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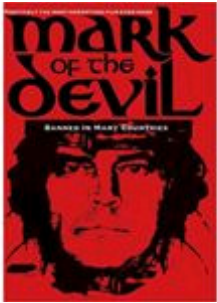
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## DVD reviews



This review contains semi, sort of, kinda, possibly spoily information, so, you know, beware.

This is not a happy movie. Kind of a tragic melodrama exploiter all the way around. And that word melodrama is a key word here.

Sure, Mark of the Devil is quite functional as a sadistic Eurotrash flick, complete with all kinds of old school, witch-hunting torture and shit, not to mention some nudity, albeit in a pretty take-a-shower-afterward context, but, hey, this is across-the-Atlantic sleaze.

But the melodramatic storyline gives Mark of the Devil a double boost.

It's not unusual for European trash flicks to have long stretches of chat and such between moments of horror and gore, but Mark of the Devil makes good use of that aspect. A lot of these films seem to be unaware that they don't really have any weight beyond their exploitation element and that trying too hard to give story context for whatever exploitation factor is at work just prolongs waits between the good stuff.

Well, with Mark of the Devil, the stretches between the "good stuff" are (mostly) not a detriment. It's a little slow going at first, waiting it out until the next bit of witch torture comes along, but once all the bona fide plot elements have been dropped into place, the viewer discovers that Mark of the Devil actually has a decent, interesting story to tell. It's not uber profound and it won't win any arthouse awards for most dramatic witch torture movie, but it is a nice bit of melodrama.

So not only does Mark of the Devil compensate for the talky stuff between the sadistic stuff, by doing so it gives us a character story that grabs our interest.

Herbert Lom plays the big ol' bad Witchhunter on his way to town to suss up all those in league with the devil (interesting those people are either rich men or beautiful women). Preceding his arrival is Udo Kier, his apprentice. Kier is full of naive faith in the (religious) system and the God he supposes is behind it, but a seed of doubt is planted when the local witchhunter, a real nasty fucker whose ego bumps heads with the big ol' bad Witchhunter, targets a lovely barmaid who refuses to get down with his nasty ass.

Needless to say, nasty fucker gets the barmaid (for whom Kier falls in love, giving us the only truly slow moments in the film - la la la la, traipse through the fields, yadda yadda yadda, whatever) in the sights of the big ol' bad Witchhunter.

It was easy enough for Kier to watch people tortured and killed for witchcraft when he was all aloof and distant from those involved, but when it's someone for whom he cares and who he knows to be innocent ... well, that's a different matter altogether. It only makes things worse when the diabolical character traits of the big ol' bad Witchfinder begin to come to light, revealing him to be a hypocrite of the worst order - a real shock when Kier had til this time held him up on a pedestal as a superior moral being.

It's actually a cool story with which I got pretty involved and it leads up to a somewhat surprising denouement reminiscent of Frankenstein, only with a witchfinder as monster instead of a stitched together mass of resurrected body parts.

In the midst of this melodrama there are, of course, the requisite torture scenes - tongue rippings, racks, thumbscrewings, whippings, brandings, even drip-drip water torture. The water torture makes for one of the more interesting effects in the film. Each time an assistant to the witchhunter checks on the guy under the drip and it cuts to a POV of the torture victim, the visuals become more colorfully distorted and shaky in rhythm with the drip. (There's also a nice psychedelic POV shot when one of the witchhunter bastard-ass assistants gets his eye poked out.)

Needless to say, all this violence and corrupt self-righteousness (\*sigh\* and love) comes to a head, but things don't turn out like you might expect. This is a pretty rough film all the way around. You've been warned.

Yay!

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Upchuck Undergrind listens to a little bit of a lot of things - just note the eclecticism of his reviews. He also reads voraciously and loves movies. He is a very open-minded Episcopalian (and student of Buddhism and Hinduism) who thinks Slayer is one of the greatest metal bands. Ever. In addition to his work with Corazine - for which he has written since its inception (he is a Fishcomcollective veteran) - he also writes for DJFix.com.

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