

sued to crafting movie scares. Indeed, with *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, he and his *Oculus* co-writer Jeff Howard have, with *Ouija: Origin of Evil*, retro-engineered one of the best horror films of 2016.

The film's set in Los Angeles, 1967. Elizabeth Reaser (*True Detective*) plays Alice Zander, a widow not really getting by as a fake medium conducting phony séances. Helping out is her teenage daughter Lena (Annalise Basso: *Oculus*) and younger child Doris (Lulu Wilson: *Deliver Us From Evil*). Lena suggests incorporating the newly popular Ouija board into the act, and Alice agrees. But it's Doris, desperate to communicate with her beloved father, who proves to be the one with whom the spirits wish to commune – well, spirits and other things that were never human to begin with.

Full credit goes not only to Flanagan and Howard for coming up with a compelling story that fits into the original underwhelming film but to his cast for making us care about what happens to the Zander family. In Wilson's capable little hands, Doris becomes much more than just the cute movie moppet; she goes from gosh darn cute to profoundly creepy to

terrifying as the malevolent spectres inhabiting her house use her to live again. And because we've become so emotionally invested in the fates of these three women, the evil that strikes them is not just horrific but tragic.

But the best thing about *Ouija: Origin of Evil*? You don't have to suffer through the first film to enjoy this one.

SEAN PLUMMER

## BASIC BRUTALITY

### KILLBILLIES

Starring Nina Ivanišin, Lotos Vincenc Šparovec and Jurij Drevnešek  
Written and directed by Tomaž Gorkic  
Artsploitation

Stop me if you've heard this one before: a group of pretty, young city folk – here an egotistic photographer, a nice makeup lady and two superficial models – go to the idyllic but threatening countryside for a photo shoot, where some rednecks torture and kill them.

That's the scope of inventiveness in the first horror film from Slovenia (ex-Yugoslavia). It's a small but beautiful country under the Alps – perhaps too beautiful for a slasher, but at least the photogenic scenery looks nice on the screen. Sadly, when it comes to evoking chills and thrills, Tomaž Gorkic's direction in his feature debut is about as inspired as its vapid plot and characters.

The weirdest thing about this flick is how rudimentary it is: there's no subplot, no subtext



*Ouija: Origin of Evil*

and no twist except for the silly premise of yokels brewing moonshine from people's blood (yes, you heard that right!). It's so basic that it even dispenses with the inevitable clash between the urban-and village-dwellers people: the hatred of the latter for the fancy people coming from the state's capital is taken for granted, like so much else in this film, but the "urbanoia" (as Carol J. Clover famously labelled this archetypal clash of cultures) is neither dramatized nor explored.

Excellent makeup by Sedy Kumulakanta, the FX master from Serbia, is *Killbillies'* only asset, especially the *Wrong Turn*-inspired look of the inbred villains. However, although the film flirts with torture porn, there's a frustratingly small amount of gore. This is partly because the screenplay clumsily reduces the number of potential victims to merely four (including the "final girl"), and partly because the murders are brief and unoriginal (a blink-and-miss decapitation, an axe in the back and an offscreen murder). The generic dialogue and score only add to the overall feeling of déjà vu.

It seems like we'll have to wait longer for the first *good* horror film from Slovenia.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

## ARTISTIC ANAEMIA

### VAMPYRES

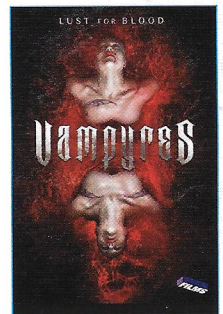
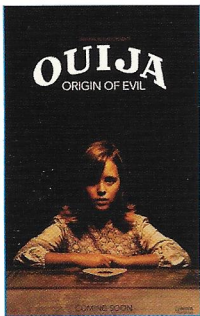
Starring Marta Flich, Almudena León and Verónica Polo  
Directed by Víctor Matellano  
Written by Víctor Matellano and José Ramón Larraz  
Artsploitation

It seems unlikely that the producers behind this remake of José Ramón Larraz's *Vampyres* (1974) deliberately set out to strip it of everything that makes the original a Euro-horror classic.

(After all, Larraz, who died in 2013, gets a screenwriting credit and a dedication in the end credits.) But they have, and the result, no matter how much red stuff gets spilled onscreen, is bloodless by comparison.

The storyline is essentially the same as the 1974 film: lovers Fran (Marta Flich) and Miriam (Almudena León) lure strangers to their isolated country estate and drain them of blood after seducing them with wine and sex. One such victim, Ted (Christian Stamm), becomes enamoured with Fran and ends up being a blood bank for both women. He is also seemingly unable to leave their property. Meanwhile, a trio of campers (a couple in the original) becomes curious about the mysterious women living in the big house nearby. Fran and Miriam, in turn, become curious about their nosy guests – albeit for more sanguinary reasons. But beyond these skin-deep comparisons, there is little to suggest these films share the same bloodline.

