

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: The Scar Crow

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Images from the Internet



The Scar Crow

Written and directed by Andy Thompson and Pete Benson

Gaia Media / Dead on Arrival Digital / Jingai

83 minutes, 2009 / 2012

Gaiamedia.co.uk

MVDvisual.com

Well this is a just-miss Hammer-esk film that is a bit of a mixture of early-1970s and mid-'80s clichés. The story of three fetching witches (Prim, Proper, and Vanessa Tanner) enacting a bloody plan to escape a curse by their lecherous (and non-warlock?) dad and move on after 300 years could have been right out of the mind of those who wrote the Karnstein Trilogy (look it up [HERE](#)) rather than written by co-directors Andy Thompson and Pete Benson).

Let me start with the good stuff, coz that's the kinda guy/fan I am. The film looks beautiful, is shot well, and edited strongly (if sometimes confusing of the action, especially in dim-lit scenes). People fading in and out are certainly nice touches and the sense of atmosphere works incredibly well; also soundly done is a scene where the audience can see the post-carnage effects in a room, but some of the characters who are enchanted cannot. The British countryside and the farm have just the right feeling of isolation, creepiness and loneliness to show the emotions of the sisters, without needing dialog to explain, though the words and actions are there.

The shimmering light of fire rather than electricity, for example, is used without much loss to the image (i.e., too dark to see), and the color saturation is nicely tuned (fire tends to make things too yellow or red).

As the viewer is taken back and forth between the origin story centuries ago that weaves through modern times, it is never confusing, and they tie together in a solid knot that is the center of the story.

Ah, yes, the story. Actually, it is a really decent tale that is poorly told (as you can see, I'm starting on the problem parts now). While the acting is mostly either over- or underdone, which I will get to shortly, it is the co-screenwriting by the directors where is the most troubling.

But first, let us catch up a bit on the story. You got the three enticing witch sisters who cannot leave the farm until the curse is lifted (they are both bodily solid and spatially fluid, depending on the circumstance, which is actually a nice touch), and then there are the four macho insurance salesmen

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(is that an oxymoron, or are they just trying to mock a cliché?) copping out on a mean-spirited office team-building weekend (I would quit the job before going through this ridiculous and physically rigorous nonsense; most office workers could not do what is expected in the film, and beside, many insurance sellers these days are women, and there is nary a true representation in the group. But, as usual, I digress...). Running out on the exercises (rightfully), they come across the rural farm with the witches, to become fodder, as expected.

Man, I hated these four guys. They are every macho jock moron bar bully you ever met. We are also never given a chance to really feel pity for them, because, with one exception, there is no background story given about them, and absolutely no character development. All they do is drink (excessively), talk about how they're going to score with the three women (disproportionately), and goad and fight with each other, calling their supposed good buddies "twats" over and over. The dislike I felt for them, including the supposedly sympathetic one who is more than willing to cheat on his girlfriend, was palpable. There were a couple of times there where I just said to the screen, "Oh, c'mon, kill the asshole already."

There is also no shock value in here. When one of the four twats (as I now will call them) stops for a potty break in a field, there's no doubt as to what is going to happen. Even the ending is no surprise, if you've seen any horror film in the last 30 years.

But the biggest annoyance for me was the questions that went through my mind about the plot holes. For example (and I'll only give two here), if the witches are planning to use these twats for their great escape, why would they let them go to the town pub and mix with the locals, including the cliché wise-but-not-taken-seriously-by-anyone older guy (bar owner, here) who warns them to leave? And why, when they are seducing one of the twats, who is tied to the bedposts, would two of the sisters undress over him and start kissing each other? I mean, gratuitous lesbian incest, really?

As for the cast, well, most of the acting, as I said, was either too subdued or too scenery chewing. For example, the witches are supposed to be 300 years old and isolated (are you trying to tell me that no one else has been on that farm in all that time for them to do what they need to escape?; obviously, there are more than two questions...), but they sure do seem to know a lot about Twenty-first Century mores for women from the Eighteenth Century, including stripping at the drop of a corset. When they speak, they sound stilted in their language, like a high schooler trying to do Shakespeare, rather than have it flow naturally. This is especially true, sadly, for the most film-credited actor in the cast, redheaded Marysia Kay (as the eldest, Vanessa). Her line reading is atrocious here (I haven't seen her in anything else, so I don't know if it's endemic for her, or she just didn't care about this mess). The other two sisters, busty and beautiful Gabrielle Douglas (middle child Proper) and the cute and more reticent Anna Tolputt (youngest Prim, short for Primrose), fare a bit better, but are caught in a maelstrom of clunky writing.

As for the twats, well, mostly they seem interchangeable. Their characters were so vacant and transparent, and their portrayals so bland, that half the time I couldn't remember who was whom. In fact, I'm not even going to bother with them, other than the supposedly sympathetic anti-hero (?) Dez, played by Kewyn (really?) Connett (who looks remarkably like Canadian comedian Shaun Majumder). While his acting probably comes the closest to being best among the troupe (possibly why he is the lead male role), he is also hampered by a ham-fisted script.

Now the all important gore-factor: I read a review that claimed it was not up to par, but actually, I thought the blood-to-kill quotient was quite good, and with one exception of a very obvious prosthetic in a corn field, was pleased with the various body parts strewn about in various scenes. It is amusing to me that a similar gag employed here – a hand reaching through a body to lift out a heart – was also used almost identically in a more recent film, *Zombie A-Hole*, reviewed recently on this blog by moi. Oh, sidebar here: I actually was annoyed that the character who had his heart removed above, along with other internal organs, was still alive to view all this happening way beyond the point of even suspension of disbelief. Again, poor writing/direction.

I realize this is a first film by Benson and Thompson, so I'm going to cut them some slack. After all, as much as I loved them, the similar could be said about some of the early works of masters like Chronenberg, Waters, Hooper, and yes, even Romero. I'll keep my fingers crossed, even though they've only worked on one film since this was filmed in 2009. Perhaps we can get them to direct something they have not written, or have edited by someone else, where their strengths will all come together, because if they can match their content with their visuals, they may become a force worth noting.