



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

One Cut of the Dead

It's impossible to discuss Shin'ichirô Ueda's *One Cut of the Dead* in any meaningful way without giving away vital plot twists and this review is no different. If you haven't seen it yet, stop here and come back when you have – the bottom line is that it's one of the most inventive, funniest and unexpected zombie films you're likely to see this or any other year, a film which goes off at tangents you simply will never see coming and which becomes an affectionate tribute to the resilience and invention of the low budget filmmaker. Now, continue with caution, serious spoilers ahead...

The first 36 minutes or so appear to be a dreadful found footage film. A group of filmmakers are in an abandoned factory shooting a zombie film when the real undead turn up and start taking chunks out of the cast and crew. The performances are terrible, the camerawork worse than usual for this sort of thing and the script gives the impression that it was being made up as it goes along. And then the credits roll... As you're still scratching your head trying to work out what you've just seen, the film continues, jumping back one month to reveal exactly what it was that we've just seen. New cable TV channel the Zombie Channel plans to launch with a live zombie apocalypse special, *One Cut of the Dead*, all filmed in a single take. Channel executives hire Higurashi (Takayuki Hamatsu), a director of adverts and industrial films who is, in his own words, 'fast, cheap, but average'. A series of disasters befalls the production from the very start and the final third of the film repeats the opening night film again but this time seen from the viewpoint of the small crew who battle all manners of adversities – including alcoholic stars, actors with irritable bowel syndrome, a leading lady who gets a bit too into her role for comfort and all manner of technical glitches – to keep the show on the rails.

It was an extraordinarily brave move to make the first 36 minutes of your film so deliberately terrible as it could so easily put people off. There are no clues in the opening act as to what's really going on and one can't help but wonder how many people, unaware of the joke being played on them, simply gave up before the big reveal arrived. As the final act progresses, all those deadly dull dialogue exchanges, weird non-sequiturs and dodgy technical mishaps make often hilarious sense. Even the seemingly saggy mid-section suddenly becomes retrospectively laugh-out-loud funny as the terrible first run-through of the script – interrupted by a squawking baby and diva J-pop star Ko (Kazuaki Nagaya) obsessing over whether a zombie could use an axe or not – hints at the even greater catastrophes to come.

The cast is largely made up of unknowns – former real life J-pop singer Yuzuki Akiyama is great fun as the young female lead and Hamatsu is hilarious as the much put-upon director who has to step in to play the fictional director in his film when the original actor suffers a car crash. But the show is comprehensively stolen by Harumi Shuhama as the director's wife and make-up artist Nao. A former actor, Nao had to give it up as she had a tendency to get far too involved in her parts – until she finds herself drafted in at the eleventh hour to replace the actress who was also in that car crash. Inevitably she takes method acting to ludicrous extremes and gets completely carried

away, starting to lay waste to her fellow cast members using the self-defence techniques she's been studying as a hobby (complete with war cry of 'pom!'). Eventually Nao has to be physically restrained by her husband, production assistant daughter Mao (Mao) and other crew members. The director, with his loud, desperate and often inappropriate cries of 'action!', gets somewhat lost in his role too, his pent-up aggression towards his cast and crew spilling over such that we can't always tell whether he's acting or just losing it. It's the funniest and perhaps truest – if rather exaggerated – take on the trials and tribulations of low-budget filmmaking you're ever likely to see.

Elsewhere, drunken cast members have to be operated like a puppet by the off screen director, the script needs to be rewritten on the fly when IBS strikes at an inopportune moment and a human pyramid has to be hastily arranged when a vital camera crane is dropped off a rooftop. The whole production is an absolute riot and a testament to the seemingly bottomless pit of quick-thinking ingenuity and inventiveness that's the hallmark of a good low budget crew. Clueless station executives take an eternity to realise that things are falling apart and it's up to the inexperienced but creative Mao to save the day. The ending, with the cast and crew – a likeably daffy bunch – coming together to save that all-important final overhead shot is really rather lovely. You'll be cheering the team on as the credits roll again, as delighted at their success as they are exhausted and traumatised by it. And just when you think Ueda can't wring anything else from the film, as the actual end credits roll (it all gets very confusing at this point...) we see real behind the scenes footage of the filming of the actual film *One Cut of the Dead* revealing the truth behind a found footage film about a found footage film – you following all that?

Endlessly inventive and funny, *One Cut of the Dead* was made for peanuts (allegedly ¥3 million, around \$25,000) as an offshoot of an actors and filmmakers workshop that Ueda took part in at the Enbu Seminar drama school in Tokyo. It initially opened in just one cinema, an arthouse theatre in Tokyo for a six day run. But after the film came runner-up in the audience vote at the Udine Far East Festival and the reviews started rolling in, the film was given a well-deserved wider release, eventually reaching as many as 200 screens across Japan by March 2018. It was a box-office success and has continued to pick up fans as it made its journey to the west.

