

# 'Ever After' ('Endzeit'): Film Review | TIFF 2018

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Courtesy of TIFF

*An enjoyably grim fairy tale that injects fresh life into the undead genre.* [TWITTER](#)

## The zombie apocalypse forms the backdrop to director Carolina Hellsgard's sci-horror road movie, which world premieres in Toronto.

Layering contemporary zombie apocalypse tropes over timeless gothic fairytale elements, *Ever After* is a superior German-language pulp thriller from the Berlin-based Swedish director Carolina Hellsgard. Chronicling the adventures of two mismatched twentysomething heroines on a quest to save the human race from extinction, or at least themselves, the screenplay was adapted by young German author and illustrator Olivia Vieweg from her own 2011 graphic novel.

World premiering in Toronto's Discovery strand, *Ever After* has more than enough emotional depth and conceptual chutzpah to transcend limiting genre labels. The splatter violence is fairly tame by modern gore standards, and the episodic narrative sags in places, but the ecological subtext and feminist folk-horror elements make this almost entirely female-driven road movie an agreeably fresh addition to the zombie canon. It certainly passes the Bechdel Test. Festival bookings should be healthy, with several strong hooks for potential theatrical interest.

The setting is a dystopian Europe of the near future, two years after a raging zombie plague has wiped out most of humanity. Only two cities in East Germany, Weimar and Jena, remain safe havens for the last surviving humans. In Weimar, newly infected zombies are immediately slaughtered without mercy. The Jena authorities take a more humane approach by trying to find a cure for plague victims. The vast rural no man's land between the cities is divided by miles of wire fencing and watchtowers. Echoes of the old Cold War border between East and West Germany, as well as Fortress Europe's current refugee anxieties, are surely not accidental.

Two young women, traumatized Vivi (Gro Swantje Kohlhof) and kick-ass zombie-slayer Eva (Maja Lehrer), become fractious travelling companions after fleeing Weimar to attempt the hazardous overland trip to Jena. When their antique self-driving train breaks down, the pair are forced to continue on foot, fighting off marauding mobs of zombies at irregular intervals. Both have personal reasons for risking life and limb, guilty secrets which only come to the surface through nightmarish flashbacks and painful shared confessions.

The lush, sunny, deceptively idyllic landscape that Vivi and Eva traverse takes on an increasingly folkloric feel as they encounter spooky abandoned castles, monstrous outcasts and cackling gargoyles in bridal gowns. We are definitely not in Kansas anymore. But potentially more dangerous is a witch-like stranger (Danish screen queen Trine Dyrholm) who welcomes the imminent extinction of humankind as Mother Nature's payback to our greedy, parasitic species. "We are unwelcome guests," she claims, "Earth is a wise old lady and humans haven't paid her any rent for too long." The garden of Eden is returning with a vengeance, purged of sinful humans.

*Ever After* has a jumpy stop-start plot that sometimes lacks focus. Some of the zombie make-up effects also look a little cheesy, while the open-ended finale will not satisfy genre fans expecting a more conventional orgy of flesh-chomping carnage. But taken on its own terms, Hellgard's second feature is a smart and stylish treat, with two engaging leads and plenty of fresh ideas. Incidentally, that Disney-sweet English-language title loses something in translation. The original German title *Endzeit* strikes a much more cataclysmic chord.

*Venue: Toronto International Film Festival (Discovery)*

*Production company: Grown Up Films*

*Cast: Gro Swantje Kohlhof, Maja Lehrer, Trine Dyrholm*

*Director: Carolina Hellsgard*

*Screenwriter: Olivia Vieweg*

*Cinematographer: Leah Striker*

*Editors: Ruth Schonegge, Julia Oehring*

*Producer: Claudia Schroter*

*Music: Franziska Henke*

*Sales company: Picture Tree, Berlin*

*90 minutes*

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