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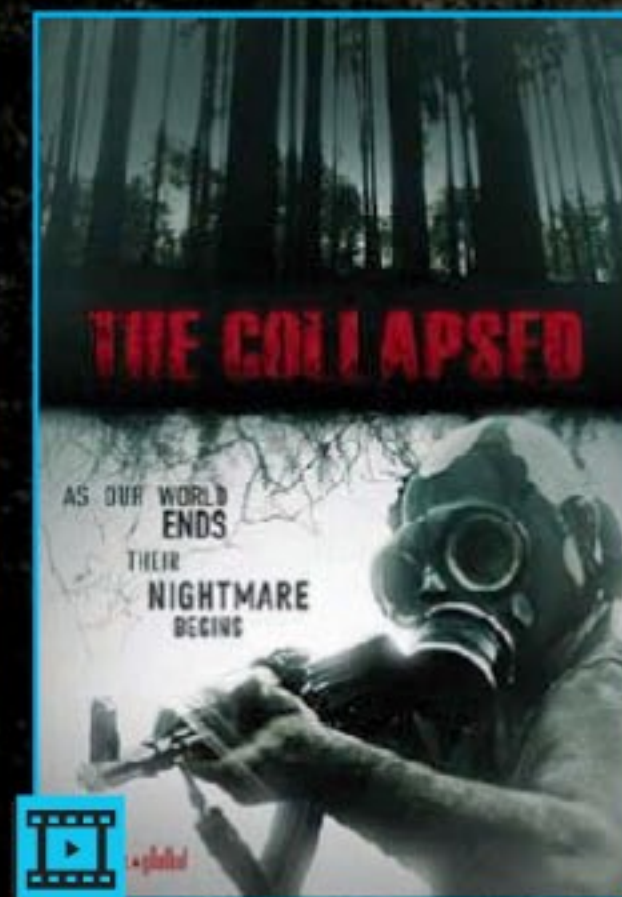
THE DAWN OF UNCIVILIZATION

THE COLLAPSED
Starring John Fantasia, Steve Vieira and Lise Moule
Directed by Justin McConnell
Written by Justin McConnell and Kevin Hutchinson
Unstable Ground Productions

The end of the world has been a favourite plot device for a long time now, but lately the subgenre seems ready to crumple under its own weight. The subtle post-apocalyptic thriller *The Collapsed* puts a fresh spin on the idea, though, and opts for the slow burn over the bloody bang.

Guiding us through the end times is the Weaver family: parents Scott and Emily and grown children Aaron and Rebecca. Some unknown event has sent the world spiralling into chaos, and they're are trying to make their way to the small town of Dover's Bend to find their estranged son. When they encounter a pair of machine gun-toting survivors at a gas station, the family is forced to abandon their car and take to the forest. They gradually realize they aren't safe there either, yet the nature of the threat is unclear. Are they being hunted by their fellow survivors, or has the end of the world brought something far worse in its wake?

We don't learn the answer until the film's gory climax, and the filmmakers use the ambiguity to their advantage. It's a nice marriage of technique and subject matter; we have a vague sense throughout the movie that we're being somehow set up, so we stay just as uneasy as the characters. Skillful manipulation of point of view, creepy dream sequences and occasional bursts of violence ramp up the tension and help keep us off-balance. The filmmakers also get considerable mileage from the time frame, which adds an extra element of paranoia and distrust. (If you've resorted to cannibalism a week after the end of the world, you're either a very poor planner or you've just been waiting for an excuse to eat somebody.)

The film could have benefitted from a firmer hand in the editing suite and the stalking sequences get a bit repetitive after a while, but the climax is powerful enough to override these flaws. The deliberate, reserved pacing won't appeal to all genre fans, but *The Collapsed* has tension to spare and offers an inventive take on a tired concept.

APRIL SNELLINGS