

FILM REVIEW

by Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone
and Noel Tanti



WYRMWOOD

Year of release: 2014

Director: Kiah Roache-Turner

Gore Rating: ●●●●●

KRISTA: I am tired of coming across things I like and forced to feel excluded. This film is so obviously 'for the boys'. All-male group and female victim waiting to be rescued. All 'pop culture' symptoms are there—the 'woman in refrigerator', the 'smurfette', the 'damsel in distress'. She does rescue herself in the end, but that's two-thirds into the film and too late to participate in the 'fun bits'. I'd have preferred to feel included in the intended audience for armoured vehicles and zombie petrol!

NOEL: At first I thought that Brooke (Bianca Bradley) would have a more prominent role. The photoshoot scene was promising, she sported the resourcefulness of Alice from the *Resident Evil* film franchise. But then it all went downhill. During the lab scenes she was totally upstaged by The Doctor (Berryn Schwerdt). She had a comeback of sorts towards the end but it was simply too little too late.

K: 'Purer' torture porn that has women as vulnerable victims, but focuses throughout on their struggle for survival, is perhaps less sexist than something that relegates women to the periphery.

N: The parodic nod towards torture porn is one of the things I liked most about *Wyrwood*. The Doctor is a great character, a cross between Mr Blonde, Walter White and Dr Heiter. It also exposes what's wrong with bad torture porn. The lab scenes are rather disturbing without being too graphic whereas usually it works the other way round.

K: Agreed. I also liked the 'magic zombie' touch. Brooke's unexplained powers nod towards magic 'necromantic control over the undead', something we don't often see in zombie films. I also liked the little visual nods to Romero, the unflagging pace (which it sustains throughout), the humour, the violence, and the action. What distinguished it was the pace. We were thrown into the thick of it, so to speak, and it didn't let up. No pause in the relentless action.

N: Is there a zombie film that doesn't reference Romero? I liked *Wyrwood* for the same reasons as you however I found it too earnest in trying to be a cult movie. The handheld camera, the fast zooming in on close-ups, the

breakneck editing, the 'iconic' shots. It's obviously trying to ride on the crest of *Mad Max* by setting the story in a post-apocalyptic landscape with lots of vehicles and scarce fuel. It bothered me.

K: I liked the heightened artificiality of the blue-red colour (well, blue and blood) scheme inside the 'mad scientist' truck. That too was a case of style within a low-budget framework. It contrasted with the grit-and-grime greyness of the outdoor sequences.

N: Nobody takes zombies seriously anymore so trying to build a sense of dread is too trite. Even metaphorically, zombie films are at a dead end at the moment. So *Wyrwood* is the antithesis of a film that has something to say. It just plays it for laughs. However this doesn't mean that the film is 'silent'. For instance, I found its politics a bit dubious. We already mentioned the 'boys only' stance. What about the only indigenous person being the foolish sidekick who sacrifices himself for the greater good of the 'white man'? I didn't like that. **T**