

'28 Weeks Later' is Heart-Palpitating, Seat-Jittering Gore Fest

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on May 15, 2007 - 5:32pm

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CHICAGO – Having sold so many on a first film that's watertight in warranting a second, a sequel answers to a much higher authority.

The reincarnation's lifeblood ultimately is designed not to disappoint. It must surprise by making something great unquestionably better.



The group runs through a tunnel as London is being firebombed.

Photo courtesy of Fox Atomic

If "28 Days Later" wasn't the kind of film you'd enjoy, you'd hate "28 Weeks Later" vehemently more. If a heart-palpitating, seat-jittering gore fest happily gets your blood boiling, though, you'll indeed seethe infinitely more this time around.

I don't scare easily. While very few films jolt me, I freely admit that my jerking from this film came entirely courtesy of the critic sitting beside me who couldn't stay glued to his seat. His being terrorized threw me because I kept anticipating when he would be.

Following the 2002 film "28 Days Later," "28 Weeks Later" picks up in London six months after a "rage virus" annihilates the British Isles. This fictional virus is the type that transforms a healthy Brit into an "infected" thingamabob ridiculously instantaneously. Bird flu, mad cow, SARS and West Nile are all put to shame.

They're basically zombies but they're swiftly voracious rather than sluggish and dense. Even so, in a fight between a traditional zombie, a pirate and a ninja, these manifestations would not win. Just shoot them and they're toast.

Like zombies, they don't talk and all they care about is their next cannibalistic feast. This uber virus first ran riot following a raid on a primate research facility by animal rights activists. Infectious in a single bead of blood, the virus throws those infected into an undeviating state of murderous fury.



The rage virus is back in "28 Weeks Later".

Photo courtesy of Fox Atomic

Following the first film's apocalyptic vision of the world, the virus in "28 Weeks Later" – which began its 10-week, independent-style film shoot in Aug. 2006 – is allegedly gone and the country's reconstruction is apparently ready.

Emerging from the city's ashes, the first wave of refugees return. You can guess what happens next. When the resurrected outbreak occurs, American snipers are given the order to indiscriminately take out all targets – women and children included – to thwart the mushrooming contagion.

The story is rather obvious. You couldn't make a violent sequel to a violent original without the return of the violence. Of course, this time around, it had to be even more violent. I'll give it that. This allegory certainly was.

Blood obviously embodies gore – and there was a lot of it – but "28 Weeks Later" was seriously sadistic in its sound, too. From the wood demolition to the gunfire to the explosions to the fire bombing, you could close your eyes, just listen and the scare would still be powerful.

In addition to the ringing in your ears, director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo even wanted you to be able to smell the characters and the environment. I peculiarly couldn't help but smell chicken – rotten, of course.

As is the case with lots of scary movies, the film exploited countless scenes that quickly went from silent to startling. The body of the unspoken but easily jilted critic to my right just couldn't sit still through a single one of these moments. He even squirmed through particularly rosy scenes in the expectation of a twist.

While all cast members knew they were getting involved in a terror project designed to trounce its predecessor, not everyone was immediately convinced. Lead actor Robert Carlyle from "The Full Monty" and "Trainspotting" initially had his reservations about playing the father in such a tragically cursed family.



The cast of 28 Weeks Later at the film's London premiere.

Photo courtesy of Fox Atomic

"I was kind of worried at first because the first film was very good. I was hoping it was going to live up to it," Carlyle said in the film's production notes. "Then there were a couple moments in the script in which I thought – actually – this is brilliant."

For some medically unsound reason, Carlyle's wife – played by Catherine McCormack from "Braveheart" – had a genetic immunity to the virus because she had eyes with different pigmentations. M'kay.

While this twist could have gone somewhere further and was implied to stand as a potential cure, the film continued with death, death, death – life! (just kidding) – and more death all through the end. If nothing else, I suppose you're left lucky to be alive.

Their son, who was played by 12-year-old first-timer Mackintosh Muggleton, felt modestly lucky to get the part. He added: "I thought it was all

going to fame and glamor but realize now that it is about 97 percent hard work and only 3 percent fame and glamor.”

He was not hired for his skills in real-world mathematics.

Behind the scenes, one of the more interesting aspects of this film was the performances and casting of the animalistic, frenzy-infused infected. Many more were brought to life in this iteration and “movement specialist” and gymnast Paul Kasey was given the assignment to make the illusory creatures believable.



Director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo on the set.

Photo courtesy of Fox Atomic

Kasey auditioned actors and performers with movement backgrounds ranging from gymnasts, dancers, actors, mime artists and circus performers. He selected 60 performers to attend a workshop.

“I had to hold them back,” Kasey said. “Their rage was becoming so powerful and so crazed. It was pretty scary to be opposite 60 people who were infected. It really helped when it came to shooting as they could turn it on and off in an instance.”

Interestingly, costume designer Jane Petrie felt it important to inculcate obvious pieces of what people were like before they were infected. Petrie added: “[These] people have been interrupted. You could look at them and ... know the job they were doing [when they were infected].”

For the actors who were alive in the film, having the infected on set was sometimes an off-putting experience.

Imogen Poots, who plays Muggleton’s 17-year-old sister and had a small role in “V For Vendetta,” strangely enjoyed watching them get made up on set. When the camera was rolling and their visceral sounds were in full growl, though, these people were no longer her friends.

While entertaining, this film should not be categorized as brilliant. Brilliant films do more than hammer you in the two hours they own your attention. Brilliant films stick with you in perpetuity and everyday events bring back memories from those popcorn-eating moments.

The film succeeds in piercingly jarring your brain but fails with the element of surprise, creativity beyond the first script and overall originality. Though the sequel had its gee-whizes along with its snores, put the project to rest and spare us the trilogy.

While your tastebuds will be tickled temporarily, chances are 28 days later you won’t remember.



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Source URL (retrieved on Nov 14 2018 - 11:54pm): <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/2007/05/28-weeks-later-is-heart-palpitating.html>

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