

Hard to Find a Point to ‘Pride and Prejudice and Zombies’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 5, 2016 - 11:33pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Having not read this best-selling source novel, I had a hard time understanding the point of “Pride and Prejudice and Zombies.’ Amazingly, it falls short as both a zombie movie and a satire of the original Jane Austin “Pride and Prejudice” story, which was its only achievement as a final result.

Whether the source novel would unlock anything, I cannot know, because I have no desire to pursue the tale beyond the film. As an admirer of Jane Austin’s novel, it was surprising that the screenplay adaptation played it pretty straight, which had no oomph or reaction beyond, “wow, Elizabeth Bennett sure kicks ass in this version.” The zombies existed to show their oozing faces (both puss and blood, Thanks Obama) and to provide the zombies fighters – which included all of the Bennett sisters, Mr. Darcy and other familiar Austin-nites – with fodder for quality kills. There was nothing that hadn’t been done in a million other zombie movies, and simply placing it within the parlor manors of a Jane Austin environment was not enough to make it any more original. In a word, meh.

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains.” Ha-ha, that’s the first line of the movie, which satirizes the epic first line of Austin’s novel so limply that the movie starts with a thud. Yep, the Bennet sisters are zombie fighters, because a zombie hoard has taken over England in the late 1700s. Elizabeth (Lily James) is the leader of her sister gang, and catches the eye of fellow zombie ass-kicker Mr. Darcy (Sam Riley).



Lily James (center) as Elizabeth Leads the Undead Hunters in 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

There is a long explanation of who has what British territory, but essentially the zombies are held off by a big moat and one bridge to London. Jane Bennet (Bella Heathcoate) favors another Z-fighter, Mr. Bingley (Douglas Booth), and the story of Austin manners and expression are mixed with several skirmishes with the brain eating undead, especially those trapped in a netherworld of St. Lazarus (get it?) church. The final battle is nigh, and all the skills must be applied.

One observation – there needs to be some zombie rules, much like Isaac Asimov's Laws of Robotics. With each new zombie film, the undead seem to be able to do more and more. When first introduced as movie archetypes, their prime characteristic was the slow but steady shuffle, and superior numbers (there are more potential undead than living souls), which made the killing easy, but eventually hard to stave off. Now – like in "P and P and Z" – the zombies run, hop, attack, etc. In essence, there is no consistency from film-to-film, which leaves the concept floundering, and quite frankly boring.

Also (again, without reading the P&P&Z source novel), there needed to be edgier commentary on Jane Austin and her environment of fluttery politeness. It was present, but only to show some oozing zombie faces eventually. If the satire was a little sharper or funnier, as it was in (for example) in "Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Killer," the zombie stuff might have worked better, or at least had more laughs. Both concepts butted up against each other, and neither ended up being served.

The cast was game, and actually would have worked if this were a straight version of "Pride and Prejudice." Lily James was a proper Elizabeth Bennet, and because she was also a zombie fighter did provide at times the edge that was lacking in other areas of the story, plus added a welcome bit of sex appeal. The Bennet sisters were amusing, all sheathed knives and killer bodices. Sam Riley's Mr. Darcy was darker than his source, but would have interpreted the straight version of the story more intriguingly than this version, just by performing it as he was doing it here. The original Darcy needed some darkness.



Sam Riley is Mr. Darcy in 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

The fight choreography was pretty good around the battles, especially a decent scene where the Bennet sisters fight each other in training, all whilst talking about their near-miss relationships. But in general the cast felt not sure of themselves in trying to serve the two story masters. For example, Elizabeth was a great as the Jane Austin character, which weakened her as a zombie fighter. And the actress portraying her mother (Sally Phillips) overplayed the satire elements (to milk the laughs) thus destroying her Austin-ism. The “one or the other” situation happened throughout this adaptation, and weakened it further.

Here is what we'll all look forward to (all real books) if this film is successful... "Dreadfully Ever After" (the P&P&Z sequel), "Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters," "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Zombie Jim" and "To Kill a MockingBrain." Okay, I made up the last one, but it would give a whole new flavor to the character of Dill.

"Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" opens everywhere on February 5th. Featuring Lily James, Sam Riley, Bella Heathcoate, Douglas Booth, Jack Huston and Sally Phillips. Screenplay adapted by and directed by Burr Steers. Rated "PG-13" (Oozing faces for all!)



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [19]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [18]

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