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Save Yourselves!

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Save Yourselves!* (2020), directed by Alex Huston Fischer and Eleanor Wilson.

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.

Save Yourselves! (2020), dir. Alex Huston Fischer and Eleanor Wilson

Su (Sunita Mani) and Jack (John Reynolds) are a young Brooklyn couple who are on their phones constantly, much like many of us today—and again, much like many of us, they long in some indistinct way to "disconnect" and overcome their dependence on the internet. At the same time, they cannot even complete an intimate encounter without checking for the most recent posts. When their friend tells him that they can borrow his cabin outside the city to go for a tech-free week, they embrace the chance to find out "who they really are" by reconnecting with each other and the environment, and they promise to not access the internet. Unfortunately for them, aliens attack the Earth while they are disconnected.

There have been "end of the world" and/or alien invasion parodies before—Edgar Wright's *The World's End* (2013) comes to mind as a fine example, or Seth Rogen's *This is the End* (2013)—and in such films, the total ineptitude and unpreparedness of the protagonists to survive the disaster is the source of much of the humor. Here, Su and Jack have no real skills that would

be useful in a post-apocalyptic scenario such as using an ax, shooting a gun, or even starting a fire: never mind deciding on a strategy for how to combat aliens. And yet Su and Jack are determined planners, even in their ineptitude. Before they realize that they are under attack, when they are still enjoying their retreat, Su forces Jack to undergo self-discovery and goal-setting exercises that she has written down but which—yes, you guessed it—she found on the internet before leaving the city. He resists her control, desiring to "go with the flow" of their spontaneous week away, and yet once they have aliens to combat, they both need to become goal-oriented. In this way, the disaster proves a growth opportunity for them, which is usually the case in serious as well as comic disaster films. Mainly through luck and an occasional wise choice, they manage to survive and bond as a nascent family—even acquiring a spare baby along the way. That they do this almost entirely alone, however, bespeaks the internet era of disconnection from social bonds, so that their goals are achieved in their own isolated bubble (literally, as it turns out).

Mani and Reynolds are gifted comics who carry the film in their interaction, and they perfectly capture the anxiety many millennials have about finding purpose, and their excessive and yet largely ineffective focus on self-actualization. Su and Jack's attachment to technology and their discomfort with nature are also emblematic of our times, as they really don't understand the larger world—but as it turns out, this might actually be a benefit. Maybe we are all best off just trying to save ourselves and those closest to us? And yet they do care about the world, and resist the temptation to only "save themselves" even when this might be easier. It's not exactly clear what happens to humanity in this film, but Su and Jack's humanity is worth saving.