

## 28 Weeks Later

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For horror film fans, the film *28 Days Later* came as a revelation in 2002, its hyperkinetic depiction of a "rage" virus that breaks out in England and proceeds to transform 99% of the populous into rabid, zombie-like "infecteds" (in 28 days, hence the title) providing a much-needed injection of energy and originality to the zombie sub-genre, which had been sinking further and further into the dregs of direct-to-video schlock throughout the 90s. Instead of the lumbering, moaning zombies with arms outstretched that audiences had become so accustomed to, the infected were pure, ferocious energy, running at breakneck speed and vomiting gallons of blood onto their victims. Loud, scary, and relentless, its apocalyptic horror quickly garnered a cult following.

Fast-forward to summer of 2007, and we have a sequel released into theaters, *28 Weeks Later*, which departs from all of the original characters to look at how events have progressed in the months since the outburst of infection. The infected people, who are single-minded juggernauts of violence and destruction, have all died of starvation, and their corpses line the city streets and countryside of England, which remains quarantined. After a horrifying opening sequence that flashes back to roughly the same time that *28 Days Later* took place in which Don, who has been hiding out in a farmhouse with his wife and an elderly couple, is forced to abandon his wife when the house is attacked by a horde of the infected, we cut to a cross-section of London where all 30,000 of the survivors of the scourge are living under the control of the U.S. Military, who are putting into place plans to repopulate Britain. Don, a survivor, is reunited with his daughter and son, who have been in Spain during the infection, and as sure as he is that his wife is dead, his children are sure that she is not, and they venture, against protocol, out into the city and miraculously find her, alone, a terrified survivor. At the risk of giving away too much, I will say that soon after this the infected are in the safe zone, all hell breaks loose, and the Military finds itself grappling with the fact that they will have to lay waste to all they have accomplished in the previous months.

*28 Weeks Later* is a remarkable horror film, in some respects superior to the first film. Although director Juan Fresnadillo deviates away from the quintessential "Britishness" of the first film, which was directed by Danny Boyle, in favor of a film that seems aimed at an international audience and dutifully addresses international issues such as Globalization, which is a minor complaint in the face of such kinetic horror. The gore is extreme, with a particularly unsettling eye-gouging sequence, the terror is that of utter panic and destruction, and the overall tone is decidedly bleak, leaving the viewer stunned and devastated. The characters in the first film were able to find the value of solidarity in the face of horror and desperation, but the human situation is decidedly more tense here; surveillance and security is extremely tight in the "safe" zone, armed guards are everywhere, and the feeling of claustrophobia descends upon the film as soon as it begins, so that when chaos erupts, we are not so much shocked as we are watching our suspicions be horribly confirmed. In the process, we are treated to some of the most brutally frightening scenes to be encountered in mainstream horror, amongst those the scene in which an infected breaks into a dark room full of people who have no means of escaping and creates a domino effect of infection, with only flashes of violence and the screams of the panicked victims of escalating horror. Fresnadillo never flinches, and we sit, numb, as he pelts us with highly disturbing imagery, and simultaneously comments on the fragility of humanity itself — in a situation so awful as this, no one can be counted on to act rationally, and the military is just as incompetent and panic-stricken in its reaction as the civilians. Just be prepared to be both frightened and depressed, if you feel that you have the stomach for this film. The ending promises a sequel, which from the looks of it will be even more apocalyptic and large-scale in its depiction of the spread of the rage virus, and for horror fans, there could hardly be anything more exciting.

*28 Weeks Later* was recently released on DVD and is easy to find in the video store, so proceed immediately — overall, the audience for the film has been relatively small, and for such a well-constructed piece of horror, it deserves better. The recent Renaissance of in-your-face, gory horror has already begun to descend into trashy, unredeeming flicks, but *28 Weeks Later* gives me hope that the trend may still be reversed and the genre will be salvaged.