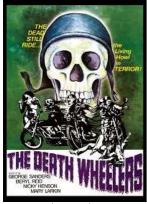


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Death Wheelers, The

REVIEWED BY: Wolfboy Posted on 30/07/2013



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A motorcycle gang calling themselves The Living Dead terrorise the small English village where they live. Unbeknownst to them, their leader Tom Latham (Nicky Henson) belongs to a family with an ancient and abiding connection to the occult. He pressures his mother (Beryl Reid) and her mysterious servant Shadwell (George Sanders*) into revealing the secret of immortality. Calling on their pact with the Devil**, he and his followers can become immortal if they kill themselves in the certain belief that they'll be resurrected.

The Death Wheelers (originally released as "Psychomania" - a title which makes no sense whatsoever) was critically panned on its original release. While it's no high-brow fare, and a good part of its charm is due to its status as a time-capsule of 70s low-budget kitsch, I do think the original critics missed a trick here. Nicky Henson is a great villainous leading man, exuding a sort of aristocratic and brutal charm that is simultaneously attractive and unnerving. George Sanders is also wonderful as Shadwell. Ted Moore's cinematography is full of psychedelic flourishes and atmospheric shots of standing stones in fog and the soundtrack is a great piece of 70s psychedelia/funk that was recently rereleased by Spoke Records.

The film is a sort of hybrid of the classic "outlaw biker" cheapies, and the British High Weirdness style of horror exemplified by the original The Wicker Man. The bikers are pretty quaint and tame by the standards of American biker movies (the worst they manage pre-Satanic-resurrection is to wreck a supermarket) but that ends up being part of the charm. The occult elements are carried off more convincingly in a largely naturalistic (again, very 70s) style. I found it particularly interesting that the final conflict was not between Good and Evil, but between those Satanists willing to live a quiet life, and those bent on world domination.

The only letdown is the car chase sequences. There are a few of these and (while they may well have been thrilling in 1973) they tend to drag on for a modern viewer. The film has also not been well cared-for prior to its shift to DVD, and the audio has particularly suffered, with persistent hiss throughout as well as a number of crackles, drop-outs and distortions.

If you can handle less-than-perfect sound and picture (and you're willing to wait out the car chases in the hopes of more George Sanders) I'd highly recommend The Death Wheelers. If you have a love of vintage British horror or 70s kitsch, then you should definitely check it out.

*He was the voice of Shere Khan in the Disney Jungle Book amongst many other things. This was his last film before his suicide.

**It's not actually clear whether the entity in question is Satan, some other demon in the form of a toad or an older toad-deity with pre-Christian origins, I've said Satan/the Devil in the course of this review largely one the basis of the blurb on the DVD box - there's really nothing in the film to indicate one way or the other.

DISC DETAILS:

DIRECTOR(S): Don Sharp | COUNTRY: USA | YEAR 1973 | DISTRIBUTOR(S): MVD Visual / Cheezy Flicks | RUNNING TIME: 85 minutes | ASPECT RATIO: 4:3 | REGION: 1 / NTSC | DISCS: 1

EXTRAS:

"Also from Cheezy Flicks" trailer reel.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING:

- The Wicker Man
- Satan's Sadists
- Angel Unchained / Cycle Savages
- Devil's Angels
- Savage Cinema (12 Movie Collection)

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