Pity those poor souls who gave up on the film before it switches gears and becomes something far more than the terrible zombie found footage film that it first appears to be. And we should loudly applaud Ueda for having the courage to make a film that deliberately sets out to dismay its audience only to pull the rug from under them and transform into something so genuinely funny and clever. And if you enjoyed it once, be sure to watch it again – it's a film that absolutely demands a second viewing when it suddenly, miraculously, becomes even funnier.

Kevin Lyons, The EOFTV Review, eofftvreview.wordpress.com, 11 October 2019

ONE CUT OF THE DEAD (KAMERA O TOMERU NA!)

Director: Shin'ichirô Ueda

Production Company: Enbu Seminar

Production and Planning: Panpokopina TV

Producer: Koji Ichihashi

Assistant Directors: Yuya Nakaizumi, Konosuke Yoshida

Writer: Shin'ichirô Ueda

Camera: Tsuyoshi Sone

Editor: Shin'ichirô Ueda

Make-up: Junko Hirabayashi

Special Make-up Effects: Kazuhide Shimohata

Music: Nobuhiro Suzuki, Kyle Nagai

Sound: Komoda Kokichi

Cast

Takayuki Hamatsu (*Higurashi*)

Mao (*Mao*)

Harumi Shuhama (*Nao*)

Kazuaki Nagaya (*Ko*)

Manabu Hosoi (*Manabu Hosoda*)

Hiroshi Ichihara (*Kasahara*)

Shuntaro Yamazaki (*Shunsuke Yamakoshi*)

Shinichiro Osawa (*Shinichiro Furusawa*)

Yoshiko Takehara (*Yoshiko*)

Miki Yoshida (*Miki Yoshino*)

Ayana Goda (*Ayana Kurihara*)

Sakina Asamori (*Saki Matsuura*)

Yuzuki Akiyama (*Chinatsu*)

Japan 2017

96 mins

IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

The Uninvited

Thu 1 Dec 18:05; Sat 17 Dec 14:30 (+ intro by broadcaster and writer, Louise Blain)

Kwaidan (Kaidan)

Thu 1 Dec 20:00; Tue 13 Dec 17:40

Night of the Eagle

Fri 2 Dec 21:00; Sat 10 Dec 12:10

Daughters of Darkness (Les lèvres rouges)

Sat 3 Dec 20:45; Tue 13 Dec 21:00

Transness in Horror

Tue 6 Dec 18:20

Let the Right One In (Låt den rätte komma in)

Tue 6 Dec 20:45; Thu 22 Dec 18:15

Philosophical Screens: The Lure

Wed 7 Dec 20:10 Blue Room

The Lure (Córki dancing)

Wed 7 Dec 18:15; Thu 22 Dec 20:45 (+ intro by

Dr Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies at King's College London)

Cat People

Wed 7 Dec 20:50; Mon 19 Dec (+ intro by Clarisse Loughrey, chief film critic for The Independent)

Black Sunday (La maschera del demonio)

Fri 9 Dec 21:00; Sun 18 Dec 18:30

Ring (Ringu)

Sat 10 Dec 20:40; Tue 13 Dec 21:05;

Tue 20 Dec 21:00

Atlantics (Atlantique) + Atlantiques

Sun 11 Dec 14:50; Tue 27 Dec 18:20

Sugar Hill

Sun 11 Dec 18:00; Sat 17 Dec 20:40

Häxan

Mon 12 Dec 18:10 (+ live score by The Begotten); Sat 17 Dec 11:45 (with live piano accompaniment)

Sweetheart

Mon 12 Dec 21:00; Tue 27 Dec 12:40

Arrebato

Wed 14 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by writer and broadcaster Anna Bogutskaya);

Fri 23 Dec 18:05

The Final Girls LIVE

Thu 15 Dec 20:30

One Cut of the Dead (Kamera o tomeru na!)

Fri 16 Dec 18:15; Fri 30 Dec 20:45

The Fog

Fri 16 Dec 21:00; Wed 28 Dec 18:10

Being Human + Q&A with Toby Whithouse and guests (tbc)

Sat 17 Dec 18:00

Day of the Dead

Mon 19 Dec 20:40; Thu 29 Dec 18:20

Society

Tue 20 Dec 18:15; Wed 28 Dec 20:50

Interview with the Vampire

Wed 21 Dec 18:10; Thu 29 Dec 20:40

Ginger Snaps

Wed 21 Dec 20:50; Tue 27 Dec 15:10

A Dark Song

Fri 23 Dec 20:45; Fri 30 Dec 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Screen Horrors –

Screen Monsters

Thu 20 Oct – Thu 15 Dec 18:30–20:30 Studio

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