Whereas Larraz maintains an atmosphere of erotic dread throughout his film – one reason it has a cult following to this day – director Víctor Matellano has no such ability. For sure, his female co-stars spend much of the overlong 79-minute running time naked and bloody, but this new *Vampyres* is so ugly and cheap-looking that even Flich and León's beauty is not enough to get anyone's blood up – let alone anything else. God knows, they cannot act. More importantly, there's an ugliness of spirit that makes Matellano's *Vampyres* more repulsive than attractive. By the time the film gets down to its final (living) girl, it's devolved into torture porn.





## OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

### THIS ISSUE: LANCE ENDURES THE END

#### SHED OF THE DEAD



#### WASTELAND

Midnight Releasing

There's a lot of debate as to how the world will end. Some say nuclear war, others say zombies. (I think it'll be Donald Trump distributing infected hairpieces while riding a chariot made of chocolate feathers.) This British entry isn't clear on the cause of it, all we know is civilization has collapsed and zombies are on the prowl. Set mostly within the confines of a shed in the English countryside, it follows a man trying to preserve his sanity while waiting for his girlfriend to return from an attempt to locate her parents in London. Though it had every opportunity to convey brutal scenes of loneliness, fear and dread, *Wasteland* is utterly boring. Even the handful of rotter attacks are more tedious than terrifying. A waste!

**BODY COUNT:** 5

**BEST DEATH:** Zombie gets a pipe through the eyeball

#### THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



#### 5 YEARS AFTER THE FALL

Sector 5 Films

Set five years after an industrial accident contaminated most of the world's water and food supplies, only the wealthy and privileged still live well. The rest are left to rot on the other side of heavily protected walls. But when one of the lucky ones finds himself on the wrong side, he must decide whether to remain true to his political ideals of peace and friendship or devolve into an opportunistic murderer fighting for his survival against hordes of cannibalistic killers. Though the dialogue is mediocre, *5 Years* is filled with plenty of action, some cool kills and a couple of big twists that lift it above the ordinary. This one's worth leaving your fortification and seeking out at the freak-filled wasteland known as Wal-Mart.

**BODY COUNT:** 27

**BEST DEATH:** Kid takes a bullet to the noggin

#### HOUSE OF THE SLITHERIN'



#### FUTURE JUSTICE

MVD Visual

When a shuttlecraft from a prison moon near Saturn returns to Earth, the crew finds a planet ravaged by a nuclear war that has forced the surviving population to join gangs of thugs that fight each other for turf, weapons, food and water. Enlisting the help of the dangerous prisoner they were transporting, the crew takes on the leader of a mob while also battling radioactive mutants. It sounds a lot better than it is, but that's okay because *Future Justice* (formerly *Python Vs. the End Times*) is fun and never takes itself seriously. It's filled with goofy, over-the-top acting, great special effects and boasts a character named Python Diamond – quite possibly the coolest name for a bad guy with a heart of gold since Snake Plissken!

**BODY COUNT:** 30

**BEST DEATH:** Soldier gets an exploding arrow in the neck

LAST CHANCE LANCE

And while Fran and Miriam weren't exactly shrieking (shrieking?) violets in the original, here they are true descendants of Elizabeth Báthory, as comfortable in their basement dungeon as the bedroom. Throw in a needless cameo from Hammer glamour girl Caroline Munro and you have yet another opportunistic horror remake with no respect for the past, let alone itself.

SEAN PLUMMER

## BRUTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

### GODDESS OF LOVE

Starring Alexis Kendra, Woody Naismith

and Elizabeth Sandy

Directed by Jon Knautz

Written by Alexis Kendra and Jon Knautz

Terror Films

Describing *Goddess of Love* as "*Fatal Attraction* by way of *Repulsion*" might seem flippant or even set it up for failure in the eyes of some, given the esteem in which those two thrillers are rightly held, but it is accurate. Indeed, this low-budget indie holds its own thanks to one bravura performance, tight direction and writing, and just enough weirdness to push it into the surreal.

Actress Alexis Kendra (*Big Ass Spider*) co-wrote and co-produced *Goddess* with Canadian director Jon Knautz (*Jack Brooks: Monster Slayer*, *The Shrine*). She also stars as Venus, a beautiful stripper who is less beautiful on the inside. She meets Brian (Woody Naismith) at work, and sparks fly. But Brian is still mourning his wife's suicide and pushes away the increasingly needy Venus.

There are signs from the start that all is not right with Venus: she has to smoke drugs to silence the loud music ringing in her head, she guzzles red wine constantly and thinks everyone is talking about her behind her back. So when Brian rejects her and seems to take up with an old friend of his late wife, it pushes Venus over the edge. Violence ensues.

Or does it? Venus is not the most reliable narrator. When she sees a worm-like thing squirming in her bird cage, spots a horse-man at the far end of her apartment hallway, and sees her co-worker turn into a demon, we question both her sanity and the veracity of what we have seen. Knautz and Kendra keep us guessing about what has happened and who has died right up to the end, and the answer is both horrific and sad.

In Venus, Kendra has crafted a female monster for the ages, one just as memorable as *Fatal Attraction*'s Alex Forrest or *Repulsion*'s Carol Ledoux. As beautiful as Kendra is, she is also delusional, psychotic and lonely. Plus, she's been wronged, so while her actions are inexcusable, the horror that results from them pushes *Goddess of Love* into the realm of tragedy.

SEAN PLUMMER

