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NO-BUDGET NIGHTMARES: NIGHT OF THE TENTACLES (2012)

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Dustin Mills made a splash a couple of years back with his all-puppet horror film THE PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE, and he’s obviously been busy since – first with the horror comedy ZOMBIE A-HOLE and now with his Faustian horror film NIGHT OF THE TENTACLES. While treading some well-worn territory – there’s more than a hint of LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS and big references to the 80s work of Frank Henenlotter like BASKET CASE and BRAIN DAMAGE – TENTACLES gleefully dives into the blackly comic possibilities of bargaining with the devil, and with having to feed a creature thirsty for blood. It gets a bit repetitive as it goes along, but a winning lead performance and a commitment to bad-taste helps propel it through its slower moments.

In this case the creature isn’t a giant plant or a deformed twin or a symbiotic endorphin-producing slug: it’s a human heart. You see, graphic artist Dave (Brandon Salkil) spends most of his days drawing alien jizz and jerking off to his downstairs neighbor until, during one particularly enthusiastic wank session, his heart gives out. Facing impending death, Dave is visited by Satan who offers him a replacement heart in exchange for his immortal soul. Of course, David doesn’t read the fine print and soon he’s the not-so-proud owner of a bloodthirsty, tentacle-spewing heart-monster that requires twice weekly feedings. Surrounded by plenty of despicable potential victims, David sends a few to the slaughter while attempting to bond with his sweet, pregnant neighbor.



And it doesn’t really get much more complicated than that. While Aylmer in BRAIN DAMAGE was an obvious analogue for drug addiction, Dave fits a bit better into the nebbish shoes of Seymour from LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS. He’s a self-described loser, and it’s only with his new “responsibility” that he finds the confidence to take control of

his life, and the eventual ending shows that his emotional growth allows him to make a noble – even heroic – decision. Of course, a few people have to die first, but who cares? They were dicks anyway.

Mills – who also writes – cleverly keeps the heart creature mostly hidden until the end of the film. Until then we mostly get quick shots of (occasionally CG) tentacles sliding towards (and occasionally through) their victims. The heart also directly speaks to David with a particularly bad English accent, attempting to reason with him even as his bloodlust rapidly grows. And I mean RAPIDLY – the entire events of the film seem to take place over a few days. The eventual reveal of the “creature” is a bit underwhelming, but its darting eyeball – which gets a few effective closeups – helps to off-set its rather stationary look.



Almost the entire film takes place in David’s apartment, but it’s a testament to Mills’ growing skill as a director that it manages not to feel claustrophobic, instead making great comic use of the limited space. Acting is solid across the board – but it’s Salkil who carries the film. He’s in almost every frame, and he manages to stay surprisingly amiable – even while (indirectly) murdering his landlord and oversexed neighbors. When his dialogue gets a bit more introspective it’s a little harder to buy, but that might just be a reality of a film which already has quite a cynical worldview.

NIGHT OF THE TENTACLES doesn’t quite reach the filthy heights of its inspirations, but it’s also more than a modern imitation of those Grindhouse classics. Dustin Mills makes the most of his limited resources, and while the gross-out gags don’t always land, there’s plenty of goofy fun to be had – and smatterings of gore and nudity for those that enjoy that sort of thing. Like me. While not as visually impressive as Mills’ breakthrough film, TENTACLES shows a refreshing commitment to low-budget thrills, and succeeds beyond the promise of its lurid title.



TWO NIGHTMARES OUT OF FIVE - SHOCKING SUCCESS

ONE NIGHTMARE - NO-BUDGET PERFECTION, TWO NIGHTMARES - SHOCKING SUCCESS, THREE NIGHTMARES - SHOWS POTENTIAL, FOUR NIGHTMARES - NOT MUCH FUN, FIVE NIGHTMARES - PLEASE KILL ME

CHECK OUT MY INTERVIEW WITH NIGHT OF THE TENTACLES DIRECTOR DUSTIN MILLS COMING SOON