

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 CareTaker

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The CareTaker

Directed by Tom Conyers

Little Man Screaming Films

Seminal Films / It's Time Entertainment

96 minutes, 2012

www.thecaretakerfilm.com

www.seminalfilms.com

www.MVDvisual.com

Aussie films tend to have a slightly different flavor, even one that borrows liberally from classic and more recent themes. And this (un)dead serious flick shows that the sum is great than its parts, even when the portions are fine by themselves.

Essentially, and elementally, this is a zombie film where the zombies are replaced by vampires. For example, the theme relies heavily on *28 Days Later* (2002), as people get transformed into vamps after contracting the disease from bloodsucking mosquitoes (not sure if that was meant as ironic, but there ya go).

Four people are trapped at an isolated vineyard and farmhouse, trying to keep the vampires out in a similar fashion to *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), though there are more points that reflect that film. Each character is flawed in their own way(s), and yet there is a level of pity for most. Well, four people and one vampire, I should add, who used to be a doctor. He strikes a bargain with those who are there for various reasons: simply he will protect them from the vampires at night, and they will protect him from the humans during the day. Definitely a Faustian bargain for all, including the vampire.

These aren't the sweet vampires of late mainstream blockbusters, or even the erudite ones of, say, *Blade* (1998) or the underrated *Daybreakers* (2009), these are mostly feral scavengers who are more interested in severing necks than ties. Okay, with the possible exception of the good ex-doctor, played by folically shaved Mark White, who does an excellent job of simmering bloodlust, malevolent anger, and violence. Did I mention he was also an executive producer of

Blog Archive

- ▼ 2013 (16)
 - ▼ June (3)
 - DVD Review: Bad Meat
 - DVD Review: Strawberry Cliff
 - DVD Review: The CareTaker
 - May (3)
 - April (3)
 - February (4)
 - January (3)
- 2012 (27)

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this film?

While this film also borrows liberally from others in the same genre, such as *30 Days of Night* (2007) and the oft-copied stiff-as-a-board rising by *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), there is a lot of originality here. For example, the vampires will not only fight each other to the death, but will drink one another's blood, as well. I don't remember seeing that before.

There is definitely a sticking to the vampire canon, though, such as no reflection in the mirror, super-speed, super-strength, aversion to the sunlight and stakes through the heart or die, and the change of eye color (pale blue in this case). No mention of garlic or crosses, though.

Getting back to the story, the four major characters are:



Mark White



Anna Burgess

The tense, type-A malcontent named Annie (Anna Burgess), and her jobless and hapless boyfriend Guy (Clint Dowdell), who are on the verge of relationship meltdown. Then there is misogynistic Ron (Lee Mason), who is in town to propagate the end of legal divorce, which is meant more as a means of control rather than religious reasons. He wants power, but refuses the responsibility that goes with it. He's essentially a bully (think of the EDL).

Lastly is Lester (Colin MacPherson), who owns the farm. He's a lonely guy, but also exceedingly creepy. He keeps a mannequin (who looks oddly like Annie, for whom he lusts), and has a brief speech about how he's 57 but desires 20-year-olds. Colin occasionally steals the scenes when he's on, which is noteworthy because the whole cast is solid. What makes this so is Colin's use of subtly, letting the viewer know what he's thinking (when the director wants it) just by facial expressions or voice tonal inflections. While coming across as a milquetoast, could he possibly be the most dangerous of all?



Colin MacPherson

Along with the substantial acting, the film is shot beautifully in an area in Victoria, outside of Melbourne. There are some quick action shots, but most of the film leans on longer sequences that show off the actors and the natural light of dusk and dawn. There are a few special effects, literally smoke and mirrors (especially in a scene with Lester's mum), but much there is also a lot of focus on character. Also, there is a lot of blood with very little gore, so be sure to bring your whole family!



Guy Dowdell

The humans, including others in the story, are as potentially dangerous as the supernatural beings, as human nature has proven throughout history. Being a serious drama, you know that, as the Heartbreakers (Thunders, not Petty) sang, most of the characters are "Born to Lose." But it is a tight-knit ensemble cast that squeeze the most out of a strong story.

The dialog is well written, with the good doctor vampire spouting out philosophical treatise to others (though he seems to be talking more to himself) when he's not fighting off other vampires to the death. As he states (as opposed to stakes) at some point, he did not realize how much he wants to live, even if it means as the undead.

This is Tom Conyers's first full-length feature, but he shows some early expertise, such as the first act while we meet the characters, going back and forth to them slowly at first, and zippering their scenes together until stitched into one spot. He also avoids the "shot in one room" (which he posits on in the commentary) claustrophobia, and takes advantage of the nearby town and uses the beautiful surroundings to juxtapose the horror of the events.



Lee Mason

The extras are pretty interesting. Along with a couple of trailers (teaser, theatrical), there is a Making Of documentary that is lengthy and keeps attention all the way through, as it shows the process of the filming, recording, and the beautifully scored soundtrack. A full-length commentary is hosted by director Conyers and producer/actor White, who, I am grateful to state, talk about the making of the film, rather than "there's my third cousin on my mother's side" kind of nonsense. Lastly, there is something called the "Lester Rap," which is hysterical. MacPherson apparently has a great sense of humor, and with Conyers editing scenes

from the film with "Lester's" dialog and a beat track and with extra filmed footage, we get the entertaining song "Lester the Molester". Burgess and Dowdell join in as the chorus, and they all seem to be having so much fun doing this that it's catching.

This is an indie with a large heart, and one worth the viewing. With substantial backing, Conyers could be a force in the film field.

Posted by Robert Barry Francos at 5:46 PM

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