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Notez Horror Metal Scallywagz Morgue Rantz Pix Linx Contax



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GRADE CODES

A+	= A Classic
A	= Outstanding
A-	= Great
B+	= Very Good
B	= Good
B-	= Above Average
C+	= Average
C	= Okay
C-	= Below Average
D-	= Poor
D	= Very Poor
D-	= Sucks
F	= Crap

PENANCE

2009 ~ Director: Jake Kennedy



The "Inspired By True Events" tagline to sell films, if you excuse the pun, help make a killing in the home video market. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Deranged*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Last House on the Left*, and *The Girl Next Door* are just a mere smattering of films that have used this tagline, and has worked immensely. People just love to believe the most outrageous stories committed to film....provided that those stories are filled with sex and violence. And who doesn't like a little of that every now and then. Well, another film has tripped down the horror pike in the form of the Jake Kennedy directed *Penance*, released by Independent Media Distribution.

Good-hearted Amelia (Marieh Delfino) is in desperate need of quick cash to uphold her business helping the community. Her stripper friend Suzie (Eve Mauro) offers up the chance to strip to pay her mounting bills. While definitely not in her character, she concedes. While not comfortable, she does rake in the cash. Eve informs her of a job that she must do for her after an incident involving her face and a man's fist; and its promises a big payday. What Amelia is succumbed to is a judge of her faith and honesty, and whether living with a lie is worth financial satisfaction.

Shot in *Blair Witch* style, *Penance* already feels like a tired film. We've seen it all before....shaky camerawork, talking into the camera, fuzzy zooms-the works. And even with the tremendous added abilities of Michael Rooker, Tony Todd, and James Duval (the last two being extremely brief) they don't add much. Rooker as Mann is hypnotizing at times. But just not enough to carry this production. Don't blame him though, he's only working with what he's got. Its also a morality tale seen from the bad guy's point of view; which gives it a bit of a twist. the POV gets muddled as we can't really tell which is from the video camera's shot and the filmmakers. The gore is what you would expect from a film like this. And the nudity is nice too -It would have to be with strippers involved!

The DVD presentation is crisp and clear with 5.1 Surround Sound. Extras include behind the scenes, making of, interviews, alternate endings, featurette of how to strip (!), deleted scenes, and commentaries.

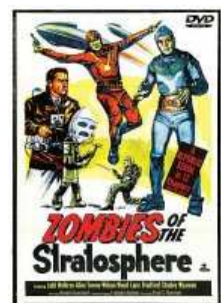
Penance offers absolutely nothing new in the way of.....ugh, I hate saying this.....torture porn. But it does try. *Penance* does get ugly from moment to moment, but you can catch better sequences in films like *Hostel*.

C+

-Rabid Rich

ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE

1952 ~ Director: Fred C. Brannon



Man, you gotta love these old serials from the 1950's (serials being short films about 13-15 minutes long that played before the feature film in any number of chapters). Moreso than from the 30's or 40's cuz most of them dealt with either a western or gangster motif. We all know that shit can be boring. But the 50's gave us weapons of the atomic age. All things big became small and visa versa, and all points in-between. Science fiction was up and rolling with robots and laser guns! And the serials were not unaware of this new genre. One such serial, *Zombies of the Stratosphere*, played up to this new breed of genre in 1952. And Cheezy Flicks has brought this sci-fi find to DVD directed by Fred C. Brannon.

The plot is really simple. Apparently, the planet Mars is getting away from the sun. Leader Marex (Lane Bradford) goes to Earth to inform the humans (a small band of them---about 5) that they plan to swap Earth's orbit for Mars' so they can enjoy a peaceful existence; in exchange for allowing them to live on Mars. The only way to have this accomplished is for Marex and his two henchmen (one being Narab-played by a young Leonard Nimoy!) to create an H-Bomb strong enough to move the Earth out of its orbit and into Mars'. Now the only reason why they are complying to this move is to prevent foreign countries to find out about their plan to control the world. Sort of a "best of two evils" scenario. But to save the day is our hero "Rocketman" Larry Martin, (Judd Holdren). A man who wears a flight suit with dials on the front to control his movements.

Zombies of the Stratosphere, while honestly speaking is the first serial I've actually viewed, I can tell there is better out there. But *Zombies of the Stratosphere* is a whole lotta fun. The poor acting, ridiculous script, inane set, and best of all (though a constant in serials) the outrageous ways our hero can escape from the most dire of circumstances. To quote Annie Wilkes in *Misery*-- "Are you kidding me? Have you all got amnesia? They just cheated us! This isn't fair! HE DIDN'T GET OUT OF THE COCK-A-DOODIE CAR!!!!!!!!!!".

And many times, Rocketman didn't. But somehow, he finds a way. The series is consisted mostly of fights of both guns and fist (nary a hat to be forced of someone's head from a punch), and its not boring. Just always waited for the first hat to be falling on the ground. Consider this to be true cheese! *Zombies of the Stratosphere* was re-released in 1958 in a 70 minute cut; taking out the recaps and other material to make a tighter cut. The second film in an unintended trilogy, this series wasn't very well received by critics or audiences alike.

The series is full frame with a nice crisp picture. The sound however is a bit of a problem. I had to turn the volume up to 80 to get a good sound out of it. There are intermissions, brief history of Cheezy Flicks, other titles from said company, and a trailer. Other than the sound, an all around good package. Oh yeah, its also nice that Cheezy Flicks used the original theatrical art for this release.

Zombies of the Stratosphere is mindless entertainment, nothing more--nothing less. Just sit back and enjoy. One more thing...one has to wonder whether or not actor Lane Bradford actually knew how to pronounce the word "robot". Just thought I'd throw that out there!

B -Rabid Rich



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