

Storage 24

United Kingdom/USA 2012
 Director: Johannes Roberts
 Certificate 15 86m 59s

Viewers who recently complained that Ridley Scott's unofficial *Alien* prequel *Prometheus* lacked the slasher-style scares that made the director's original 'haunted house in space' so terrifyingly memorable might well find both solution and antidote to their *Alien* obsessions in Johannes Roberts's *Storage 24*. Roberts's previous feature *F(2010)* established his faculty with claustrophobic cat-and-mouse and unpleasant gore, so *Storage 24*'s setting in a Battersea self-storage building, complete with half-lit corridors, labyrinthine ventilation shafts and a cobwebbed basement, places the director right in his element, especially when he's pitting a group of haplessly trapped humans against a predatory extraterrestrial monster. Roberts and his DP Tim Sidell favour tight close-ups to ramp up the tension but don't shy away from fully revealing their creature – an anthropoid abomination of teeth, claws and practical and CG effects.

So while *Storage 24* makes for slickly competent SF horror, it suffers, as perhaps its very title implies, from a by-the-numbers approach to *Alien*-style materials that have already been revisited since 1979 in a dizzying surfeit of sequels, spinoffs and ripoffs. What most obviously distinguishes the film from the many other entries in this subgenre is its Britishness; but while Joe Cornish's similarly British *Attack the Block* (2011) used interplanetary invaders as a mirror to the alienation and beleaguered aggression of South London's urban underclass, *Storage 24* engages so little with the sociopolitical specificities of its metropolitan setting that it might just as easily have been set in another country – or indeed in space.

Offsetting all the murderous mayhem in the dark is the character arc of Charlie, played by the ubiquitous Noel Clarke (who also produced and had the original idea for the screenplay). Devastated at having been dumped by long-term girlfriend Shelley (Antonia Campbell-Hughes), Charlie is spoiling for a fight. "If she says one word..." he tells his friend Mark (Colin O'Donoghue) – and even

if the masking-tape dispenser that he brandishes like a gun renders the threat banally ridiculous (in a film that is often very funny), his rage is palpable. Charlie will gradually learn to let go of Shelley, but at the same time his hatred and aggression are merely transferred to the creature itself. Significantly, just as he gave Shelley a stuffed monkey on their first date, so Charlie's first contact with the alien is expressed through a toy animal. Pent up even before he gets locked into *Storage 24*, Charlie finds the path to physical and emotional release in burning, pummelling and skewering a monster that, like Shelley only more literally, tears men's hearts out. Meanwhile eccentric David (Ned Dennehy), self-exiled in the facility to escape his "poisonous whore" ex-wife, makes the film's link between women and aliens explicit by confronting the creature with the words: "You're just like my wife." It is a disquieting strand of misogyny in a film too focused on its male lead to make much of its female characters. If *Alien* brought feminism (of sorts) to horror, *Storage 24* represents an uncomfortable regression.

◆ Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Manu Kumaran
Noel Clarke
Screenplay
Johannes Roberts
Davie Fairbanks
Marc Small
Noel Clarke
Original Idea
Noel Clarke
Director of Photography
Tim Sidell
Editor
Martin Brinkler
Production Designer
Malin Lindholm
Music
Christian Henson
Production Sound Mixer
Julian Willson
Costume Designers
Andy Blake
Miss Molly

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Unstoppable Limited
Production Companies
Universal Pictures
presents in association
with Mediant and
Unstoppable
Entertainment a Big
Yellow Films production
Executive Producers
Pankaj Rajani

Johnny Fewings
Josh Varney
Pankaj Kapoor

CAST

Noel Clarke
Charlie
Colin O'Donoghue
Mark
Antonia Campbell-Hughes
Shelley
Laura Haddock
Nikki
Jamie Thomas King
Chris
Ned Dennehy
David
Geoff Bell
Bob
Alex Price
Jake
Ruth Gemmill
Sarah
Davie Fairbanks
Greg
Amy Pemberton
Lucy
Robert Freeman
the creature

