

The Shed Review: A Tale of Vampires and Bullying – /Film

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Vampires have gotten a bad rap in recent years, losing a lot of the mysticism, romanticism and sheer horror that usually come with creatures of the night. *Blood Night: The Legend of Mary Hatchet* director Frank Sabatella wants to bring vampires back to their roots with a film that is part drama about bullied teens and part sci-fi movie about a kid hiding a fantastical creature in their house a la *Mac and Me*, but instead of a Coca-Cola loving alien, it's a bloodthirsty vampire living in a shed.

The result is ***The Shed***, a dark and poignant look at bullying and how easy it is to fall into a dark path of revenge, while also being a traditional horror movie.

The Shed opens with a thrilling and tense opening scene where a man is bitten by a vampire that quickly disintegrates at the break of dawn, leaving the new member of the blood-sucking kind to find shelter in a shed near a house on the country. Then we cut to a cheesy scene that looks like it was taken from a '50s sitcom in which Stan (Jay Jay Warren) and his parents have pancakes on a bright Saturday morning and talk about Stan kissing a girl on a date. The scene is quickly revealed to be a dream – one of several throughout the film. In reality, Stan's parents passed away and he now lives alone with his abusive grandfather (Timothy Bottoms).

Warren does a good job in making us feel for Stan. There is a darkness and emptiness inside him that makes him angry at everyone, and Warren holds all that deep inside so as to avoid further trouble with the local sheriff. At least he's got it better than his best friend Dommer (Cody Kostro), who Stan regularly defends from school bullies.

Sabatella infuses the film with a dream-like feeling, which is accentuated by the constant cut to dream

sequences where Stan imagines a better life for himself before it gets ruined and ends violent and bloody. It's a nice way of putting us inside the character's head and the violent tendencies he tries to get away from, and it all goes to hell once he discovers the vampire living in his shed.

The Shed walks a fine line between real life horror and an entertaining popcorn flick, building a deeply personal story about bullying and inherited trauma. You see, when you've spent your entire life being tormented and abused by the world, would you give up the opportunity to use such a lethal supernatural force as a vampire for revenge? That's the dilemma Stan and Dommer face, and it's the entry point into Sabatella's message about the open wounds left by bullying and the real anger that can, at any point, burst out. Some may be turned off by the way *The Shed* directly confronts those issues, but the film's biggest asset is that it pulls no punches when it comes to portraying the reality of how bullying deeply disturbs those who are tormented by others.

When it comes to the actual vampire, this is one of the best-looking creatures in years. The monster is barely humanoid, with orange eyes and shark-like teeth. Sadly, though the vampire is used sparingly and as more of an allegory in the first two thirds of the film, the third act derails the movie a bit. At this point, *The Shed* becomes just another horror film, complete with a vampire hunter. Where before we got just a few glimpses of the vampire, the third act trades the slow burn of the first part of the film for what feels like a full-blown and generic action movie.

Even if it doesn't end as strongly as it started, *The Shed* offers a different version of the vampire mythos – one that is deeply rooted in fears and concerns of today and has a valuable lesson: don't be a bully, because you never know what is hiding in the bullied kid's shed.

/Film Rating: 7 out of 10

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