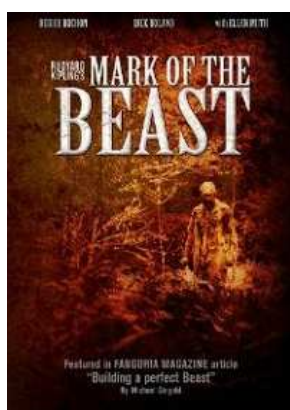




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Mark of the Beast

REVIEWED BY: Wolfboy Posted on 14/02/2013



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Mark of the Beast is an odd, somewhat awkward movie.

It takes place in an unidentified area of (presumably) America where civilisation ends at the border of a great Forest populated by strange wild people who worship an odd monkey god. Two friends, Debbie (Debbie Rochon) and Strickland (Dick Boland) try to escort their very drunk, somewhat unpleasant companion Fleete (Phil Hall) back to his house through this Forest. Fleete drunkenly defaces an altar to the monkey god and is attacked by a silver leper who places a terrible curse on him. Debbie and Strickland are forced to take extreme action to try and save him.

I hadn't read the short Kipling story that the movie is based on when I watched it, but I read it immediately afterward and it clarified a lot of my suspicions about what made this film so weird.

Firstly, Kipling's story is set in British-ruled India in 1890 and the "monkey god" is Hanuman, the King of the Monkeys and a powerful trickster figure in Hinduism. Despite updating and trans-locating the story to modern-ish America, the filmmakers preserved a lot of Kipling's story whole cloth.

In the case of dialogue and exposition, I can see why that was tempting. Rudyard Kipling is a writer whose sense of sound is incredible, and even his adult stories tend to sound amazing when read aloud. However, the rest of the dialogue is modern-day, heavily peppered with swearing and naturalistic to the point of sounding almost improvised. Taken together the effect is not unlike hearing the Queen begin cursing like a trooper in the middle of her Christmas message – it makes an impact, but not in the way that it intends.

The clash goes the other way as well – modern characters might well be more profane than Kipling's, but I doubt that anyone could genuinely say a sentence like "My friend Strickland, who knows as much of natives as is good for any man..." with a straight face these days. Some of the lines don't even make sense – at one point Fleete complains "that the smells of the bazaar were overpowering, and wondered why slaughter-houses were permitted so near residences" despite the fact that the film has relocated his house to an empty clearing in the middle of a huge forest with no bazaar or slaughterhouse in sight.

The Forest also presents problems in and of itself. It's plausible to imagine that in the India of 1890 (particularly as imagined by Kipling) one could run into all sorts of strange cults and powers and Hanuman being a real god adds a certain weight to the idea. In the film it's never adequately explained who the denizens of the Forest are, why they should be allowed to live wild in the manner that they do or why they should suffer from leprosy (of all things) without being offered any sort of medical treatment or governed in any way by the state. Nor is it explained why they should worship a monkey god, when they live in a temperate forest which has clearly never seen a monkey in the history of its existence. These issues are glossed over with a cod-Lovecraft "some of the Natives are stranger than others" and never mentioned again.

This sense of "no particular place, no particular time" is born out by the cinematography, which relies heavily on odd colour filters and arty shots of trees to try and build atmosphere. In the hands of better filmmakers, that could have been dreamy and surreal but in this case it simply added to the sense that the directors had forgotten to think about the setting.

The final problem is Fleete. Kipling's Fleete is a genial bumbler – pleasant enough, but not given to thinking things through. His attack on the altar of Hanuman is stupid, but grounded in a half-innocent lack of concern for the native world which would have seemed quite familiar to Kipling's readers. In that context the lengths that Strickland and the unnamed narrator go to to save him make sense, of a sort. Because casual racist assumptions are no longer really acceptable in "nice" characters, the filmmakers have had to make Fleete a thoroughly unlikable character and this makes it very hard to understand why Debbie and Strickland would bother going to the lengths that they do.

Mark of the Beast aimed high. It set its sights on remaking the points that Rudyard Kipling had made about respect for indigenous religion, the human cost of conflict and the limits of acceptable behaviour for the modern era. This was a noble goal, but unfortunately a lack of thought about context and detail left them falling short.

Not recommended, though the leper looks pretty good – so if you're into monster makeup then it might be worth a look just for that.

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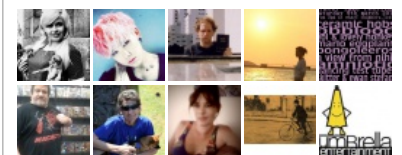


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DISC DETAILS:

DIRECTOR(S): John Gorman, Thomas Edward Seymour | COUNTRY: USA | YEAR 2012 | DISTRIBUTOR(S): Blood Bath Pictures | RUNNING TIME: 72 minutes | ASPECT RATIO: 1.33:1 | REGION: 1 / NTSC | DISCS: 1

EXTRAS:

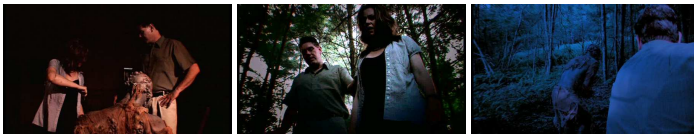
- Documentary –Making the Beast
- Directors' Commentary
- Trailers and teasers

RECOMMENDED VIEWING:

- [Dirt Dauber](#)
- [The Evil Dead \[Blu-ray\]](#)
- [The Mark of the Beast](#) (book)
- [The Call of Cthulhu](#)

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