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## Grimmfest 2012 Review: COMEDOWN - The Slasher Movie, Once More, With Feeling

Matthew Lee

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Menhaj Huda's **Comedown** isn't so much the morning after the night before as the moment that night when you realise the booze has run out, the pills are all gone and you're desperately trying to eke out the last of your buzz to stave off the realisation you're going to pay for it a lot sooner than you thought. This gritty little UK slasher flick is relatively predictable, with some frustratingly transparent twists and an ending that's obviously rushed, but it's a lot more than watching stupid people die. Huda's direction, a simple yet effective script and some strong performances from the young cast turn what could have been a tired parade of torture porn and music video showboating into something surprisingly memorable.

The crew of South London teenagers about to have the worst night of their lives are a loose-knit lot just waiting to unravel. Jason (Adam Deacon) has just done three months inside, and he's determined to do right by his pregnant girlfriend Jemma (Sophie Stuckey). The rest are still set in their ways, with firebug Gal (Calm McNab) and wideboy Lloyd (Jacob Anderson) happy to coast on getting smashed, petty violence and baiting gentle giant Col (Duane Henry) or party girl Kelly (Jessica Barden). When a local dealer offers a quick payday - some cash, some pharmaceuticals - for climbing a derelict tower block to install a pirate transmitter, Jason takes him up on it. But it slowly becomes obvious there's someone else in the building more dangerous than any rival gang.

There's precious little mystery to **Comedown**; the first couple of minutes flash forward to show you things work out very badly indeed, and the reason why these kids are getting picked off turns out to be pretty tenuous. Obviously a great many people looking to see the film won't care, and if you're just in it for the kills then rest assured there's several spectacularly icky ways to die on display here. Still, Huda does seem to be trying for more than whipping up the crowd, and it's mildly disappointing the story and pacing don't always live up to his ambitions. There's a rough-and-ready lyricism to the film, though, like a grime or horrorcore concept album reinvented for the big screen, enough to make it worth a watch for the cinephile as well as the gorehound.



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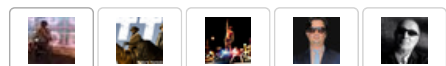
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None of the leads deserve what they get put through - they might be bad, but they're not rotten, and if they're stupid it's believably so. Deacon is particularly good, his helpless rage when things start flying apart far more affecting than pantomime yelling, but all six feel human enough both the violence and the long stretches of dead silence are wincingly painful. Not all of them get the chance to fight back, but **Comedown** never breaks down entirely into reductive cliches. Even when Anderson's terrified posturing is played for laughs, say, there's still an air of tragedy that's much more heartfelt than your average scary movie, be it PG-13 or hard R. The ending wastes some of this - Huda concedes it was originally much darker - but it still lands a wicked little hook in the back of your mind.

The visuals trade on all the heavy shadows and bloodstained power tools you'd expect, but there's also a touch of something more artistic, even echoes of the myth-making and fantasy imagery in Philip Ridley's brilliant **Heartless**. While the killer is definitely under-written there are a couple of seriously unnerving touches to the way Huda's monster becomes steadily more inhuman. And while **Comedown** doesn't show that much of London bar the skyline, the city feels genuinely haunting in a way that ought to click with anyone who's ever watched the sun rise feeling wrung out and introspective after a beer-soaked night on the town. It's a film that invites repeat viewing for more than just admiring the effects.

**Comedown** doesn't do enough with the slasher formula to escape the drawbacks of the genre altogether. It's not going to win over many people who don't already enjoy a more physical, savage kind of horror or synth stabs layered over subs fit to shake the pavement. But a winning cast and a rough but very definite streak of emotion for their ordeal make a simple story still worth watching, and Menhaj Huda's artful direction and solid grasp of dynamics make it stand out enough to be more than memorable. Predictable and occasionally incoherent there's still enough craft and effort in **Comedown** to make it one of the better films this year. If you're in it for the kills, there's enough here to keep you happy, but if you've got the stomach for a blood-spattered, laudably British take on wild-eyed urban legends then give it a shot as well.

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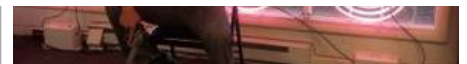
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