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Denizen

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There are a lot of independent films out there that try really hard to go for a polished Hollywood look and feel at the expense of their story. J.A. Steel's indie endeavor "Denizen" eschews a lot of production value in favor of an engaging story about a violent creature terrorizing a small town. It's one part "Swamp Thing" and one part "Tremors" with a dash of "Evil Dead" thrown in for flavor. J.A. Steel certainly shows promise as a filmmaker, commanding a sizable cast and crew for an indie film. There is a lot to say about this film, so let's start with the reasons why you should pick this flick up if you have the chance.

The characters are engaging fresh faces, many of whom are relatively new to the industry. It's obvious they enjoy the parts they're playing and throw themselves into their roles, despite the sometimes campy dialogue. Some of them feel like they'd be more at home on the stage versus in front of a camera lens, but that comes with experience and it's hard to judge their true range of skills based upon seeing them in this one movie. The leads perform admirably and the supporting characters help to fill in the world that Steel has created.

The fairly wide variety of locations used in the movie also add that sense of realism to the story that is generally left out in some films. The use of multiple locations adds a lot of free production value to an otherwise obviously low budget film. Other things in this film that should be given kudos are the action scenes, underwater filmed scenes, and even an unexpected aerial skydiving scene. J.A. Steel definitely knew how to take advantage of her limited budget on this shoot, and it certainly all ends up on the screen.

The few issues I do have come from what I know had everything to do with a lack of budget for a movie of this scope. The soundtrack, sound effects and dialogue are uneven and feel layered on rather than fully integrated into the movie. The added use of sound effects in post production are mostly too loud and sometimes drown out dialogue a little, or feel out of place. I know that it was done mostly to fill in the scene and make the picture seem more rich and inviting, but sometimes it's best to just lay off the extras. Another gripe is in regards to editing, which seems choppy at times. The story still comes through, which is really the main goal here, but it loses fluidity during some dialogue exchanges. It also shows off the differences in how some of these scenes were shot. I don't know how many cameras were used on this set, but you can tell the differences in how

some of this footage was shot and edited, as some cutaways just look completely different from the shots before it.

All in all I can appreciate what Steel was trying to accomplish with "Denizen". I think that the overall broadness of a story like this is very hard to contain within a small-ish budget with an inexperienced cast and crew. With J.A.'s background as a martial artist you can definitely tell she shouldered a lot of the action scene burdens, as well as being in front of the camera for her role in the movie. When a director has to work in so many capacities, often the production suffers a little. At the end, "Denizen" is a fun monster movie, despite any flaws that are inherent to it's production. I look forward to what the folks at Warrior Entertainment bring out next.



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