



What, another vampire movie??? Despite the success of the *'Twilight'* franchise, Ye Editor's favourite undead movie series (unless I misunderstood his *'It's Only A Movie'* column last month) which, along with the anaemic *'Vampire Diaries'*

TV series has effectively turned vampires into brooding, moody, ironically toothless pin-up figures instead of the blood-crazed fiends of popular legend, it seems that there are some out there still working to give vampires back their fangs and to make them actually a bit nasty again.

'Stake Land'

, directed by Jim Mickle, previously best-known for straight-to-DVD cult classic

'Zombie Virus On Mulberry Street'

, isn't, as I'd first thought, an in-depth documentary about the *'Beefeater'* restaurant chain (Stake Land!! Geddit?? Oh, please yourselves...) but rather a bleak, gritty and savage post-apocalypse tale set in an America which has seen its population overrun by a vampire pandemic. The few human survivors who have escaped infection have to contend not only with feral blood-suckers but also the Brotherhood, a

rabid band of religious fundamentalists who believe the vampire plague has been visited upon the human race by a vengeful God.

'*Stake Land*' will remind you of any number of recent similarly-themed movies. The partnership of the grizzled Mister and teenager Martin recalls '*Zombieland*' but with rather less jokes (in fact, none) and the persistently grey, blasted look of the vampire-riddled America isn't too far removed from the desperately-desolate landscape of

'*The Road*'

with which it shares a similar sense of futility. But

'*Stake Land*'

hasn't got the budget to compete with its costlier contemporaries so it has to be a bit tighter, a bit more inventive in its storytelling. So while the film is ostensibly about vampires - and there are some memorable sequences of the vampires tracking our protagonists through crackling woods and one startlingly-good scene where the Brotherhood drop vampires from an aircraft onto a human settlement - there's a sense that the underlying themes are the loss of innocence coupled with a discreet coming of age subtext. Martin has to grow up almost overnight when he teams up with Mister; by the end of the film he's no longer a boy, he's a confident and accomplished vampire slayer. At the very beginning of the film the ultimate personification of innocence - a babe-in-arms - is cast aside like so much rubbish when it's been feasted upon by a vampire. And then there's the young pregnant girl who joins the group on their travels - perhaps her own loss of innocence and ultimately the innocent she carries, a symbol of hope for the future, is the most telling and tragic of all.

But let's not get too worked up about what's going on beneath the surface because, ultimately, '*Stake Land*'

is a vampire film and the vampires here are a million miles away from the pallid High School '*Twilight*'

undead or the more urbane (if ultimately monstrous) killers from last year's

'*Daybreakers*'

. These are ugly, snarling beasts, evolving across the film from unthinking monsters into creatures capable, worryingly for the survivors, of rational thought and motivation. By the time Jebediah, the leader of the Brotherhood, is converted in the last act the transformation is complete for here is a vampire who's out for revenge and is capable of laying traps, torturing his captives and boasting about how clever he's been.

'*Stake Land*' is a darkly impressive movie. It wears its low budget on its sleeve and one or two action scenes suffer as a consequence but Mickle has worked a minor miracle in creating a world crumbling apart and populated by haggard, careworn survivors with the sort of money

Movie Review: Stake Land

Written by Paul Mount
Thursday, 16 June 2011

Michael Bay loses down the back of the settee. Absorbing and exciting in its own right, perhaps *'Stake Land'*

s greatest achievement is that it reminds us that vampires are supposed to be ruthless and scary and dangerous and that you really don't want one sitting next to you at High School looking all goey-eyed and buying you a milk-shake.

Expected rating: 7 out of 10

Actual rating:

8 out of 10



'Stake Land' infects UK cinemas from Friday 17th June. {jcomments on}

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