

[BHFF 19 Review] ‘The Shed’ is a Creative Morality Tale of Bullying, Rage, and Vampires - Bloody Disgusting

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***The Shed* delivers an innovative spin on the standard monster narrative by treating the creature like an extension of its characters' aggression.**

"It's not murder, it's payback."

We live in a very frightening time in society. Most of the more effective horror films hold a mirror up to the world and use the terrifying genre as a conduit for social commentary. ***The Shedd*** does this in a highly creative way that's extremely prescient for the times. *The Shed* looks at a bullied kid who comes upon a monster and then decides to use said monster to eliminate his bullies. This isn't exactly an original idea and it's frankly

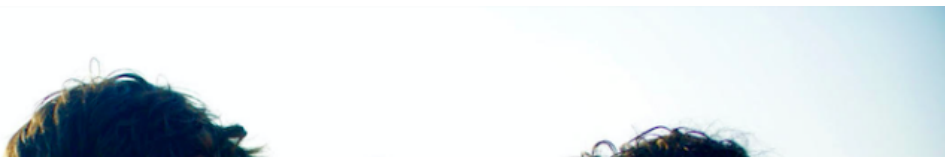
something that's been explored in more adolescent-based horror content like *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* or *Goosebumps*. Even *Little Shop of Horrors* centers around this idea. It's a fun fantasy scenario.

What makes *The Shed* so different than these other stories is that it treats its monster like it's a gun. The only thing more dangerous than a monster is a monster in the wrong set of hands. Dreaded incels and mass shootings are at an all-time high and while *The Shed's* protagonists aren't exactly jaded incels, but they still approach their killing device in the same retaliatory way. These other texts often portray the monster as the one that wants to be fed or inflict mayhem. Here it's just a tool of power that's used for vindictive purposes. *The Shed* is a fascinating, prescient morality play gone wrong and a brilliant spin on the standard vampire narrative.

Arguably the most interesting things about *The Shed* are its main characters, Stan (**Jay Jay Warren**) and Dominic (**Cody Kastro**). They make a lot of misguided decisions, but the film properly builds sympathy for them before everything goes downhill. Dominic, or "Dommer," is the worse influence of the two, but both exhibit problematic behavior behind their "good deeds." Dommer's the subject of constant ridicule and the few support systems that Stan does have—his grandfather and his crush, Roxy—suddenly exit his life. Even before Stan's grandfather leaves the picture he's incredibly abusive towards him and just as insufferable as any bully at school. Stan and Dommer find themselves more alone than ever before. The discovery of a bloodthirsty monster is initially frightening, but once it's contained in a toolshed, it turns into more of a moral quandary than a creature of horror. Accordingly, a tight friendship turns into a fraught and strained one as Stan and Dommer argue what to do with their monster and whether it's the perfect solution to their bullying problem.

There's an affable friendship between these delinquents, but in spite of any sympathy generated over them, they're still ostensibly bad people. They fill up their spare time vandalizing the neighborhood and tearing down the community with petty threats and weaponized sexuality. This ungrateful attitude is intentional since it makes their use of their vampire weapon all the darker, but in doing so *The Shed* faces an interesting problem. It wants its main characters to be deplorable incels, but that makes it very hard to root for Stan and Dommer. Their tortured situations inherently build sympathy for them, but at times it's not enough. There are a lot of moments where you wish the vampire would just take out Stan and Dommer instead of the people that victimize them.

The Shed also features the exchange, "Eat shit and die," "Eat shit and live," which is straight-up dialogue from out of *Sleepaway Camp*. It does, however, give a good idea of just how juvenile these high school students are and gives Stan and Dommer a baseline. As the film goes on, Stan and Dommer both become more aggressive in their behavior. This culminates in a very difficult to watch scene where Dommer does actually use a gun as a source of intimidation, but it's merely the prelude to a more serious form of pain. *The Shed* doesn't reduce the fear behind firearms, but it does tease a more twisted fate.





The first half of *The Shed* is slower in nature and deals with Stan and Dommer's understanding of the creature they've acquired. It's the second half of the film that moves into the realm of calculated revenge. It's a structure that works, even if the revenge portion could start a little earlier. The final act veers into more conventional action material, albeit a surprising shift, yet it still retains the film's original message.

When it comes to the actual monster, *The Shed* adopts a "less is more" approach here. However, what they do show is highly effective and really stands out. *The Shed* bills this monster as a ferocious, deadly take on the vampire and that's exactly what it looks like. The severity of this creature doesn't get undercut by budgetary restrictions. *The Shed* is a film that is more interested in the monsters that humans can become and the emotional and mental demons that they face, but it still understands that its actual monster needs to look good. This is a vampire beast that's a practical triumph and doesn't disappoint.

The film doesn't shy away from gore whenever there's an opportunity for it, but it also constructs some decent scares. The first act of the film does a lot with the mystery of the vampire in the toolshed and gets a lot out of that unknown factor. The vampire never stops being scary, but he does become somewhat demystified as the film goes on. *The Shed* is largely a character study, but it's satisfying to still get some actual scares in the movie in addition to the headier material. Stan also suffers from a series of nightmares that vary in their effectiveness, but still provide more visceral fears in the movie. Additionally, *The Shed* is a beautiful film to look at a lot of the time (usually the scenes that are set at night). It's full of lush cinematography and has a very voyeuristic feel to it.

The Shed is a film that has its fair share of rough patches, but the idea behind it is so good and it has such a powerful message that its weaknesses are easier to forgive. The performances and filmmaking show their greener independent nature a few times, but it's never enough to completely pull you out of the movie. *The Shed* features a grittier lo-fi quality, but it doesn't always work in its favor or seem intentional. Tonally, it almost feels like *The Shed* could be an episode from a more adult reboot of *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* that's produced for Spike TV. It skews towards that young adult demographic, but the dangerous message that it plays with is definitely more mature territory. *The Shed* is an inventive spin on the vampire genre that hints at deeper ideas than the ones that it fully explores. Writer/Director **Frank Sabatella** puts together an encouraging film that hopefully won't be the end of his career in horror.

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Daniel Kurland is a freelance writer, comedian, and critic, whose work can be read on Splitsider, Bloody Disgusting, Den of Geek, ScreenRant, and across the Internet. Daniel knows that "Psycho II" is better than the original and that the last season of "The X-Files" doesn't deserve the bile that it conjures. If you want a drink thrown in your face, talk to him about "Silent Night, Deadly Night Part II," but he'll always happily talk about the "Puppet Master" franchise. The owls are not what they seem.

