

## Cheap Seats & Sticky Floors

film reviews



By Matt Mosley  
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Since there haven't been any appealing mainstream films in the past two weeks, my eyes, ears and brain have spent some time in downtown Philly, fully emerged in the thought-provoking world of independent cinema. It's a world which I try to frequent at least every other week. One of the lit-

tle pearls I was lucky to find in the big oyster called The Ritz Theater, was the Sundance Film Festival hit, *Dark Days*.

Shot on beautiful black and white reversal film, *Dark Days* is a small scale documentary that unveils a homeless community who make their humble abode in the tunnels of New York City's Penn Station.

British director Marc Singer should be commended for his dedication to *Dark Days*. He spent two years in the tunnels shooting and socializing in an attempt to get his film made. The product of his dedication is a film that is as socially potent as it is engaging.

Singer has chosen to focus on a cross-section of people that make up what I like

to call "the homeless elite." These people aren't the typical homeless that we see everyday on the streets of our major cities. I don't mean to make their lives sound nice, but they live in a "homeless suburbia." Not only do they live in "homes" (shanties built with old wood and metal sheets), but they have working electricity and creative home security devices. It is fascinating to see what modern conveniences these people have taken from the garbage and put to use. They have stoves, toasters, lamps, TVs and even heaters that get power from the Amtrak lines. Much of the film shows these conveniences being put to use. It's an amazing, eye-opening thing to see.

Besides the homes, what really stands out in *Dark Days* is the photography. By using the existing light, with the occasional help of a mounted spotlight, Singer has given the film an eerie quality that provides a sense of the bleak, dark place these people inhabit. There is also a wonderful metaphor

used; scavenging tunnel rats are juxtaposed against the daily lives of the people. It's images such as these that really make *Dark Days* come alive.

*Dark Days* isn't a perfect film by any means. It does have one main flaw, and that is its characterization. The film focuses more on communal relationships than on individual character studies. This approach sacrifices any emotional involvement for the viewer. There are so many characters that we never really get to know any one individually. Nevertheless, *Dark Days* is a fascinating and poignant film, and should not be missed. Look for it on home video in the upcoming months.

# DARK DAYS

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