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REVIEW**Movie Review: *Harry Knuckles and the Pearl Necklace***

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Enthusiasm is always a good quality for young independent filmmakers to possess. Director Lee Gordon Demarbe and writer Ian Driscoll, by all evidence, have plenty of enthusiasm to burn; their film *Harry Knuckles and the Pearl Necklace*, like their previous *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter*, is goofy and unpretentious and, above all, genially enthusiastic. Watching it, you can tell that all involved had a swell time making it. The difficult thing about enthusiasm, though, is that it often supersedes discipline. And if there was ever a film that would benefit from a little structure, it's *Harry Knuckles and the Pearl Necklace*.

For instance, it would be convenient if there was a plot of which to speak. To put it simply, I have no goddamn idea what happens in *Harry Knuckles and the Pearl Necklace*. I have to wonder if Driscoll knows what happens or even in what order he arranged the scenes. There's stuff that happens, true, and I think it involves special agent/superhero Harry Knuckles (Phil Caracas) trying to track down a stolen necklace and encountering Bigfoot, ninjas, drunks in hats, masked wrestler El Santos (Jeff Moffat) and a secret from his past; however, the progression of events doesn't seem to matter as much as the events themselves. It's a film that lives in the present at the expense of all else.

For a while, this approach is amusing. The rate at which Demarbe and Driscoll throw out

crazy shit is impressive - it's as if this film has been designed as a clearing-house for all the stuff they've ever wanted to put into a movie. A lot of the early scenes, like the bit where Harry takes on two lingerie-wearing, kickboxing nuns with the help of The Unknown Gas Station Attendant (wearing a bag on his head like The Unknown Comic), or the bit where Harry has to duke it out with a malicious virtual reality babe, get some incredulous laughs due to their cheesy, go-for-broke sensibilities. It's akin to watching a film with a good alcohol buzz: nothing makes sense, but everything is funny. (You know the reaction: "What the hell did I just see? Oh who cares, it's funny! HA!")

Around the time Troma majordomo Lloyd Kaufman shows up as boozed-up information merchant The Man in the Hat, though, *Pearl Necklace* shifts into being like watching a film while falling-down drunk: nothing makes sense, your head hurts and you just want everything to stop so you can go to sleep. The problem is that Demarbe and Driscoll never set up any sort of parameters for their universe, and while the film's first half may be amusing for that reason, the technique has a pretty short vanishing point.

If anything can happen, then the element of surprise that comes with inventing crazy new shit gets lost; when the element of surprise goes, so do the laughs and entertainment value. When Harry puts the smackdown on enemies the first couple times, it's fun, but when he does it for the fiftieth time, it's too much. Similarly, when El Santos flashes back to his childhood and is still wearing his platinum mask, that's hilarious; when he gets involved in a mock wedding ceremony that turns into a battle royale, that's not so much. (Maybe the latter is because genuine *lucha libre* films are ridiculous enough that any attempts to satirize them come off as weak - *Nacho Libre* suffered from much the same malady.) Demarbe and Driscoll have a modus operandi that is ideal for short bursts of insanity, but the two-hour canvas of *Pearl Necklace* proves to be exhausting.

There's a difference between absurdism and incoherence. With *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter*, Demarbe and Driscoll demonstrated they knew just how far they could go with the

former without toppling over into the latter; with *Harry Knuckles and the Pearl Necklace*, they go hurtling over the edge at a million miles an hour. They're not the first filmmakers to be undone by the lures of excess, and they won't be the last. I still hold out hope for their next project, *Black Kissinger*, since *Pearl Necklace* at its most tiresome is still a lot more scrappy and likeable than your average summer-movie offering. I do hope, however, that they exercise a little more restraint the next time around.

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