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## REVIEWS

Thursday, January 17th, 2013

# RUDYARD KIPLING'S MARK OF THE BEAST

reviewed by Matthew Wright

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### Blood Bath Pictures

**75 min., dir. by Jonathan Gorman and Thomas Edward Seymour, with Ellen Muth, Debbie Rochon and Margaret Rose Champagne**

Two minutes into *Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast* I thought of two things. The first was a museum I'd read about when I was living in New England, The Museum of Bad Art (MOBA), and the second was a documentary I watched last year about the making of *Troll 2* called *The Best Worst Movie*. *Mark of the Beast* is instantly that kind of bad, but like the MOBA and *Troll 2*, the people behind it appear to be failing with great passion and conviction. When one element of a film is of poor quality, the piece as a whole suffers and the experience for the audience is diminished. But the rare and complete failure, across the board, results in a product strangely as uplifting as a partial or even complete success. This was my experience with this film.

If you were a fan of "Dead Like Me" and its star Ellen Muth, you might have been wondering what she's been up to lately. I think she's got a lot of talent, and hope she's been laying low of her own volition. I further hope we'll all get to see her again soon in a professional capacity, because she was outstanding in the past. She's in *Mark of the Beast*, but it's a little like a semi-retired professional basketball player joining a neighborhood pickup game with a bunch of lovable losers. You admire them for their willingness to participate, but you wouldn't call it a return to the sport. Not only is the script awkward and unpolished, all of the actors surrounding Muth have the poise of junior high schoolers in a Christmas pageant. I promise you Muth looks worse here as an actress than you can imagine seeing her, though thankfully for those who want to remember her fondly, she has very little screen time. If I could say one thing to her after watching this film it would be, "All is forgiven — but please fire your agent."

The next big problem is the music, which sounds like it was inspired by the score to *The Last of the Mohicans*. The melodrama of too much leather-bound percussion is not the problem — it's that the music is crisp and clear and near-continuous for the duration of the film, consuming dialogue of greatly reduced recording quality. What the actors are saying is hard to hear all by itself, but when you blast bad mood music over it the combination is painful.

The source material by Rudyard Kipling is dated, but still has a lot of potential. I can see why someone would get excited enough to modernize it. The problem on that front is that bits and pieces of the original text are chosen to be voiced over, which only draws more attention to the poor quality of the script. There is no clear entryway to suspend disbelief. In the end, *Mark of the Beast* is a highly watchable disaster, but only when coupled with the right attitude, good friends, and strong adult beverages.

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