

Mark of the Beast

MVD



One of the classic structures to horror fiction is pretty much the same as the classic "two men went into a pub" joke. As are so many things in life, chiefly among them instances of two men going into a pub. Get some broadly-drawn characters, put them in a place and a situation, work through the story, and then BAM!- hit 'em with the punchline. **Jon Gorman** and **Thomas Edward Seymour**'s latest defiantly indie horror pic does this almost to perfection, and is all the better for it. An adaptation of **Rudyard Kipling**'s "Mark Of The Beast," it takes the unusual step of simultaneously sticking very close to the original text and uprooting the action from colonial India and plonking it down in the rural USA and making it dress up as a cabin in the woods shocker.

And dress is up it certainly does – the footage has been processed to give it the look and feel of a '70s "nasty" of the kind that would probably have been banned in the UK at the turn of the decade in that bizarre wave of tabloid hysteria that elevated a whole heap of basically pretty standard horror movies to legendary or even classic status, while adding to the already deserved notoriety of stuff like *Cannibal Holocaust*.

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Appearances can be deceptive, however, and despite visual nods to *Evil Dead* with some great monster POV cuts in the woods, and a couple of river shots that could have come straight from *I Spit On Your Grave*, this is a more thoughtful piece than it pretends to be. The transposition of Kipling's original narrative into the movie's voice-over, complete with references to "natives" and the like, at first causes something of a disconnect, but eventually serves to add context to the questions the story raises – uncomfortable ones about race, colonialism and, possibly most interestingly given the current international situation, about the use, efficacy and moral cost of torture. OK, don't worry, it's still a horror story in the classic mould, and this stuff isn't rammed down your throat, but it's definitely there, and I suspect that to ignore it would be to miss both Kipling's and the movie's point.

And the punchline? Delivered AS a punchline, it's a knowing wink from the filmmakers which certainly raised a smile as it echoed pretty much my own internal monologue. OK, so it's not going to be widely deconstructed in colleges, or form part of anyone's *New York Times* thinkpiece on cinema in the world of the War On Terror – it's happy to be a creature feature (and yes, the "creature" is bloody impressive) – but it manages to raise more questions than I suspect a dozen mainstream reality-based thrillers (which may or may not feature **Kiefer Sutherland**), with their gung-ho ticking bomb apologetics, ever could.

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[...] Bloodbath. Also we got another great review of Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast from Freq Reviews with a pretty awesome quote below. Lastly over the past few months our Radio show has blown up [...]