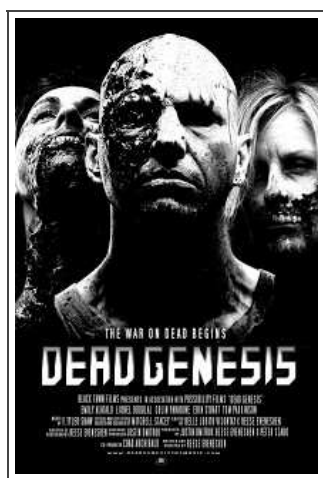


MAR 10, 2013

REVIEW: DEAD GENESIS



An alcoholic cop with emotional baggage. Hooker with a heart of gold.

Low budget zombie movie.

After a while, a concept eventually becomes cliché, regardless of quality. If any one trope gets beaten into the ground enough times, it's very hard to care about a "fresh take." Filmmakers will try, claiming they have brought something new to the table, but at the end of the day, it's all same-old, same-old.

This is both Dead Genesis' failure and success (and unfortunately more of the former than the latter).

Dead Genesis opens mighty fine and goes immediately for the throat. There is no calm before the storm as there usually are in zombie film first acts. We hit the ground running as a man is forced to dispatch his zombie wife...as well as the son she had just gotten done eating and turning. Following this is a somber voice-over catching up the audience on the zombie pandemic and what it's done to the world.

It's sad in that it's all down hill from here - for both our characters and the audience.



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A very young journalist named Jillian Hurst is assigned to assemble a documentary on the pandemic and ordered to give it a pro-war tone. She hooks up with a militia group called the Deadheads who, through various means, have joined up with each other in an effort to contain the growing threat. They hail from different races and religions, so, you know, conflict. There's also a mix of both men and women, none of them unattractive, so, you know, more conflict.

Large portions of the film have our characters musing on their current predicaments and to what has led them to join the Deadheads. Zombie action feels constant, but is actually only used sparingly. What *Dead Genesis* really is about is the effect on society, psyches, and moralities.

Twenty years ago, *Dead Genesis* would not have felt generic. And I really hate to beat a dead horse, but George Romero has done all this already - a look at a post-zombie society, parables to real-life international conflicts, the roles of women in such conflicts. We've seen this all time and time and again. And what Romero hasn't done, other filmmakers have - even the outright outlandish. For instance, 2008's *Deadgirl* has two teen boys discovering a naked zombie girl shackled to a table in an abandoned building. She then becomes a sex slave to one of the boys and some of his friends. It is grimy and wrong and forces us to question at what point a person completely loses their humanity. *Dead Genesis* tries this, too, only it weaves into the concept a mini-twist so out of left-field that it feels cheap and sensational.



Dead Genesis is an obvious response to the war in Iraq. This is never more obvious than when all the characters argue back and forth if the "war on dead" (what they call it) is right, wrong, or beyond either label and is strictly necessary. It's one cliché wrapped in another, and it causes the viewer to respond not with "how true!" but "who cares about all this?" We didn't need a low-budget zombie film to make us wonder if the war in Iraq was wrong. It's not a matter of opinion, here - just fact: yes, it was fucking wrong. Not to mention that when *Dead Genesis* goes out of its way to show soldiers acting obnoxiously and having a grand old time delivering non-lethal gunshots to zombies to make them "dance," the filmmakers aren't trying to be coy and subtle about their own opinions on the matter.

Most of the character interaction feels awkward - not because it's supposed to be, but because none of the actors feel comfortable with their roles. Lead Emily Alatalo as Jillian is adorable, but not up to the task. She's also way too young to be believable. The film attempts to head this off at the pass by having a character tell her, "You're a journalist? You look like a teenager," to which she responds, "I get that a lot." Sorry, that's just not enough.

As for her performance, she occasionally manages to show signs of life, especially

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after her discovery of the fuck zombie chained up in the basement, but the rest of the time there is no real conviction on her part. And I won't single out just her - none of the cast seems up to the task. At times it seems more effort was spent on camera work than shaping the actors' performances, and that's a real shame, as there is a concerted effort on the part of the script to make this a post-zombie character study.

While the tone is mostly consistently bleak and straight, moments of intended levity, in the form of an eccentric bartender, or a fake television interview with the frumpy head of a zombie rights activist group, are jarring and completely uncalled for. They feel foreign in a film that otherwise takes itself seriously, and a bit involving a Youtube video response to the zombie rights movement called "Fuck Pro-Zomb," in which a man pisses on a zombie girl only to have his dick bitten off, feels very cheap and something more appropriate for a Troma production. It feels as if this were something shot independently for another purpose and utilized here for nothing other than to pad out the running time.



On the pro side, while the handheld shooting style can sometimes go overboard, the film looks great. From a production standpoint, Dead Genesis looks to have five times the budget it likely did. My own personal prejudice against low budget film-making forces me to focus first on the actual look. Once something looks cheap - shot on cheap cameras and utilizing cheap sound - part of me can't help but tune out. But Dead Genesis never looks like that. In all honesty, though it has far less scope, it looks quite similar to 28 Days Later.

The make-up effects are especially good and grisly where necessary. It doesn't push the boundaries as far as gore gags or good taste are concerned, but it's more than competent and at times even especially well done.

Low budget zombie films don't have to be terrible. Last year's Exit Humanity (a film I would make love to should it ever become human) and The Dead - both which explore the same themes of humanity - prove you can still do it well with good intentions and without pretension. I'm not sure Dead Genesis can say the same.

Although it's still better than all the Resident Evil sequels.

Posted by TEOS at 12:00 AM



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