

MOVIE REVIEW

Exists finds a *Blair Witch* alum failing at the genre he helped pioneer

By [Keith Uhlich](#) [@keithuhlich](#)
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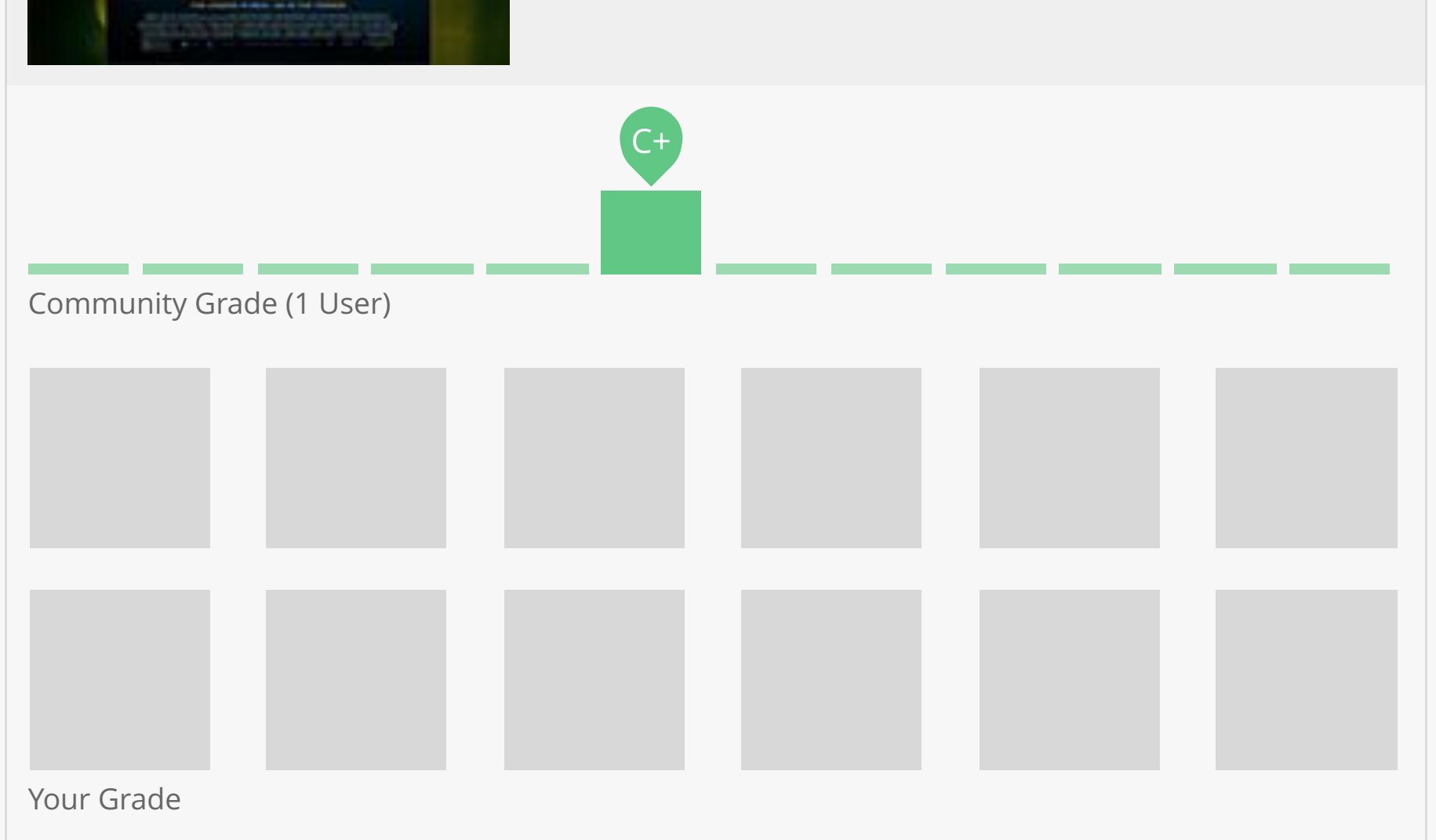
Exists

Director: Eduardo Sánchez

Runtime: 86 minutes

Rating: R

Cast: Chris Osborn, Samuel Davis, Brian Steele



It begins, as these things usually do, with a road trip. Three dudebros, Brian (Chris Osborn), Todd (Roger Edwards), and Matt (Samuel Davis), along with their lady friends Elizabeth (Denise Williamson) and Dora (Dora Madison Burge), head into the Texas sticks. Destination: a cabin in the woods. Tech-obsessed millennials that they are, the group comes armed with a massive quantity of GoPro cameras to document every aspect of the expedition, YouTube celebrity status sure to follow. So it appears they've hit the jackpot after their SUV smashes into an animal that eventually reveals itself to be a Sasquatch. But this isn't the kindly giant of *Harry And The Hendersons*; it's a relentlessly savage beast (played as a grunting, Val Lewton-esque shadow monster by Brian Steele) out for human blood.

Director Eduardo Sánchez is no stranger to found-footage horror filmmaking, having co-helmed 1999's highly influential *The Blair Witch Project*. To his credit, he can still conjure a palpably tense atmosphere using little more than offscreen sounds and half-glimpsed silhouettes. The callow protagonists replay footage of the accident and there is plenty of "Look! Right there! What's that moving in the corner?" Several audience members will no doubt plug their ears in anticipation of the numerous "stinger" scares Sánchez

employs. Sometimes it's just the pot-addled Brian having a little freak-'em-out fun. Other times it's Sasquatch himself, throwing some predatory shade in night-vision close-ups.

It's fun to be scared, but it'd be nice if the human meat were more interesting. The ladies are cowering screamers and the men overgrown infants, none of whom behave in any genuinely surprising way. They're shallow characters shallowly conceived (courtesy of the derivative screenplay by Jamie Nash), and this wreaks havoc with the story's zeitgeist subtext, which basically amounts to a disingenuous cri de coeur against humanity's perpetually plugged-in culture, casting Bigfoot as a kind of Luddite avenger. Put down the cameras and save your soul, but, you know, be sure to film it all first.

A number of movies use monsters as metaphors for larger ills, but *Exists* works best when it's just offering up cheap thrills to match its intentionally (if still shoddily) cheap look. Despite the off-putting amateur-cam aesthetic, there are two particularly well-done suspense sequences, one involving the cabin's hidden basement (site of a reverse-*Evil Dead* encounter), the other an abandoned RV that goes toppling into a chasm à la the cliffhanger centerpiece of Steven Spielberg's *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*. And having made a horror film that's barely 80 minutes without the credits, Sánchez should be lauded for not wasting too much of his audience's time. It feels strange to be so dismissive about someone who once commanded wide attention (however much as a fluke) with an indie blockbuster that effectively birthed a lucrative mainstream genre. But Sánchez, sadly, is now a pretender to his own throne.

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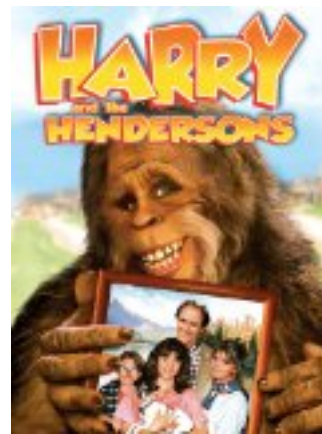


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