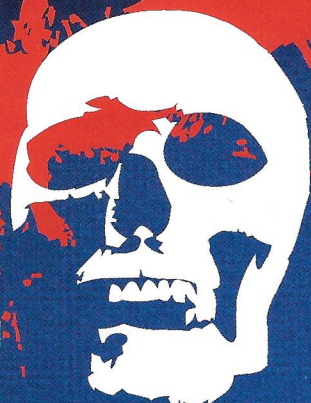


HORROR REVIEWS



WHAT'S HOT IN THE WORLD OF DVD & BLU-RAY...

PULSE

THE FILM: Some two years before MySpace birthed the social media revolution that would come to redefine modern human interaction, Pulse was already exploring the idea that as online communication increased, loneliness and isolation would inevitably follow. Originally released in 2001, just before the Americanisation of Hideo Nakata's Ring propelled J-Horror fully onto Western viewers' radars, Kiyoshi Kurosawa's film just missed that boat and – despite a predictably mediocre US remake in 2006 – never gained the overseas notoriety of Nakata's classic and, say, Ju-on. The neglect is entirely unjust as the film is not only one of the finest entries in the early noughties wave of Eastern terror, but one that truly stands out, using urban isolation as the biggest threat to its protagonists, and with nary a lank-haired, twisty-limbed female entity in sight.

The scare scenes in Pulse do share a similar sense of creeping dread with Nakata's output for instance however, with ghosts (which spill from their overcrowded limbo into our realm, causing catatonic despair in those who encounter them) moving slowly from shadowy corners into full view as they approach their victims, and the viewer. They are far from the hideously pale apparitions of the film's contemporaries though, looking more or less as they did alive, and unsettling through their very presence and slowed, wispy movements. In terms of how they are visualised, they are ghosts in the classic sense. And indeed, despite its modern themes and fears of technology, Pulse is much more grounded in traditional horror than a number of its J-Horror counterparts. This is most evident in Takefumi Haketa's haunting and oppressive score, which would not seem out of place in an early 60's psychodrama or haunted house film and recalls, at times, Bernard Herrmann's work for Alfred Hitchcock. The deep drones and shrieking, stabbing strings however, are equally powerful in their absence, cutting abruptly during terrifying moments to



maddening, unbearable silence.

While avoiding emotional pulls, Pulse is incredibly involving, thanks in part to Kurosawa's slow, creepy-crawly camerawork, which follows the action the way a human eye would, only in a floaty way that matches the ghosts' movements. This is especially impactful as we share shocks with our characters, perhaps most memorably as we watch a girl jump from a ledge on high and follow her all the way to her swift, miserable end. During more relaxed scenes, the sauntering camera lends the film a loose, organic feel that suits slacker Kawashima, who is all wallet chains, unbuttoned shirts and spaced-out puzzlement. Wholly averse to using the computers that are so central to other characters' work and lives (amusing and still relatable early moments see him writing himself instructions that amount to little more than a mouse-click, and skipping past user agreements), Kawashima is the film's human core, and a hugely likeable presence. He also represents the only opportunity we are given to really invest in a character, with the film weaving between several lives with a cold detachment.

Loneliness and suicide are endemic in Pulse, wiping out citizens in their numbers.

The latter scenes share the feel of an apocalyptic narrative or zombie flick, but one in which sadness is the disease, killing in sombre, downbeat moments instead of frenzied attacks. Modern humans' disconnect from each other is always there; conversations are held through walls, friends go weeks without talking and crucially, all the main characters live alone. It is not just Pulse's recently deceased but the living who exist in their own purgatory, one of grey, shadowy corridors and claustrophobic living spaces.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

SPECIAL FEATURES: Pulse has been deservedly revived by Arrow Video, who as ever, have presented the film beautifully. The Blu-ray is adorned with a hefty package of extras, led by a newly-shot interview with the humble and endearing Kurosawa about his career and the birth and impact of Pulse ("It was totally a copy of Ring..."). It's fascinating and very watchable, and serves as a great introduction to the director and his work, as well as shedding some interesting light on a film in which little is explained. We also get brand new interviews with DoP Junichiro Hayashi and filmmakers Adam Wingard and Simon Barrett (You're Next, Blair Witch), who talk about Pulse's influence on their work. Arrow's Blu also contains a 2001 making of, as well as archival festival and SFX featurettes. It's a worthwhile and enlightening set of extras for an under-appreciated and truly extraordinary film.

