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REEL FEST

THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2011

FILM REVIEW: SUPER 8 EXTREME

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by A.T. Sayre

The very first film I ever made was in the first month of my college career. Everyone in my film production class was given an old, but sturdy super 8 camera, one three minute roll of film, and instructed to go make a movie. The only guidelines we had were that one, there would be no cutting or splicing of our little movies- all the edits would be 'in camera', which is to say the only way to change the shot was to stop filming, move the camera, and start filming again, and two, you only get one three minute super 8 cartridge. The first time any of us would even get to see what we shot would be in class the next week. So if you screwed up, not only would you not be able to do anything about it, you might not even know you did till the everyone else did too. Yeah, that was a fun class.

Making a film with these parameters can be nerve- wrecking- on top of how filmmaking is already nerve- wracking. Having experienced back in those salad days of mine this kind of work first hand, I was really keen to check out John Hartman's 'Super 8 Extreme Shorts', a collection of short films shot on super 8 film using very similar guidelines.

I know from experience how carefully a film like this has to be planned out. My own try at this format was two whole days in planning, for something that literally took about ten minutes to shoot. And it was fairly simple- two shots, about a minute and half each. Nothing fancy.

Which is why it feels so impressive what Hartman has done here- because each of these films is infinitely more sophisticated than what I did. There are many camera shots, short ones, long ones, back and forth 'cutting', just like you would see in a regular film, but all done on the spot! It is so very impressive how Hartman manages to keep a good pacing as he went; something normally only possible in the editing room he manages to do as he is shooting. Especially in Feud Angel, which has a fairly extensive action sequence, something hard enough to manage let alone in this situation.

I have always had a fondness for the look of super 8 film. Call it nostalgia if you like, but there is something about the quality of picture that can be so appealing.

The short Petrified is so perfectly reminiscent of golden age silent cinema, its sepia tonal qualities and style make it feel almost akin to The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. Emily's Bridge and Pinky Rejection also have a nice contrast in black and white. Not to mention the color shorts (I never got to use color super 8 film stock, dammit) will surprise you in how wonderful they look. The colors in Tower Princess and especially Feud Angel look so rich and warm. Even the more washed out Mud Liberator and Hearts and Daggers, though not as pretty as the other color films, have a pleasant home movies feel to them.

All in all these are a pretty impressive set of short films, that are far more pleasing to the eye and entertaining than you might at first assume they would be.

Hopefully Hartman will continue to make these shorts in this format, as I am sure

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as he gains more and more experience, what he puts out will get even better.

Super-8 Extreme reviewed by A.T. Sayre

Posted by Rod Webber at 2:17 PM

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