

## Blu-Ray Review: Horror Fans Must Take the Trip to 'Stake Land'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 4, 2011 - 3:18pm

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CHICAGO – Forget “Zombieland,” “Stake Land” is a much scarier place to be. Jim Mickle’s smart, atmospheric vampire thriller has been given a stellar Blu-ray treatment from Dark Sky Films and is quite simply the horror HD release of the year so far. Horror fans are often (justifiably) complaining about the current state of the drama but “Stake Land” should silence them for at least a few days.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

“Stake Land” is a confident, smart piece of filmmaking that will surely find a much-wider audience on Blu-ray and DVD than it did in its very-brief theatrical release (where it made a shockingly-small \$23k TOTAL). It’s an incredibly-promising film from a talented director and I hope that it doesn’t get lost in the shuffle. This is the kind of release that I think could suffer the most from the death of the local video store. I should I know because I managed one a lifetime ago and it’s the kind of small horror gem that I would have recommended to the right consumer. Now, I have an outlet to try and do the same for you.



Stake Land

*Photo credit: IFC Films*

“Stake Land” is an accomplished piece of filmmaking with some striking visuals (made even more so with a great HD transfer), well-done action scenes, and clever twists of storytelling. The acting diminishes the piece a bit as none of the cast quite delivers as much as one would hope and the dialogue can be a bit cheesy but enough of the other elements work that it’s easily worth a look, especially for horror fans.

Nick Damici steals the film as the grizzled veteran (the Woody Harrelson of the piece to make the “Zombieland” comparison), a tough character named Mister, who plays no games in the post-apocalyptic world. He’s trying to survive in a world of not just vampires but cannibals and religious zealots. One of the best things about Mickle’s vision is that it presents a universe with more than one true villain and suggests

that humans may be even more deadly than the bloodsuckers. Mister takes an orphaned teenager named Martin (Connor Paolo) under his wing but not with the typical sentimentality of this sub-genre. He decides, for reasons unstated, to save Martin and teach him the art of staking vampires — It's not as easy here to crack a breastbone as in some vampire fiction.



Stake Land was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on August 2nd, 2011

Photo credit: Dark Sky Films

But vampires (and, keep in mind, these are the speedy, “28 Days Later...” variety of vampires) are far from the only problem for Martin and Mister. As they move north to try and find New Eden, they come across a nun (Kelly McGillis) who is about to be raped. Mister kills the two freaks about to commit such a heinous act, crossing paths with a cult leader (Michael Cerveris of “Fringe”), who has basically created his own society with very different rules. They find other survivors on their trek north (including horror icons Danielle Harris and Larry Fessenden) and director Jim Mickle and co-writer Damici clearly imply that the world of “Stake Land” would be a brutal, vicious, awful place even without vampires.

Some of the narration by Martin is a bit heavy and almost all of it is unnecessary. Mickle should know that when we see a pregnant character we don't need to hear Martin tell us she was pregnant. It almost feels like producer intervention to add narration to a project that never really needed it. And sometimes the execution of the action scenes can be a bit off. Although for every bit that feels a bit wrong (like a car fight) there's one that just rules (two words — plummeting vampires).

I'm a horror junkie, but I still know that my genre is in dire straits. We need more strong voices in the genre to elevate it again. We need a new Romero or a new Cronenberg or a new Carpenter. I'm not saying that Mickle is in that realm but I do love the personality and intelligence on display with this film (and, to a lesser extent but still strong, his “Mulberry Street” from the “After Dark” collection of 2007). Mickle knows what works about George A. Romero, finding the balance between atmosphere, plot, and the inherent nihilism of a future dominated by death and violence.

I also love that, despite its anemic box office, the film has been given a glorious Blu-ray release complete with two commentary tracks, an hour-long behind-the-scenes piece, a stunning transfer, 7 short films that serve as character prequels, and much more. It's fantastic.

*“Stake Land” stars Connor Paolo, Nick Damici, Kelly McGillis, Michael Cerveris, and Danielle Harris. It was written by Damici & Jim Mickle and directed by Mickle. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD on August 2nd, 2011 and is rated R.*



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