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Film Review: Bath Salt Zombies (2013)

Posted on [03/08/2013](#) by [Daniel King](#) [Leave a Comment or Post Review](#)

SYNOPSIS:

A new illegal drug – manufactured from stolen weapons-grade chemicals – turns addicts into mindless flesh-eaters.

REVIEW:

This ultra-low budget effort from one-man film industry Dustin Wayne Mills (who not only writes, directs and acts but shoots and edits too) sticks pretty close to the bargain basement holy trinity of sex, violence and loud music. However, it does boast a better than average script and some incredibly imaginative solutions to get around the vexed question of how to create good special effects with no money.

The movie starts off with a short animated sequence to introduce the concept of 'bath salts': a potent new street drug which offers an unsurpassed high. Unfortunately it suffers from the twin drawbacks of a) being incredibly addictive, and b) temporarily turning the user into a blood-crazed, super-strong killing machine with a taste for human flesh. The animation is rudimentary enough to make South Park look like FANTASIA but it is nevertheless in keeping with the refreshing punk ethos that drives the movie.



Following the animated sequence, scrolling titles tell us that abuse of bath salts has reached epidemic levels in parts of the US leading to a severe clampdown by the government. However, an enterprising chemist (played by director Mills) has perfected a new strain of the drug and is looking to corner the market. Ritchie (Brandon Salkil) a habitual drug user goes to meet his dealer Bubbles (Ethan Holey) who offers him a free sample of this new strain in cigarette form. Almost as soon as he has sparked up, Ritchie is experiencing agonising-looking facial contortions and an apparent total loss of mental and physical control. He viciously sets upon drug buddy Mona (Bella Demente), ripping off her face and eating it.

Waking up in his bathtub covered in blood and with no memory of what happened Ritchie immediately feels the need for another hit of bath salts and goes to see Bubbles, who is amazed at the speed of addiction to the new strain. However, shortly after scoring, Ritchie is collared by a zealous DEA operative, Agent Forster (Josh Eal) who confiscates his drugs and promises a world of pain if the lab results show up anything illegal. Suffering withdrawal symptoms and craving another hit, Ritchie persuades Bubbles to give him some drugs on credit; he hooks up with two friends Rita and The Chet (Jackie McKown and Dave Parker) to get high before the three of them go to a punk club for the evening. While they're there, the bath salts take effect and all hell breaks loose.



It would be easy to pick apart the film's shortcomings and point out where it pales in comparison to bigger budget efforts but that, for me, would be to miss the point. Yes it's rough around the edges, crude and frankly pretty ugly to look at but what it does have – in spades – is energy, a dark sense of humour and a total commitment to getting the film made by any means necessary. This is what I mean by the punk ethos I referred

to earlier – a spirit of DIY enthusiasm and a cheerful disregard for a lot of the normal conventions of film-making. A good example, perhaps the best example, of that style of film-maker is British director Alex Cox, whose 1984 cult hit REPO MAN is the definitive punk movie, but even someone like Orson Welles, especially in his later cash-strapped years, had a make-do-and-mend film-making style.



Now, I'm not saying Dustin Wayne Mills is in the Orson Welles class, or even the Alex Cox class, but he undoubtedly has talent. The script, co-written by Mills and Clint Weiler, is wittier and more literate than most semi-pro films, and a lot of the effects shots are inventive and imaginative, even if they do look cheap and home-made. Mills has also coaxed some decent performances from his cast, particularly Brandon Salkil whose ability to contort his face into all manner of hideous expressions must have saved a good few dollars off the effects budget.

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