In Colour
Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

7,828 ft +8 frames

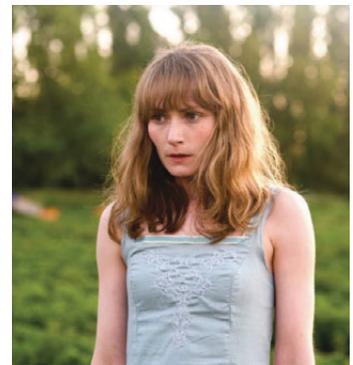
Strawberry Fields

United Kingdom 2011
 Director: Frances Lea
 Certificate 15 86m 50s

Director Frances Lea's low-budget feature places a love-triangle drama in a somewhat unlikely setting – the transitory world of seasonal fruit picking in Kent, transformed here into a heady, wild space outside the normal limits of society. When we first see Gillian (Anna Madeley), she is cycling through fertile fruit-picking terrain – a Kent country lane, sun-drenched to a hyperreal degree. The saturated colour palette is initially the backdrop for this withdrawn young woman's fumbling flirtations with the simmering Kev (Emun Elliott) as she joins him working in the titular strawberry fields on the farm her wanderings have brought her to. The bucolic rural landscape reflects this shy girl's internal world, her innocence and the possibilities of liberation. Only a few brief flashbacks suggest that all is not well with her.

When Gillian's eccentric sister Emily arrives on the scene she is a startling presence, almost immediately disrupting the clunkily written romance developing between the mismatched Gillian and Kev. The energy that Christine Bottomley pumps into the character kickstarts the film into a welcome higher gear, as her increasing levels of pleading and scheming begin to twist Gillian tighter and tighter – though the schizophrenic switching between giggling schoolgirl and Machiavellian siren eventually begins to feel schematic.

Emily's arrival signals a shift not only in the film's pace but also in its visual style. As Gillian endures emotional tortures at the hands of her disturbed sister, who demands she return to whatever bizarre arrangement the two previously had (the sisters' domestic situation, beyond the death of their parents, is unclear), the bright daylight is abandoned for moodier shades of dusk, the action shifting from sunny open fields to the gloomy, claustrophobic spaces of the farm sheds. It's here that some of the more powerful scenes – such as a bizarre and subtext-laden game of hide and seek between the sisters – take place. Lea's visual strategy is admittedly striking in its intensity and contrasts, if not a little obvious. The Tennessee Williams-esque melodramatics never manage the same



Forbidden fruit: Anna Madeley

impact, however. The script, by Lea and Judith Johnson, only sporadically delivers a solid emotional punch and gives Bottomley more lively material than co-stars Madeley and Elliott. The murky events in the sisters' past are left ambiguous, the script never digging deeply enough under the surface of their weird relationship, which is as much frustrating as intriguing. Instead, we are left with a series of face-offs where Gillian's attempts to drive her sister away meet with mewling and insults from Emily, followed by unsophisticated mind games directed at Kev. By the time it all reaches fever pitch we have seen plenty of lust and love amid the beautifully shot fields, but nothing really new. .

◆ Owen Van Spall

CREDITS

Producer
Liam Beatty
Lucie Wenigerová
Written by
Judith Johnson
Frances Lea
Director of Photography
Dave Miller
Editor
Cinzia Balderassi
Production Designer
John Bramble
Music Composed by
Bryony Afferson
James Stone
Production Sound Mixer
Nigel Albermanchiche
Costume Designer
Emma Moore

©Spring Pictures (SF)
Limited & Film London
Production Companies
Film London presents
a Spring Pictures
production
A Microwave
Film produced in
association with BBC
Films and Kent County
Council Film Office

A Spring Pictures
production
A film by Frances Lea

CAST

Anna Madeley
Gillian
Christine Bottomley
Emily
Emun Elliott
Kev
Jonathan Bonnici
Fabio
Florence Bell
Sammy
Jack Roth
Ewan
Vanessa Babirye
Sabrina
Philip Martin Brown
Bob
Susan Park
Jane

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

7,815 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Kent, present day. A young woman, Gillian, cycles through the countryside, ignoring her ringing mobile. Happening upon a strawberry farm that's hiring pickers, she gives her name as Tammy and takes up the offer of work. Another worker, Kev, is enthralled by her and makes advances. The two grow close as they work together.

Fellow picker Fabio answers the phone that Gillian has left unattended, and invites the caller to the farm. The caller, Emily, turns up at the farm in glamorous attire. She declares to the fruit pickers that Tammy is in fact Gillian, her sister, who has run away from home. The eccentric and unstable Emily immediately begins disrupting Kev and Gillian's romance and their relationships with the other farm workers. Emily pleads with Gillian to leave, tries to seduce Kev, and later claims that he attempted to rape her following an altercation. During an evening party on the nearby beach, Emily and Kev have aggressive sex following an argument, which Gillian witnesses. After a near-fatal physical struggle with her sister in a barn, Emily pours scalding water over herself. Gillian decides to leave both Kev and Emily.