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DAVID CRONENBERG

The Early Years

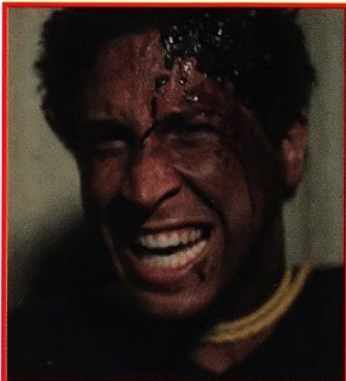
"THE COLLAPSED"

Death is just off-camera

The postapocalyptic-horror formula has become a familiar one by now: a handful of survivors struggling to stay intact as they're assaulted by flesh-rendering infected humans/ghouls. Director Justin McConnell's *The Collapsed* approaches the subgenre a little differently, keeping the threat offscreen and focusing on the emotional travails of the humans under pressure—and is no less effective and scary for it.

Shot on Ontario locations and set for Canadian release via Anchor Bay early next year (McConnell was on the verge of signing a U.S. deal as of this writing), *The Collapsed* grew out of the director's desire to tell a horrific end-of-the-world story realistically. "I wanted it to be more down-to-earth, since you wouldn't actually always be on the run, ducking and shooting," says McConnell, who scripted the movie with Kevin Hutchinson. "I believe that the quiet moments—the times when we have to take stock of what's right in front of our faces, and everything else is lost—are as important to a postapocalyptic story as any in-your-face gruesomeness. It's more important to show what we've lost than how we lose it."

McConnell decided to tackle this scaled-down project after his bigger-budgeted vampire thriller *The Eternal* hit a few financing snags. After also considering a serial-killer drama and a prison-set creature feature (utilizing a real-life location that wound up closing to filming), he settled on a concept that



Scott (John Fantasia) bears the very visible wounds from a largely unseen menace.

he and Hutchinson developed into *The Collapsed*. "We knew we wanted to tell a story tied into the overall mythology of five of the films we've written so far," McConnell explains. "Many of our projects are linked in a similar fashion to what Stephen King has used in the *Dark Tower* books. Chronologically, the events in *The Collapsed* take place after those in *The Eternal*; they exist in the same universe, and directly influence each other."

Which is not to say you'll see vampires, or much of anything else monstrous, in *The Collapsed*. Front and center throughout are

the Weaver family—father Scott (John Fantasia), mother Emily (Lisa

Maule), son Aaron (Steve Vieira) and daughter Rebecca (Anna Ross)—as they make their way across a rural countryside decimated by a horrible plague. Strange noises in the woods around them are testament to the deadly presences that may strike at any time, and the Weavers also have to contend with other humans who remain uninfected but are more ruthless in their own quests to survive.

Though *The Collapsed* has its share of bloody moments and a couple of shocking, unexpected twists, McConnell primarily aimed to keep viewers on edge via what they hear, not what they see. "There's a lot to consider when contributing to a film's tension, but sound design is number one," he notes. "It's such an underappreciated art, but in a movie where it's not up to snuff, you really notice it. We attacked this mix like it was its own character—the forest, every environment, the 'otherworldly' aspects...they are all deeply layered and complex, and every sound is placed on purpose. The score by Rob Kleiner really helps as well.

"I also wanted to make the forest a character unto itself," he continues, "and took a cue from Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* in how I shot it. Although we had very little money, I knew I wanted to have a smooth style, where you aren't distracted by the camera. I made sure we had at least 24 feet of track, Steadicam, a crane, the works. The more fluid, the more absorbed into the story you are. I didn't want people to watch and go, 'Yeah, that's a cool shot.' I wanted them to get the feeling that something deadly could attack at any moment."

While McConnell acknowledges that *The Collapsed*'s quieter style is something of an anomaly in an indie horror scene rife with explicit "grindhouse" homages, he believes taking the risk is worth it. And he's pleased to be part of the burgeoning independent genre movement in Canada. "It's great to see a real DIY attitude launch a whole new wave of talent up here, and to be part of all that. It's why I don't just pick up and try my hand at living and working in LA; I want to make our own industry a lot more open in the way we finance and produce. It leads to fewer hands being tied, and more risks taken."

—Michael Gingold

When society has Collapsed, violence takes its place.

