

DVD: The Fallen

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This war film is one of the strangest produced in a long time. Set in Northern Italy during the last days of the Second World War, The Fallen tells the story of three very different groups of soldiers; Italians, Germans and Americans. As it becomes more and more apparent that the war is coming to an end and that the men on the front line are being left to fend for themselves, an air of desperation and manipulation seeps through the ranks, with each man handling the situation in his own particular way.

At first, the camerawork and soundtrack give the impression of it being a late-70s production, but it soon transpires that it is simply a 21st Century movie shot on a shoestring budget. There's nothing wrong with that, plenty of decent films have been made with fuck-all money, but when the actors are also of bargain-bin quality, it becomes a problem. Films don't need to have 'name' actors, but any film needs actors who understand the fundamentals of performance. Unfortunately, The Fallen fails on this count.

Switching between English, Italian and German dialogue is a neat idea, and could have worked well if the American soldiers weren't such an unsympathetic bunch. If the film had focused solely on the German and Italian story threads, this would be a very different review, but writer-director Ari Taub's decision to focus on the Americans drags the whole film down. Neither their 'struggle' nor their characters are interesting, and it's telling that all of the actors used have since started everyday jobs; one of the leads is now a fishmonger, while another is a cop. The American cast behave like military re-enactors taking it to the next level, and are just not strong enough to carry the film.

Not only that, but the dialogue of their scenes is substandard when compared to the rest of the film. This is explained in one of the DVD special features when Taub admits that he brought in another writer to add a little something extra - the new guy's contribution being the extension of the Italian and German scenes. Perhaps if Taub has relinquished a little more control and handed over all writing duties, this film could have reached the heights it was aiming for.



On the other side of the coin, the foreign actors have created characters of massive depth and are criminally underused, particularly Thomas Pohn as Lt. Gunther and Carmine Raspaolo as Rossini, both of whom are noble bastards in the truest sense. One of the most affecting elements of the film is seeing the unspoken respect between the different groups of men. They know they have to kill each other, but they know it's just part of the job. That each has survived for as long as they have is an invisible badge of honour.

The Fallen is valiant effort, and it's got a lot of heart, but a recut and entirely foreign language version would have been far better.