I'd suggest at least giving it a go. It's very well-conceived, on a technical level at least, and the gore is abundant once it arrives.

Review by Stuart Willis

Released by Left Films

Region 2 - PAL

Rated 18

Extras :

see main review

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