

MARK OF THE BEAST (2012) Dir: J.Gorman & T.Seymour

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Here's new review for MARK OF THE BEAST, a low budget horror flick based on a story by Jungle Book author Rudyard Kipling. Shawn Francis got to check it out and you can read his review after the jump.

Written By Shawn Francis

I have heard of Rudyard Kipling, but only in conjunction with "The Jungle Book," and was never aware he had penned a horror tale during his lifetime. I became aware of this earlier this year when I visited a horror movie site and found a gruesome photo of this severely leprosy individual. This photo was the sole reason why I wanted to review this movie.

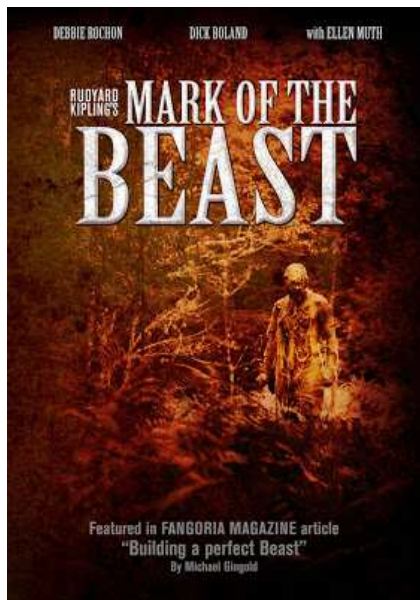
The second thing that grabbed my attention about this flick, now that I think about it, is that Ellen Muth is in it. I remember her from a Showtime series I used to love called, *DEAD LIKE ME* (2003-2004), and I don't normally associate her name with horror movies. Incidentally, on the behind the scenes featurette she even states this is her first horror movie.

One more thing I need to throw out there before I get into the film—*Muth is not the lead*; she's a supporting character, with not enough screen time, if you ask me. Debbie Rochon and Dick Boland are the main characters here, with Dick playing, Strickland, the town Sheriff and Rochon playing a civilian friend.

On first impression the movie appeared to be set in Lovecraft's territory of New England, 60s or 70s, to be more precise, but even though it was filmed in Connecticut, it's not set there. Rochon, Boland and their friends at one point celebrate New Years Eve, and with no sign of Winter in sight, I can only assume the local is supposed to be in the South. This was confirmed later on when I listened to the commentary.

The mood is instantly set with some nice aerial photography of the deep, dark woods and Rochon's antiquated narration that sounded like it was taken right of the Kipling's story verbatim. Which also made me wonder if H.P. Lovecraft was influenced by Kipling's work. I'm a big fan of Lovecraft's tales, and some of the movie adaptations that have been done on them throughout the years, but don't know that much about him as a person. The opening narration sounds very "Lovecraftian."

The story revolves around a prickish friend of theirs named, Fleete, who gets a curse put on him when, drunk one day, and in the process of being escorted home by Boland and Rochon, he decides to piss off the "local native's" god by putting out his cigar on an effigy they stumble upon in the woods. This curse is delivered to him through horrific physical contact by a half naked leper who lurches out of nowhere.



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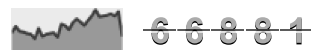


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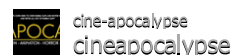


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This "curse" seems to mimic your generic demonic possession, but it's one they can't expunge with your generic exorcism. What they resort to is going out into the woods, locating this wandering, mindless leper and forcibly taking him back to their home, tie him to a chair and torture him until he relents and removes the curse. I was pretty much on the side of Boland and Rochon, until they decided to engage in some "torture porn" to get their friend's soul back. And then when the deed is done and their douchebaggy friend is back, they think they can amend the situation by bandaging the leper's wounds and sending him on his way. This movie has a nice twist, though, at the very end, where Karma decides to pay them a visit. I dug it, and it works. I was kind of puzzled, though, in the process of capturing the leper, why they were making so much contact with him, isn't leprosy contagious?

Anyhow, the movie falls nicely into that rural horror category which does double duty of fascinating and repulsing me at the same time, probably because I myself am rural based, and doesn't the most shocking and weirdest shit happen in the country?

The angle of having "natives" in the woods, especially a leper, in a 60s, 70s American setting seems a bit odd, I can only guess that's probably due to the original story's setting being in India, and the filmmakers not having the funds to actually replicate that exotic locale. Regardless, I still dug the period piece they made, even going so far as to replicate the look in the 1.78:1 transfer of the film stock, too.

The only thing that does n't quite work is the score. It's fine for the opening and ending credits and for certain moments in the film, but there are other times when it feels intrusive, not to mention being out of place. It sounds like something you'd hear in an action movie, or, had the India setting been replicated, it would have fit *that* movie perfectly. The directors, on the other hand, talk about the score in the commentary, and in their eyes they think it fits the movie perfectly.

The film is short; running only 72 minutes, and comes with some decent extra features. First up is a commentary with the directors, Jon Gorman and Thomas Edward Seymour, which touches upon everything about the film and what inspired it. Like me they are fans of those 60s horror films (i.e. Hammer, Corman, etc.) and deliberately wanted to homage them with this one. Next is an 11:28 minute Behind-The-Scenes featurette that chronicles their first and last days shooting the movie. Even the leper is interviewed and his FX is chronicled. For a low-budget film they pulled off a really good-looking "creature," I must say. Two trailers of the movie are included, and a section titled, Student Trailers, houses a teaser and a full trailer, the creators of which were the winners in a contest that was held to see who could deliver the best looking ones.

I'd love to see these guys tackle an actual adaptation of one of Lovecraft's tales. Until that happens *MARK OF THE BEAST* is a good substitute.



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