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MURDER UNIVERSITY KILLS IT

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Richard Griffin's *Murder University* is a low-budget indie effort that pays homage to the golden era of slasher horror in the early '80s, and for the most part, successfully mimics the unhinged style of filmmaking often seen in this period. It's a fun, sleazy, and frequently shocking tribute that manages to find that perfect balance of humour and horror that is often lacking in modern "throwback" films that have flooded the DVD market in recent years. In a few words, it's lame in the right ways. From the

ridiculous opening scene (which features a completely illogical twist just to mess with you) to the impressive and memorable final shot, Griffin's film demonstrates a commitment to celebrate the styles that define this era of horror filmmaking, and is sure to satisfy genre fans looking for a fun way to spend 90 minutes.

Full credit is due to both **Lenny Schwartz** for his deliciously witty script, and to Griffin who puts years of experience as both director and editor to excellent use, demonstrating a clear understanding of the clichés he's riffing while ensuring there are enough original surprises to keep the viewer hooked. The resulting film is tighter and more entertaining than it has any right to be for its meager budget; and despite several genuinely stupid scenes here and there, it maintains its integrity as a suspenseful horror film through to the end without descending into self-parody.

The plot follows a shy freshman named Josh Greene who has just started school at a New England college, only to discover that his campus is plagued by a mysterious group of sadistic killers who butcher students while wearing devil masks, mimicking a series of murders that occurred 20 years earlier at the same campus. After a close encounter with the killers, Josh decides "these assholes just fucked with the wrong freshman" and teams up with a seasoned Detective who worked on the original case in an attempt to find and stop these psychos once and for all.

Multiple decapitations ensue – often completely out of the blue for added shock-value – and more than a few twists and turns arise before things are finally explained and resolved in a suitably bloody way. None of the revelations will be earth-shattering to anyone who has seen a few slasher films, but *Murder U* keeps a fresh perspective by constantly toying with the viewer's expectations, and coming through with a memorable ending even if it is a tad predictable.

All of the characters are perfectly cast based to add to the B-Movie charm, and many faces will be familiar to fans of Griffin's previous films. Of particular interest here is the hilarious **Michael Thurber** who absolutely knocks it out of the park as the hard-assed Detective Forresster, stealing nearly every scene he's in. **Jamie Dufault** also does a fine job in the lead role as Josh, maintaining interest as the sympathetic protagonist but also clearly having a lot of fun with the role. The synth score is a welcomed addition that helps to bring it all together, as is the original rock track "Murder U" which plays during the opening credits.

Though it may come off as a bit cheesy or low-budget for some tastes, those with a good sense of humour who enjoy the unbridled creativity that once fuelled the slasher genre back in its heyday will be pleasantly surprised by *Murder U*. It succeeds at having a great deal of fun with its material while never losing sight of its primary goals as a horror film, and it also helps that Griffin sticks the landing. In a time when these types of throwback slasher films are a dime-a-dozen, *Murder U* manages to stand out from the crowd, and deserves a spot on your shelf next to your other trashy horror-comedies from the '80s.

R A T I N G : 3 . 5 / 5 S T A R S

Bio

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Mark is a lover of film, television and literature, with a particular passion for all things horror. Born on the 31st of October, he was conditioned at an early age to perceive zombies, vampires and masked lunatics as signs of forthcoming presents and candy. He also has several years' experience working in the film, television and advertising industries, both on set in the camera department, and in the harrowing world of post-production.



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