Progress the Webseries

Official Teaser

Lisa Finch

The teaser video for "Progress the Webseries," produced by Armando Saldanamora and Nicole Wright, makes me anxiously await its ten upcoming episodes. Meticulous attention to detail in its technical devices and believable characters help create suspense. Oscar Lerwill (played by Ben Whalen), expert computer hacker of the Victorian era, uncovers files posted by Jack the Ripper. He learns that the next victim will be his love interest, cam-harlot Lila DeClide (Rebecca Lynch). Enigmatic foil character, Adam Rhett (Derek Houck), delights not only in computer wizardry, but also in playing mind games with Oscar. What does Adam stand to gain from this? Viewers are left to ponder this and bigger questions. Can Oscar save Lila? What is he willing to risk?

The teaser uses several cinematographic techniques to create a chilling tale. It opens with synchronous sound: steam, chugging machines, film rolling, a Victorian computer. This fades, and we see a corpse; the image jumps across the screen. Then the camera pulls away revealing the back of Oscar's head. I love the intensity here; it shows us what to fear, sets the scene, but doesn't immediately show us Oscar's face. Is this an allusion to the typical client/cam-harlot anonymity? Oscar tells Lila, "You're Jack the Ripper's next

target." The next scene reveals just the cloak and gleaming knife of Jack and one of his victims. The lighting effect on the knife is excellent. Equally impressive is the low key lighting used throughout the teaser to create a dark, brooding mood. Fast motion technique is used when Oscar works feverishly on his computer. A sense of urgency prevails. The use of breaks between scenes provides a dramatic effect, giving us glimpses of the scene before moving onto the next. Graphics loom across the screen: A K1LLER ON TH3 LOOSE. It's the attention to even these smallest details (the number 1 replacing the "I" , the number 3 replacing the "e") which makes this teaser so well produced. Every technique used lends itself to the overall effect; nothing is wasted. Behind the words, we see gears and levers, a steampunker's delight.

I like the change in pace when the scene dissolves into the drawing of Oscar enveloped in steam, amidst an explosion. Another break, and we see Adam and Lila. The blocking here is brilliant. First we see him shot from the back and her face and then as the dialogue switches, so does the point of view. A close up adds tension as we just aren't sure how close she should get to Adam. She asks coquettishly, "Did you send the file?" He assures her he did not. She leans in, "Do you swear?" Here is where everything changes. He says, "Problem fair maiden?" The shot pulls back, clearly showing her disdain and repugnancy for him. She backs up. The music stops abruptly, her face changes. The mood changes. We have one final break and this one is longer, adding to the suspense. Lila comes on film pleading for her life. The film fades in and out as if it's coming off its reel: and we are left with a sense of her desperation and fear.

The acting is excellent, the characters believable. Ben Whalen is the likeable hero. He's the expert computer hacker, yet he also manages to be the boy next door. He is smitten by the lovely Lila DeClide, and I found myself rooting for him, hoping he will win her love. We see his dedication as he tries to get the computer running and keep it running. It's the key to information that will save Lila. Rebecca Lynch plays the fetching prostitute well, the girl who knows how to primp for the camera, thus enticing her clients. She plays this to the hilt in every moment, every movement. We see a glimpse of the real Lila when she is in danger, first when Oscar warns her and then next when she is grabbed and then finally with her plea. Derek Houck's character strikes me as part clown, part chameleon, mostly charlatan. He's polished and polite. Maybe too much. Lynch shows us this when she backs away from him. Although what he says to her is proper, even polite, it's the *way* he says it that repulses her. Something is very wrong here.

Despite how much I like the teaser, it does have a few problems. For one thing, I find Oscar's reaction from smiling at Lila's image to suddenly being concerned for her, too abrupt. I think a break is needed here, since they were done so effectively elsewhere. Just a brief break would cue us to a change in what Oscar sees. Having seen the first four scripts, I understand exactly what's happening here. But I have to wonder, will the audience? Also, I could not make out what Lila says in her plea. "To all…something [perhaps "lads" but it was never clearly audible]…" I watched the teaser several times and never did decipher what she said.

Lastly, the teaser leaves me with a nagging question. Will the

viewers understand the significance of the line, "Would you risk your freedom?" Without having read the script, probably not. It needs another visual, something, to make it clear why Oscar's freedom is at stake. Despite these small matters, it does nothing to deter my need to watch for the web series with great anticipation.

The teaser does exactly what it should do; it makes me want more. Production is expected to start in the spring, episodes to be released every two weeks. For more information about the series and how you can connect through Facebook and Twitter, and keep abreast of all the Progress news, check out www.progresstheseries.com

Lisa Finch was given the first four scripts of the Progress and a download of the official teaser for a fair and honest review. Neither she nor eSteampunk was promised anything in return.