

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies feels a bit stiff

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 Stars

Running Time: 108 min.

At this point, we've seen more takes on the famous and enormously popular Jane Austen novel than probably any of us can count. At least the latest adaptation does throw in a new and unexpected element into the mix - the undead. Yet, while *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* has its moments, the movie is afraid to take any liberties or poke fun at its source material. It's well mounted but feels a bit stiff and doesn't go far enough to maximize the outrageous potential the material possesses.

Elizabeth Bennet (Lily James) is a young woman living with her parents and sisters. Concerned for the future of the family, their mother (Sally Phillips) encourages the ladies to begin looking for well-to-do husbands. Oh, and there's also an infection spreading across the land that causes people to die and turn into flesh-eating zombies. In between her warrior training, Elizabeth and her sisters meet many suitors. However, the two who make the biggest impression on the lead are a charming soldier George Wickham (Jack Huston) and blunt, stuffy, aristocratic monster hunter, Mr. Darcy (Sam Riley).

The filmmakers have clearly decided not to emphasize the outrageousness of the situation, perhaps to its detriment. Sure, there are some changes and an interesting wrinkle to the zombie formula (a dead person can speak normally and it takes time to show visible signs of their demise), but after seeing the ladies fight some off early on, events quickly revert back to the classic plot of Elizabeth sorting out her complicated feelings for the two men.

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Despite the new challenge in identifying a zombie, little is done with it creatively. It does play a part in the opening and at the very end of the film, but overall this concept is never fully utilized. The interactions and budding relationships between characters progress traditionally and the dramatic potential for suspicion of infection between the ladies and their suitors isn't emphasized as much as it should be. There's little tension or drama among the leads as to the threat or who the undead may be. At least the performers are decent, taking their roles seriously and acting as though they are in a straight-forward retelling of Austen's material.

People coming to the theater will expect the heroines to take on more zombies between their romantic escapades. And what's so surprising about this mash-up is just how unexceptional the horror and action sequences are. There's a good moment or two, including a scene in which a formal conversation is abruptly stopped by a zombie meeting his demise via a loud musket shot. It's an effective and jarring moment that contrasts traditional etiquette with a dose of, if not reality, then a jolt of violence. Unfortunately, there aren't more scenes like this to add more subtext to the concept.

Instead, the screenplay wedges a few brief zombie interactions within the preexisting story, or has the characters give exposition while practicing their martial arts routine. The jokes are scattershot and interestingly enough, those that make the biggest impact aren't new. Zombie sequences are edited together in a competent but otherwise flat manner. In particular, the film's climax leaves much to be desired. It doesn't use the undead onslaught to its full potential and beyond the characters riding on horseback past flesh-eaters and a brief sword fight, not a whole lot of excitement results.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies would have been a little better served if it had used the novel as an inspiration, strayed further from the original story and integrated the undead in a smoother manner. Ultimately, it feels like a passable adaptation of the Austen book with zombies thrown in here and there as a throwaway gimmick, instead of using the bizarre concept as a way to satirize manners in a completely original way.

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