



# Doomsday

By DENNIS HARVEY

**Neil Marshall's flair for visceral action more than compensates for his script's lack of conceptual novelty in "Doomsday." Principally South Africa-shot tale of a post-apocalyptic Great Britain cobbles together large chunks of "Escape From New York," "The Road Warrior," "28 Days Later" and "Resident Evil," but those with a taste for revved-up, splattery fantasy thrills won't be complaining. Opening cold in the U.S. sans press screenings, and with no Stateside marquee names, pic bowed to \$4.7 million domestically but should see better numbers elsewhere (especially in Blighty), and is sure to become a repeat-viewing fan favorite in ancillary.**

Given a much bigger canvas than in his previous muscular horror outings ("Dog Soldiers," "The Descent"), Marshall proves immediately adept at filling the screen with spectacle, action and no small amount of gore.

Present-day prologue finds Scotland placed under permanent quarantine after a deadly "Reaper virus" rapidly spreads from Glasgow. One soldier gives up his place on the last evacuating helicopter so a little girl with an eye wound can be taken to safety.

In 2035 London, Eden Sinclair (Rhona Mitra) is now a military police major with a take-no-prisoners attitude and one high-tech replacement eye. Haunted by the memory of the mother she left behind all those years ago, she's more than willing when boss Nelson (Bob Hoskins, second-billed but in few scenes) puts her in charge of a potential suicide mission -- to go back into the "hot zone" in search of a cure.

Going into territory sealed off for nearly three decades, Sinclair and her two-tank team of drivers, riflemen and scientists eventually reach an eerily ruined Glasgow. They make their way to a hospital where stranded military apparently cloistered themselves for some years, their continued existence -- eventually sustained by cannibalism -- hitherto known only to the highest government intelligence.

It's Sinclair's mission to find leader Kane, if he's still alive. What they discover instead is a society of vintage punk-styled crazies (apparently, hair dye and gel remained plentiful even as other essentials ran out) ruled over by the mohawked, manic Sol (Craig Conway). Assaulted on all sides, the unit quickly dwindles in number, with one unlucky member barbecued for supper in a sort of Burning Man-meets-Circus-Maximus setpiece, complete with pole dancers, stage diving and '80s British New Wave hits on the PA. (Duly excessive yet not funny or original enough, this sequence is one of Marshall's less successful gambits.)

At about the one-hour mark, pic makes a welcome break from well-done but overmilked decayed-urban-future settings to the splendidly shot great outdoors. Protags let themselves get captured by Kane's men and hauled back to his feudalist castle community (complete with grimy-Renaissance-Faire aesthetic), only to find that Kane (Malcolm McDowell) is not interested in helping an outside world that turned its back on him and every other Scot who might have survived the disease.

But Sinclair (in every way a doppelganger for Milla Jovovich's unstoppable "Resident Evil" protag) still can't be counted out, paving the way to a climax that very much apes -- and equals -- the over-the-top highlights in "The Road Warrior."

Conclusion is a bit underwhelming, with the door left wide open for a sequel. That aside, there's no question that "Doomsday" does what it does with vigor, high technical prowess and just enough humor to avoid turning ridiculous. Critics generally turn their noses up at such derivative popcorn actioners, but many such pics of late could have benefited from Marshall's ability to deliver familiar goods with maximum zest. There's nary a dull moment here, and the purported \$30 million budget is milked for every last drop. Whether serving up hard-R gore or ye olde narrow-escape-from-armed-hordes, helmer makes sure it packs a wallop.

Though "Doomsday" isn't exactly an actors' showcase, the cast acquits itself well enough, and stunt coordinator Cordell McQueen's personnel -- who outnumber thespians in lengthy end credits -- are stellar.

All tech credits are top. production designer, Simon Bowles; supervising art director, Steve Carter; art directors, Jonathan Hely-Hutchinson, John Trafford, David Doran; set decorator, Mark Auret; costume designer, John Norster; sound (Dolby Digital/DTS), Derek Mansvelt; sound designer, Matthew Collinge; visual effects supervisor, Hal Couzens; visual effects, Double Negative, the Senate Visual Effects; special makeup effects designer, Paul Hyett; stunt coordinator, Cordell McQueen; assistant directors, Jack Ravenscroft, Dale Butler; casting, Jeremy Zimmermann. Reviewed at AMC Van Ness 1000, San Francisco, March 14, 2008. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 109 MIN.

**With:** Lee-Anne Liebenberg, Sean Pertwee, Darren Morfitt, Leslie Simpson, Nora-Jane Noone, Rick Warden, John Carson, Cokey Falkow, Nathalie Boltt.