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Case Number 19523



Lights Camera Dead

SRS Cinema // 2007 // 77 Minutes // Not Rated
Reviewed by Judge Daniel Carlton // August 20th, 2010

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Judge Daniel Carlton warns, even in rigor mortis, the camera adds ten pounds.

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The Charge

How far would you go to make a movie?

Opening Statement

Tim Reaper's **Lights Camera Dead** is a labor of love with heartfelt intentions to be funny and exciting, but fails to rise to the level of humor and horror it was hoping for. The jokes are dry and the gore is sparse, making this film difficult to sit through.

Facts of the Case

Independent filmmaker Ryan Black wants nothing more than to create a good horror film. With help of his assistant Steven, the two assemble a cast and crew to shoot his creation *The Music Box*. Starring in the lead role is Kari, Ryan's girlfriend, who has little to no game when it comes to acting. After Ryan makes demands she can't handle, Kari quits the picture and the disgruntled crew follows immediately thereafter. With no other choice, Steven and Ryan go to extreme lengths to finish their film by devising a plot to kill members of the cast on film, thus providing some authentic scares for their picture.

The Evidence

Tim Reaper writes and directs **Lights Camera Dead**, an independent film low in production quality, but high in its earnest intentions. I admire the fact that a group of friends can get together and make a feature-length film, as this is not an easy task. Lamentably, I can't muster up more compliments, because it was just too hard to watch; not simply because it was shot on VHS, but because the pacing and humor is so excruciatingly flat. I will admit that I'm a hard judge when it comes to most comedies, but the slapstick humor in **Lights Camera Dead** was too bland even for my tastes. This is coming from a person who thinks **Whoops, I'm An Indian!** by The Three Stooges is a cinematic masterpiece.

Lights Camera Dead works as a treatment—an aspiring young director tries to make a horror film, but numerous complications on the shoot bring the production to a halt. The two directors stage a hokey premiere with the cast and crew so that they can murder the attendees and capture their demise on film, thereby obtaining the shots they need to finish the picture. That actually sounds like an interesting film. Unfortunately, the finished picture lacks the focus to tell this story in an engaging manner. Instead, the tale plods along with virtually no suspense, little gore and dialogue that either wasn't funny, or delivered by unfunny people. For example, an audition scene comprised of Reaper's friends seems to go on forever. We've all seen films where people intentionally act terrible and needless to say, the actors here could not pull it off. I was wondering if the eight minute scene would ever end and I found myself looking at the clock only to see that I was thirteen minutes into the film.

In the next scene, we are treated to a bloody tampon joke (complete with prop) and viewers shortly thereafter get a full dose of potty humor from a guy sitting on a toilet farting. The commentary states this scene was inserted only because that actor had to be at work on the day of the actual shoot. Really? The filmmakers would rather write an extraneous scene into the film than shoot around one of the actor's work schedule? I understand that some films work on an unbelievably small scale, but I would hope that scenes are added because the filmmaker thinks it is necessary. These two scenes sum up the film, in that some are completely unnecessary while the ones important to the story are poorly executed.



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Scales of Justice

Video:	50
Audio:	70
Extras:	75
Acting:	50
Story:	75
Judgment:	50

Perp Profile

Studio: [SRS Cinema](#)
Video Formats:
 • 1.85:1 Anamorphic
Audio Formats:
 • Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo (English)
Subtitles:
 • None
Running Time: 77 Minutes
Release Year: 2007
MPAA Rating: Not Rated
Genres:
 • [Comedy](#)
 • [Horror](#)

Distinguishing Marks

- Commentaries
- Short Film

Accomplices

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I know this isn't saying much, but the most admirable part of the film is the DVD cover art; clearly a throwback to Lucio Fulci's **Zombie** and cool enough to garner my attention. Unlike **Zombie** however, **Lights Camera Dead** has zero tension or scares whatsoever. Those hoping to be rewarded with some gratuitous violence will be disappointed, as the level of gore is minimal and what does take place doesn't occur until well into the film. I might be more lenient, if the whole feel of the film didn't have a by-friends-for-friends tone to it and maybe had some tighter editing, although that would make the short running time even shorter.

As far as extras, there is a good amount of bonus features to feast your eyes and ears on. Fans are treated to two audio commentaries, one by actor Richard Christy and the other by the director Tim Reaper, actor Monica Moehring, composer Mean Gene, and executive producer Jonathan Straiton. The filmmakers' track is light-hearted and the cast and crew clearly had a blast making the picture, but the commentary isn't especially professional as there as many spots of dead silence and we can hear friends entering and leaving the screening room. Not especially bothersome because it blended with the quality of the rest of the picture. The Richard Christy track only lasts for the one scene including Christy and that might be a good thing because he clearly doesn't know what to talk about. I actually found his track amusing because he's just trying to think of things to say, like when he learned to spin a drumstick or referring to the line about Vikings. Incidentally, I did find Richard Christy's scene in the film to be funniest in the film, even if the scene wasn't necessary to begin with.

Also included in the extras are a few trailers and the short film *The Music Box*; 17 minutes in length and, like **Lights Camera Dead**, extremely hard to get through. The film opens with a fat guy's hand being put in a vice and then removed with a saw. Mind you, just implied gore at that. After the opening credits, the story shifts to one of a girl buying a music box, which looks remarkably like the Book of the Dead, and then goes on for fifteen grueling minutes. By this time, I was hard pressed to pay attention to whatever story was going on.

Closing Statement

I don't enjoy writing harsh reviews, especially for low budget films because I know that much work and many hours went into a picture such as this. But in the end, **Lights Camera Dead** feels like a home movie made by a friend who isn't as funny as he thinks he is. This is an honest effort by Tim Reaper, but the pacing and humor just killed it. For a horror film with a comedic tilt, this didn't deliver.




The Verdict

Guilty.

You, The Jury...



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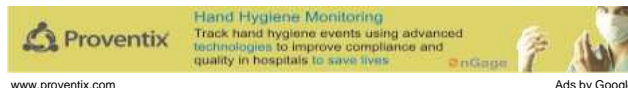
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