

The UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS is about Andrew (Jamie Scott Gordon), a homeless veteran whose time in Afghanistan has left him with PTSD as well as a phobia of crows and ravens. His therapist, Angela (Amanda Gilliland), arranges for him to have the use of a remote cabin in the Scottish Highlands for a month. She is convinced that writing about his nightmares and facing his fears with photography and art are the only things that will help him.

A soldier on a solitary mission, he heads into the wilderness. Symbolically he passes the last phone booth on a country lane, and hikes the last few miles to the lonely cabin. There he confronts actual birds, creepy raven warriors, men who fought and died by his side, the horrors he experienced while at war, some (hopefully) imagined mélange of private terror and actual events, and a raving, fatalistic version of himself. He is driven to hunt the raven warriors. IT is not clear if they stem from local legend or from some cult he encountered in the Middle East. By the end, it is clear that their origins are not important.

Like post-traumatic stress, this film comes in waves of horror and revulsion. Just when you think Andrew has worked through to the cause of his recurring, waking nightmares they return to reveal another layer, another facet, and another secret. The old adage is that war is hell. This film reminds us that it is a hell that doesn't stay on the battlefield but permeates the psyche, travels with the soldier no matter where he goes. Yet the horrors are also older than any current conflict. The fears and tortures are both specific to time and place and universal, ancient, perhaps connected to some primordial evil.

The mix of the real horrors of war and the folk horrors that grow out of some ancient Lovecraftian cult leads to quite a lot of gore and bone-chilling terror. Up until the last moment, it is not clear if Andrew will overcome his fears or be destroyed by them.

Jamie Scott Gordon remains sympathetic even when he is outside of himself as a frenzied, wild man taunting himself about how the ravens hunger for the sweet, soft whites of his eyes, or reminding himself that he should be dead. He is the victim and the aggressor, the hero and the demon and is convincing as both.

Another bonus of this film is some really lovely cinematography of actual crows and ravens. There is liberal use of the countryside as well – often in harsh contrast to Andrew's memories and nightmares of the desert battlefield.

That said it is not for the squeamish. The beauty juxtaposes with disgusting images of dismemberment, torture, slavery, mental and physical cruelty.

One element that stuck out in my mind was the fact that the moon was always full – implying several months, not several days – or that somehow the events were outside of time; a much more plausible explanation.

On the downside, because the film is from Scotland I found myself wishing for subtitles near the beginning. It took a few scenes to get into the rhythms of the accent. As the film goes on it relies much more on the visual and much less on actual dialog. There are a few scenes with eloquent, poetic voice-over – so if you haven't adjusted to the accent by the middle of the film, it would be worthwhile to find a copy with subtitles.

As a total side note, this film was partially funded by a Kickstarter campaign that raised the largest amount of money for a UK film to date.

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UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS Review

8.7

FILM SYNOPSIS - A homeless veteran battles to survive against his demons in the remote Highlands of Scotland

Story9.0

Director9.0

Cinematography8.0

Acting9.5

Sound8.0

Reader Rating: (1 vote) 8