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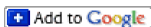
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Review by [Jeremy Biltz](#) | posted November 27, 2012 | [E-mail the Author](#)

The Movie:

There aren't a lot of movies made based on Rudyard Kipling stories these days, let alone horror movies. But that's exactly what the producers of *Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast* have make, and though it has its share of missteps and flaws, the filmmakers are truly stretching themselves, and deliver an intriguing and at times disturbing film.

I went back and read the original short story this afternoon, and though the location has been moved from colonial India to the northeast United States in modern times (which does set up a bit of confusion), the film follows its source material quite closely. Dick Boland plays Strickland, a local sheriff who hosts an annual New Year's Eve party at his isolated home. Neighbors and old friends come to stay the weekend, drinking, playing games and indulging in delightful conversation. Debbie (Debbie Rochon) drags along another neighbor Fleete (Phil Hall), who is new to the area, his home being a walk of a few miles from Strickland's.

Though most of the guests drink moderately and enjoy a quiet game of Skittles and some light interlocution, Fleete drinks heavily, moving from one liquor to another, and passing out on the couch in the wee hours of the morning. Strickland and Debbie resign themselves to walking him home, after he puckishly throws Strickland's car keys into the lake, of course. On the way, they pass close to a shrine to the local monkey god, though what indigenous people are worshiping it is unclear, a victim of shifting the locale from India to the US. Without hesitation, Fleete stumbles up and puts out his cigar right on the monkey god statue. Hard upon that, a leper (Mark Bovino), whose skin shines like silver, rushes up to Fleete and presses his deformed head upon the drunken man's breast. Frightened, the trio of revelers flees back to Strickland's house.

And things don't go well from there. Fleete becomes ill, getting a strange inflammation on his chest where the leper touched him, and soon develops a craving for rare pork chops and perhaps a little long pig as well. Soon, he becomes crazed, and has to be restrained. And his friends will go to any lengths to lift the curse that has been laid upon him.

The original short story doesn't provide an enormous amount of direct material for adaption, but a lot of material for expansion and development. Co-directors Tom Seymour and Jon Gorman do a good job of staying faithful to the story, while exploring its themes more fully. There's not a lot of plot to speak of, but loads of atmosphere and mood. The idyllic back woods setting and the very lived in practical sets help a lot. The image, though shot digitally, is manipulated to give it a washed out sixties horror film look, with some intentional "film" damage thrown in. The leper makeup is extensive and quite effective, especially in the torture scenes toward the back end of the film. The leper is seen only in glimpses at first, but it can certainly stand up to a prolonged inspection.

The makers of *Mark of the Beast* aren't afraid to take their time, developing characters, tension and mood, but also wrestling with some fairly weighty subject matter: loyalty, comparative religion, and the morality of torture and its effect on both the subject and inflictor, to name but a few. This isn't a film that fits neatly into a genre box, even within the more select horror subset. It's not a T&A film, or torture porn, or a ghost story, or... anything simple, really. But it's definitely a horror film, and a good one.

It's not without problems. The performances are not uniformly great. Debbie Rochon is a seasoned pro, and can play this kind of role with ease, and does so effortlessly here. Dick Boland is good generally, but there are a few stumbles, and at times he fails to reach the emotional depths necessary for the scene. The rest of the cast, which includes Ellen Muth of *Dead Like Me*, do their part admirably as well. The script often chugs along just fine, and Rochon's narration is very evocative, but the writing in general could probably have used some polish, and the story doesn't have the classical emotional beats and payoffs. (Though lines such as "I may be a Christian, but if God isn't going to help on this one, he'll just have to forgive me for beating up a cripple in the woods" are definitely keepers!) But what's admirable about the film is what they're able to accomplish with a miniscule budget on a very short shooting schedule. And these folks aren't afraid to be different, to defy convention, or to stretch themselves. The fact that they don't always hit the mark dead on is inconsequential compared to the fact that they were really trying for something difficult and unique.

This isn't a film for everyone, but if you're a fan of sixties and seventies European horror, or low budget horror generally, you'll enjoy this. Recommended.

The DVD

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The video is 1.78:1 widescreen, and generally looks good. A lot of effects and color correction are used to give the film a somewhat antique film, complete with film scratches and other artifacts. There is a bit of muddiness and low contrast at times, but it essentially works well.

Sound:

The audio is Dolby digital 2 channel, and works well enough. The dialogue is always clearly audible, and no hiss or other problem can be heard. No subtitles or alternate language tracks are included.

Extras:

There are a few extras. They are:

Behind the Scenes

This comes in at 11:28, and consists of behind the scenes footage and interviews with most of the main cast, and a lot of the crew. It's quite interesting, especially the bits about the leper makeup.

Trailer

At just over a minute, a thoughtful, low key trailer.

Trailer 2

This is a more somber, menacing trailer, also good.

Student Trailers

Bloodbath Pictures held a contest for college students to cut trailers for the film, and the winners are shown here: Ilian Matos won for the teaser, and Carlos Freire for the standard trailer. They're both quite effective.

Director's Commentary

Co-directors Thomas Seymour and Jon Gorman (the creative forces behind the *Bikini Bloodbath* films) are engaging and fun guys, old friends and longtime collaborators, and they make this commentary quite enjoyable. The conversation is wide ranging. They talk about their influences, philosophy of film, and the cameras they used, working with Ellen Muth and Debbie Rochon and lots of other topics. The film was shot in ten days, with a \$7,000 final budget, but there are plenty of anecdotes to go complement the lack of funds. This should be quite interesting for those interested in low budget filmmaking.

Final Thoughts:

Rudyard Kipling's *Mark of the Beast* is a deliberately paced, contemplative film, that also manages to be deeply disturbing, and to ask difficult questions about morality. It's not your normal movie fare, but quite fun nevertheless, and there are some genuinely fantastic makeup effects on display. And Debbie Rochon. So, what's not to like?

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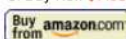


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