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LIGHTS CAMERA DEAD

Rating: ★★★

USA. 2007.

Director/Special Effects/Makeup Effects – Tim Reaper, Screenplay – Monica Reaper & Tim Reaper, Producer – Mean Gene, Photography – Jonathan Straiton, Music – Mean Gene of Pitbull Productions, Mask & Music Boxes – Davis Bradley. Production Company – Aisthesis Productions/White Lightning Productions/Duke Studios.

Cast:

Wes Reid (Ryan Black), J.C. Lira (Steven Didymus), Amy Lollo (Kari Price), Monica Moehring (Melanie), Coldon Martin (Ted), Garrett Weeda (Patrick), Scott Johnson (Alan), John Patton (Redneck), Hunter White (Editor)

Plot: *Ryan Black is making a low-budget horror film 'The Music Box' about two girls who accidentally conjure a demonic force. But everything is going wrong on the shoot. Most of the cast and crew, including Ryan's girlfriend Kari, walk out after he has an angry tirade about their ineptitude. But as they try to put the finished film together, the editor gives up on the lack of worthwhile material he has, whereupon Ryan and his co-writer Steven attack and kill him. Realizing how filmable this would have been, they have an idea. They invite the cast and crew to the premiere of the film at a remote farmhouse. But there Steven appears in the demon's mask and attacks the various members of the crew as Ryan films this, staging each killing for the best potential set-up on screen.*

Lights Camera Dead is the first film from Aisthesis Productions, a company of newcomers from Virginia. The production was put together by director Tim Reaper and his wife Monica (who also plays the role of the actress who is hired for her chest measurements under the name Monica Moehring). Aisthesis have announced plans to make further horror films and on the basis of *Lights Camera Dead* show a considerable promise.

Lights Camera Dead comes with an appealing meta-premise – it is a low-budget horror film made by novice filmmakers about the making of a low-budget horror film by novices who turn their efforts into a real-life horror movie. It's a premise that makes one think of the level of meta-fictional referentiality that came in [Scream](#) (1996). Or perhaps even more than *Scream* of [Incident at Loch Ness](#) (2004), which kept up a constant level of play between documentary filmmakers, the attempt to fake the appearance of the monster and appearances of the real monster.

The film sets in particularly amusingly from the opening scene where the director (Wes Reid) and writer (J.C. Lira) attempt to cast their film and we pass through a montage of audition scenes that include an actor who emotes everything with melodramatic overemphasis, another that does with no expression, another who thinks he is auditioning for a porn film to a white homeboy trying to fit things around his parole appearances – “Nephilim, ain’t that when you fuck dead people and shit? I’m a crazy-ass white boy but I had those thoughts a few times.” The wry characterizations, as much of the auditioning actors as of the director and writer, come with a clever deadpan humour that constantly plays around the edges of the scene. The subsequent scenes where they are attempting to

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shoot the film, but things constantly gets thrown awry by the inpetitudes of the crew and the men fawning over the women is hilarious – and is especially clever for the fact that Tim Reaper manages to pack so many wry throwaway pieces into scenes that come via handheld camerawork. Equally funny is the scene where Amy Lollo gets a series of visions of Wes Reid imprecating her to open the envelope.

The film becomes even funnier as the bodies start piling up. Like the first murder where they attack the editor (Hunter White) and then Wes Reid stands over calmly reflecting: “He’s dead. We killed him. And all I can think is how good that would look on film.” There are hilarious scenes like where Wes Reid wants writer J.C. Lira to hold the camera so that he can conduct a director’s cameo that ends up in an argument as Lira protests “But you’re not an established character.” Or where redneck passerby John Patton finds Wes Reid pretending to lie bloodied on the road and asks if he can help only for Wes Reid to get up and ask him: “Can you say “The Nephilim’s quest to partake of human flesh will commence under the blood red sky”?” only to get a puzzled response, “Well, can you at least just say “The Nephilim is near”?” which receives an indignant outburst from screenwriter J.C. Lira on the sideline “That’s not the line.” The film ends with the director and screenwriter hacking each other to pieces in a dispute over screen credit and the surviving heroine (Amy Lollo) going on to claim the film as her own, sitting down to watch the premiere surrounded by the corpses of the crew.

Though it is a low-budget production by industry amateurs, *Lights Camera Dead* is shot, directed and acted with a high degree of professionalism. One minor complaint is that, while the film sells itself with the line “less bore ... more gore,” it is relatively restrained in the gore department, apart from one scene where Monica Moehring gets her intestines torn out. One must also commend the clever opening credits sequence where the cast and crew’s names appear on tapes and labels attached to film and makeup equipment, even storyboards. The end credits insert a peculiar credit for ‘[Star Wars](#) [1977] Historians’.

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