

NEXT TIME I'LL AIM FOR THE HEART (2014) 88/1/2

D: Cedric Anger. Guillaume Canet, Ana Girardot, Jean-Yves Beteloot, Patrick Azam, Arnaud Henriot, Douglas Attal. 111 mins. (Icarus Films) 8/18

Based on a true story liberally reimagined by auteur Anger, *Next Time I'll Aim for the Heart* recounts the rather robotic sociopathic exploits of Franck Neuhart, gendarme by day, random serial killer by night, who plagued France in 1978-79 (to underscore the time frame, the soundtrack includes contemporaneous tracks by American rockers Johnny Thunders and the Velvet Underground). Stationed in a small French city, Franck suffers from acute Bickleitis: like Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* antihero Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) Franck leads a distanced existence, with little apparent affection for or ties with his fellow law officers, neighbors, or even Sophie (Girardot), his sort-of squeeze whom he sets up for an ultimate humiliation. Nor is Franck a particularly inventive psycho, contenting himself with giving rides to unwary femmes, then dispatching them with bullets and dumping their bodies in the woods. While *Next Time* is uniformly well acted, especially by lead Canet, its disaffected tone and languid pace exert a similarly distancing effect on viewers. Nearly identical material received more involving treatment in Jaime Rosales' 2003 Spanish thriller *The Hours of the Day* (VS

#50), featuring a strong central performance by Alex Brendamuhl as an alienated clothes store worker who likewise surrenders to murderous impulses. One interesting side note is the apparently extreme hostility festering between France's gendarmes and regular police, at least as depicted here, with the two organizations seemingly loathe to cooperate with each other. *Next Time* is worth a look for serial killer completists but doesn't represent one of that long-thriving subgenre's more compelling achievements.

—*The Phantom*

NIGHT ZERO (2017) 88/8

D: Mark Cantu. Katie Maloney, Eric Swader, Dawnelle Jewell, Vincent Bombara, Umar Faraz. 81 mins. (MVD Visual) 5/18

In 1967, western Pennsylvania contributed to indie/horror history when cult director George A. Romero shot *Night of the Living Dead* there. Fifty years later, writer/director Cantu turns Waynesburg, a picturesque small town near Pittsburgh, into the setting of a tale that meshes Romero's dark visions with the sensibility of

thirtysomething. In this story, foundering couple Nina (Maloney) and C.J. (Swader) bring their negative energy to their friends' dinner party. The celebration is interrupted by an extraterrestrial invasion and a zombified population, an emergency that puts the "kill" in "buzzkill." The script works because it shows people coping with ordinary problems being forced to confront nightmares that haunt genre-film characters. Maloney and Swader effectively ground the sci-fi/horror scenario by teaming up to reproduce the all-too-familiar dynamics of the dysfunctional relationship. Waynesburg's suburban locations further enhance credibility. Actors and settings interact in a manner that enables the viewer to understand Cantu's doomed portrait of postmodern America.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

A QUIET PLACE (2018) 88/8/1/2

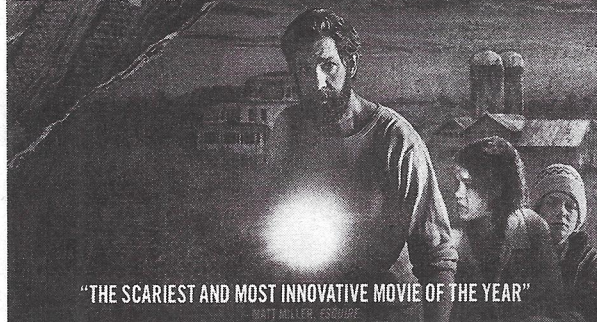
D: John Krasinski. Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, Millicent Simmonds, Noah Jupe, Cade Woodward, Leon Russom. 90 mins. (Universal Studios) 7/18

Sort of a *Night of the Living Ssshh*, director/co-scripter/costar Krasinski's ingenious chiller pits a post-apoc family unit against vicious blind aliens that negotiate via their acute hearing: Make the slightest sound and you die. Krasinski and his excellent ensem-

BLU-RAY + DVD + DIGITAL

EMILY BLUNT JOHN KRASINSKI

A QUIET PLACE



ble cast transform what seems like a bite-size anthology episode premise into a nerve-shredding feature-length experience as Lee Abbott (Krasinski), wife Evelyn (Blunt) and their three children hide in a large farmhouse (shades of *Night of the Living Dead*!) seeking to elude the visually challenged but sonically sharp predators. Classic sequences abound, highlighted by an excruciating passage that finds an injured Evelyn attempt to give silent birth while a visible monster salivates nearby. While *A Quiet Place* also contains echoes of *War of the Worlds* and the *Alien* franchise (with a likely unintended last-reel nod to *Invisible Invaders*), the film arrives as a refreshingly original piece. Especially impressive is young Simmonds as the Abbotts' deaf daughter Regan, whose condition at once prepared them to survive in this terrifying new world and inadvertently causes the early death of a sibling. Like Jordan Peele's brilliant *Get Out* (VS #103), the modestly budgeted pic proved a surprise smash hit at the box office, standing out as a bracing exception to the usual run-of-the-plex Hollywood pap. Extras on Universal's double-disc Blu-ray/DVD/Digital edition include *Creating the Quiet*, a Krasinski-hosted behind-the-scenes look at the film's production; *The Sound of Darkness*, dealing with the sound design; and *A Reason for Silence*, about the visual effects. 8

—*The Phantom*

