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# 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.

Monday, May 28, 2012

## DVD Review: Claustrofobia

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### Claustrofobia

Directed by Bobby Boermans  
DaSilva Films / Seminal Films, 2011  
94 minutes, USD \$19.95  
[Seminalfilms.com](http://Seminalfilms.com)  
[Claustrophobia.nl](http://Claustrophobia.nl)  
[MVDvisual.com](http://MVDvisual.com)

Online kostenlos oorspronkelijk bevrijd in Nederland... oh, sorry... originally released in the Netherlands online for free, this film is now being released on DVD. It's in Dutch, with the option of turning on English captions.

Perhaps it is the Dutch cultural sensibility that has added a dimension that has seems to be missing from many European genre films of late, which has relied so heavily on graphic torture porn (such as with *A Serbian Film* [2010], where the term is taken more literally) of late. With a possibility of a wider general audience, the sex and explicit gore is kept down to a (relative) minimum, and instead, there is a much stronger reliance on the thriller aspect, for which the film surely benefits. If you'll pardon the touchstones I use often, this is closer to Argento than Fulci, or Scorsese to Carpenter.

The opening is a prologue scene that will come to fruition much later in the story in a partially obvious way. This device has been used in umpteen horror (especially slasher) films since at least Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), but whatever, it's only the first few minutes. From there it's "now" and we follow a failing veterinarian student / failing actress named Eva (Carolien Spoor), as she moves into a new apartment building filled with mystery and bizarre people (and, as far as I can tell, no means of financial support; but I digress...). As it says on the DVD box, she goes out partying with a friend, and after, finds herself chained to a table in a room that looks like it could be out of the *Saw* franchise.

One of the more interesting aspects of the way this film plays out is that we find out who the bad guy is behind the gas mask pretty early on, so that is not a distraction, leaving the action to keep our attention rather than the who-done-it. I approve (though for TV murder mysteries, I still like to try to guess). And how he fits into the bigger picture is pretty easy to figure out, despite all the red herrings. Somehow, again, this is okay because this is more of a story than a character study.

I should digress again here and posit that one of the problems with this picture is the lack of

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character development. By the end, you kinda understand why the bad guy (played by Dragan Bakema; I won't tell you who he plays to keep the first five minutes of suspense going) is doing this, and it is certainly one of the more interesting and creepy twists. While I admire the sheer gumption and smarts – and also some sheer incredibly stupid moves – of Eva, the viewer has no clue where she gets her resourcefulness, or what is her illness (diabetes?). More expository back-story is needed for her.

Then there is the cop, Danny (the Thor-looking Thijs Romer). His presence in the film and motivation for, say, not cluing in HQ about his moves, is left completely open. Now there is talk early on about Eva naming a lab rat Dino after her ex-. Could that be Danny? I was feeling a bit of claustrophobia about the rationale of the central pro- and an-agonists.

Despite this drawback, the actors play their parts full on, without any scenery chewing. The three main players have a long history both in Dutch cinema and television serials (with the three co-playing in many of these productions, as well).

There certainly is a lot of suspense, making up for the minimal gore and sex (other than a brief, gratuitous shower scene). Most of the film takes place in three apartments and a secret room, but there still seems like a lot of movement. Plus, there is a decent body count for that little space,.

And then there are the bones to pick (and this paragraph may contain minor spoilers): for example, how does a medical student afford all the equipment used? And how does one get into medical school after being locked away in an institution for a period of time? When Eva escapes the handcuffs and knocks him out, why doesn't she cuff *him* in, rather than just running so he can chase her again? These are just some of some of the questions that rise up once in a while, though honestly, these kinds of holes are not earthshaking, just a bit of an "Argggh!" While they did grab my attention in the moment, the story kept me pretty rapt.

Actually, the only thing I found truly annoying was an aspect of the ending. Rather than taking a shot towards poetic justice, a theme in the film to begin with, the conclusion was a tad of a cop-out for me.

Okay, so I've complained a bit here and there, but really, I would like to emphasize that this is actually quite a well-made film, especially for a director's first full-length feature (he also has three shorts to his credit). Though there is a lack of gore, this is still pretty violent (much like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which actually had very little blood), so if you're looking for a *Law & Order*-level murder story, this is not for you; if you like a good story, however, and do not flinch at some squeamish material, definitely go for it.

Whether you're from Utrecht (the Netherlands) or from New Utrecht (Brooklyn), this is a fine release. As I said earlier, this thriller is story-focused, so prepare for a good ride. And watch for the contextually unintentionally humorous PSA at the end.

Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at 10:06 AM

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