



Publicity still from '28 Days Later'.

28 Days Later

Review by Megan Spencer, 2003

'Horror to die for...'

After the Hollywood excesses of *The Beach* (2000), English director Danny Boyle (*Trainspotting*) returns to his “punk” filmmaking roots with latest feature, the stupendous apocalyptic zombie 'flick', *28 Days Later*.

After the critical savaging of *The Beach* (2000), Boyle had been 'licking his wounds' by making a couple of DV tele-features for UK TV before venturing back into feature film territory. Re-invigorated, he decided to ask *The Beach* scribe Alex Garland to pen a new project on which they could collaborate for a second time.

According to Boyle, Garland was keen to come up with a modern-day horror film so he asked the screenwriter to read HG Wells' novel 'The Time Machine', and "to set [a story like it] in Britain”.

As critic Scott Macauley from *Filmmaker Magaine* noted, *28 Days Later* smacks also of Richard Matheson's classic apocalyptic novel 'I Am Legend' (adapted for the screen in 1971 as *The Omega Man*, one of Charlton Heston's finest acting turns). It is a book that has influenced its fair share of filmmakers, *Night of the Living Dead's* George Romero among them.

In *28 Days Later* we see a very different London on screen - a London that has become the last place on earth you'd want to live. At the start we witness militant animal liberationists breaking into a vivisection lab only to unwittingly unleash a rabid blood-borne virus on an unsuspecting city.

A month later later we meet Jim (*Disco Pigs'* Cillian Murphy), dazed and confused, and stumbling around the haunting, deserted streets of this once great and densely populated city. With him we discover the extent of the virus's devastation, as he tries to find someone – anyone - to explain what on earth has happened.

Eventually he meets The Infected who are not - as you might think - the last punk band left on earth,

rather a bunch of raging, 'unclean', infectious zombies that scream around alley ways hunting for human prey, projectile vomiting blood in their wake.

28 Days Later becomes a survivalist movie of sorts, all the reason why the film's frenetic DV camera-work is so suited. Jim eventually finds a family of fellow survivors; the film's themes then bend into territory close to that of *Reign Of Fire* (2002), last year's underrated fantasy feature. It too broods with a certain dark, apocalyptic view of London and its outer-lying cities.

The second act carves out a lovely quiet space. We not only get to know the characters more intimately, but what's important to them, and ultimately, to 'all of us'.

Of course all this nice stuff happens before the looming doom and gloom kicks in, and how.

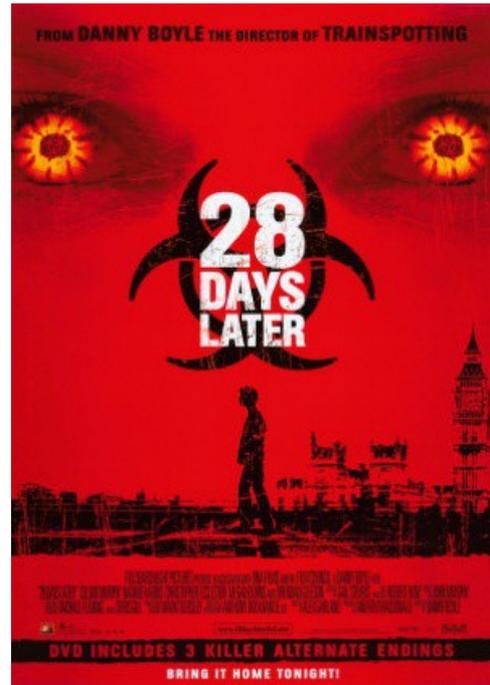
28 Days Later calls on a wealth of previous films for inspiration: *The Quiet Earth* (1985), *The Day of the Triffids* (1962), Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and Boyle's own, largely *Trainspotting* (1996) with its punk visuals and fearlessly executed editing and sound design.

Boyle's strategy of holding back his 'big gun' actors - Brendan Gleeson (*Lake Placid*, *The General*) and Christopher Eccleston (*Jude*, *Shallow Grave*) – works a treat. They fortify *28 Days Later* further as events take a decided turn for the worse.

Like the best horror movies, *28 Days Later* is an understated yet profound message movie about the nature of human existence. As the poster says, "be thankful for what you have for soon there will be nothing". Not wrong, especially considering so many films billed under the horror banner these days deliver so little.

This however, is a horror to die for...

Visit the *28 Days Later* [website](#).



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