Rating: 🧠🧠🧠🧠🧠

PULSE is out now on **UK Blu-ray and DVD** courtesy of Arrow Video.

REVIEWED BY KEVAN FARROW

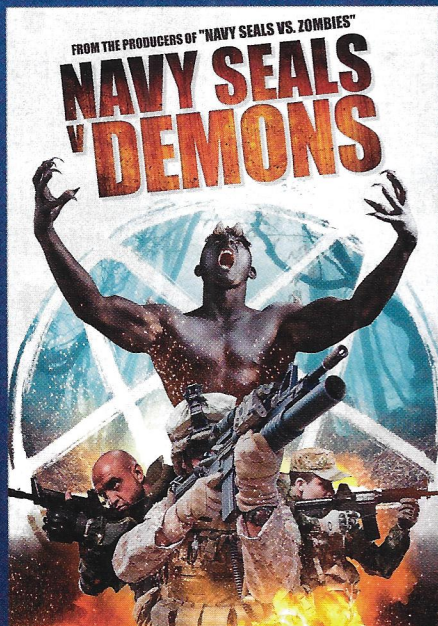
NAVY SEALS V DEMONS

THE FILM: Jeffrey Reyes attempts to blend action and horror in his latest effort Navy SEALS V Demons. Starring an unknown cast including Tim Abell, Liana Mendoza, and Samantha Stewart, the film follows a team of

hard-nosed ex-navy seals as they head deep in the bible belt of America to take on a team of demons intending to steal virgin blood.

It is clear from the outset that this film is low budget fodder and the result is an entertaining mess. As such, the low quality of the film shows in abundance but there is no denying that Reyes has a keen eye for style which is brought to life here by Pedro Avila's slick cinematography. That said, the film suffers badly from its cheap looking effects, simple plot and its little to no attempt to flesh out its characters. However, despite the cheap look, Navy SEALS V Demons does carry with it micro budget thrills and nicely paced action scenes.

As far as the cast goes, Mikal Vega leads the film as Warren LT Carr, the leader of the Navy SEALS. He's big and someone you'd want in your corner. He nails every bit of his character with gusto and cements an element of realism which is unsurprising considering Vega served in the military for 20 years. Moving on and completing the team of Navy SEALS are Matthew R. Anderson and Les Brooks Jr. Both actors match Vega's impressive frame and screen presence but that's pretty much it. As for the rest of the cast, they are largely forgettable and stay that way until the end credits begin their crawl.



Overall, perhaps the biggest issue I had with this film is not the lack of plot or likeable characters but the awful demon make-up effects. Not only does it resemble something you'd see in an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer but the make-up looks so cheap and proved to be nothing but a distraction. Thankfully the performances from the cast help ease the pain here but not completely due.

On reflection, Navy SEALS V Demons sadly fails to deliver on its promise. As an action horror, it should offer audiences the

best of both worlds but it doesn't. It's horror moments are mild and its action scenes are underwhelming so you know that I won't be rushing to watch this again anytime soon.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

NAVY SEALS V DEMONS is out now on US DVD courtesy of MVD Entertainment.

