

Indie Horror Films

All genres of suspense, terror, and horror will be reviewed by Richard Gary. His address to send preview copies supplied upon request to rbf55@msn.com.

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DVD Review: Night of the Tentacles

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Night of the Tentacles

Written and directed by Dustin Mills

MVD Visual

90 minutes, 2011 / 2013

[Facebook.com/DustinMillsProductions](https://www.facebook.com/DustinMillsProductions)

MVDvisual.com

I admit it. Dustin Millis is becoming one of my favorite indie \$2 budget horror film directors lately. Yep, he's the guy who brought us the wonderfully moniker'd *The Puppet Monster Massacre* (2010; reviewed [HERE](#)) and *Zombie A-Hole* (2012; reviewed [HERE](#)). Like early Cronenberg, Raimi and Craven, each film shows enormous growth as a filmmaker. I'm looking forward to seeing his most recent release, *Bath Salt Zombies* (2013)

But I jump ahead. Let's discuss the film at hand. True to form, there are a few consistencies that seems to run throughout a Dustin Mills film. First, there's Brandon Salkil (as Dave), who in body or voice has been present as a lead across the board. This is hardly surprising, because he is (a) handsome in the Bruce Campbell mode (more on that later), and (b) can easily run the gamut of subtle acting to over the top in a split second, and makes it work.

A second recurring theme is lots of nudity, sex, tattoos and piercings. Both men and women tend to be unconventional beauties, but still carry off a certain charm when necessary. A good example is the lead love interest, Nicole Gerity (as Esther), with white peroxide hair, skin ink, and multiple piercings in her face. And yet there is an obvious charm about her that doesn't make it seem like an odd pairing with Dave. Oh, did I mention that Esther is also in her third trimester?

Then there is gore. Lots and lots of gore. Some of it is digi, but Mills also mixes in appliances and prosthetics that sometimes looks real and other times not, but in the overall feel of the film, again, it all works. Hey, remember those fakey looking stop-motion demons at the end of *Evil Dead* (1981)?

And then there are the puppets. Yes, even in the live action films, there are plenty of costumes and puppetry that comes into play. But again, I'll explain more of that later.

So, plot-wise, we are introduced to lonely apartment dweller Dave, who makes a living as a graphic artist for alien porn boxes and posters, and has a hidden crush on Esther, who lives directly below his

Blog Archive

- ▼ 2013 (7)
 - ▼ April (1)
 - DVD Review: Night of the Tentacles
 - February (3)
 - January (3)
- 2012 (27)

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space. He also has a cute dog named Charley (Dustin's real dog, named, of course, Charley). Apparently, Dave possesses a bum ticker and is in need of a new one, i.e., he's just about a goner. But who shows up in his flat but the devil, offering him a heart in exchange for...well, you know the drill. Problem is, it's not in his chest cavity, as he's loth to find out, but rather it's a tentacled, cycloptical monster with four sharp-pointed tentacles that lives in a wooden box. Of course, it also needs to feed on two people per week in order to survive.

A question that comes to mind at this point is as follows: when does a film that is a collection of *homages* become original in its own right? There are many themes and images that come from other sources, but the film still retains a feel of originality. Here are some examples.

Of course, the whole sell your soul to the devil with regret is right out of the German *Faust* legend (first published in 1587). Dave's not reading the "fine print" has been used before, as well, with other Faust-based comedy films, such as *Bedazzled* (1967, 2000). However, the biggest Faustian story of recent time is also heavily referenced, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960, 1986). In fact, the first line of the heart is "Feed me." Note that the heart in this film sounds much more fey than did the demanding and menacing Levi Stubbs (d. 2008). There's also a bit of *Evil Dead* in here, too, especially with the facial expressions made by Salkil that are right out of the Bruce Campbell / Ash playbook. Salkil is really great at it (it's that overlay I was mentioning earlier). I cannot forget to mention the nod to *Basket Case* (1982), with the evil other part of the hero living in a box and slithering out to kill. Heck, Mills even borrows from himself, with the thumping lovers next door named Iggy and Mona, the names of similarly entangled lovers from his own *The Puppet Monster Massacre* (thought no one would notice, Dustin?)

Dustin definitely seems to be becoming more comfortable in the filmmaking craft. He has a good eye for lighting, both natural, added, and atmosphere. The use of garish, almost neon shades of green and red work with the mood of the moment, rather than indicating what the viewer is supposed to feel. His editing is also becoming stronger, as most scenes are cut back and forth between characters, rather than letting the camera linger. Unless, of course it is intended that way, such as a long shot when a drunken Dave has a conversation with an off-screen devil (during the commentary, the reason for the lack of on-camera Satan made me laugh).

It's pretty obvious that most of the actors on this film are not professionals, but then again, every single one carries their role solidly, even when the call is for over-the-top (such as Salkil's hilarious "What the fuck" when he sees the heart for the first time). It's all part of an independent and humorous horror film.

Yes, there are definitely some cheesy moments. For me, the biggest is when you finally get to see the heart in all its gory... I mean glory. Honestly, it looks silly, sort of like a fuzzy toaster cozy. But I am so willing to forgive that because, well, this film is such a hoot.

One aspect of the film that impresses me, and what makes it worth owning (though it's also available as a VOD), is the commentary. Mills handles it so correctly. The biggest mistake in commentaries (in my opinion) is that there are too many involved. Any more than two people it becomes a mishmash of "who said that?" Mills does it on his own, and keeps a perfect level of filmmaking information (camera used, funding, etc.) and anecdotes (such as how and why he switched a particular character from female to male, without changing the dialog). He keeps it interesting all the way through, which is so rare. Two other extras are trailers for his earlier films.

There are many good acting moments here (Gerity comes to mind), and also in the story and in overall filmmaking style that shows that Mills is definitely a star on the horizon. I just wonder what he could do with a real budget.

Posted by **Robert Barry Francos** at 1:14 PM

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