REVIEWED BY JON DICKINSON

THE ZODIAC KILLER

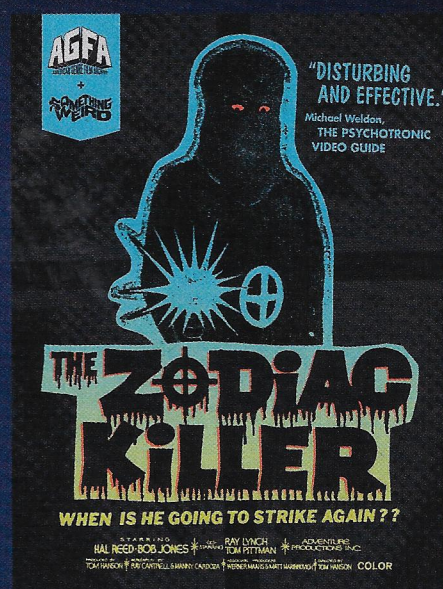
THE FILM: The Zodiac Killer is a highly fictionalised take on the infamous Zodiac investigation and sees Hal Reed take on the titular role in this overtly creepy experience. The film follows the Zodiac serial killer as he butchers his victims and taunts the local newspaper and police with cryptic messages about his identity and motives for committing his ghastly crimes. In reality we don't know the identity of the infamous Zodiac, however this film takes liberties with the real police investigation by providing a name and a back-story for the titular character.

Certainly, a product of its time, The Zodiac Killer as a film stumbles from scene to scene and hasn't aged well against today's standards. As Director Tom Hanson has delivered a thriller that has plenty going for it. Sure, it's hindered by some truly awful acting and over the top performances from its cast but Hanson offers audiences something much darker to think about... anyone could be a potential serial killer waiting to claim their next victim. Let that sink in for a moment...

Anyway, as Jerry aka The Zodiac Killer, Hal Reed easily gives the best performance in the film. He perfectly executes both sides of the character's personality. He works hard to anchor every emotional note of his character and his stark difference in behaviour makes his murder scenes even darker. Rounding up the cast are Ray Lynch and Tom Pittman. Both men play the policemen hot on the trail of the Zodiac. Neither one of them particularly adds to the quality of the film but they fill out the standard cop stereotype and help move the film along.

Intrigued by the Zodiac investigation I was excited to see this film but to my disappointment the film has not transferred well to digital. The film is grainy and the sound is awful in places and it brings down the overall quality of the film which is a shame. That said, it remained a compelling watch and carries some deeply chilling moments which at the time of its release would have easily shocked 70's audiences.

Overall, The Zodiac Killer is not a bad film but it does disrespect the source material (albeit unintentionally) which is a bit of a deal breaker for me. So, if you're looking to watch something of quality about the Zodiac



investigation, all you need to know is that Fincher did it better in 2007.

Rating: 🧟🧟🧟🧟

THE ZODIAC KILLER is out now on US Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of MVD Entertainment.

REVIEWED BY JON DICKINSON

THE DARK TAPES

THE FILM: For the first half of The Dark Tapes, it's difficult to know what we're in for. Its most generic of found footage titles may set expectations low, but when scientist Martin (Cut! director David Rountree) addresses the camera to explain his theories around sleep paralysis (which involve "trans-dimensional" demons operating on a hugely expanded time scale, accounting for their brief visibility to sufferers of the condition) it becomes clear that something slightly more ambitious is in store. When we then cut to a segment entitled The Hunters & The Hunted however, we are taken into entirely familiar found footage territory. A couple – Karen and David – explore their lavish new dwellings with a video camera but their excitement is short lived when parts of the house begin to produce strange noises and even stranger physical manifestations of unseen forces. The appearance of a blistered, misshapen handprint on David's back prompts them to call in paranormal investigators, who soon capture footage of the couple's dead daughter in the house. Familiar? Very much so, but also not ineffective, with sustained dread throughout, before ending with a twist that is both frustratingly silly and entirely unexpected, setting the stage for a horror anthology filled with such contrasts.

We return to the sleep paralysis experiment (the segment is entitled To Catch a Demon, and stars Zombeavers' Cortney Palm, the most recognisable face here), before moving on to Cam Girls, which is seen entirely through chat windows on a computer screen,