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BANSHEE!!! - DVD Review

by Dark Starr

Just released to DVD (it had a European theatrical run), this is an intriguing film. The pacing and a lot of the types of terror are along the lines of 1970's horror films. I keep thinking of "Phantasm" in that regard. Yet it has a modern sensibility to the camera shots, and the blood and gore are certainly in keeping with the horror films of today. There's an interesting aspect of this monster - and it's not a big spoiler because you see it very early in the film. It can take on the look of anyone - and can alter what people see around it. But you get little bursts of weird sounds (sort of random things around it) and at times it digitizes back and forth between the illusion and reality.

The acting and production values here are similar to the old Troma films - but without the humor angle to it. There's also a bit of a John Carpenter texture to this - and since he's my favorite director, that's a good thing. The set up of one of the subplots - a bunch of college kids out camping in the woods is a cliché from old school slasher films. They never really keep the generic gratuitous sex and gore without purpose to a minimum - at least until near the end. That's a good thing. This is more about the story and the mystery and the terror, but these other elements are used for some flavor in the tale.

The first positive of the movie is that despite seeming like it's about to be clichéd based on certain set ups, it stays clear of the trite and is imaginative. Sure, you could at times tell who was about to get killed, but I didn't see the twists and turns of plot coming. There were also some intriguing camera angles and shots - sort of part art, part mood, part just plain thinking outside the box. The effects, while cheap, are fairly good - but far from great. I guess comparisons to "Pumpkinhead" would be appropriate in some ways. The creature looks sort of similar.

If I had one real complaint it would be the acting - or perhaps the directing. The characters never seem to show the kind of real terror that one would have in this type of situation. That makes it feel like they are just acting in a movie. It takes away from the level of terror. Of course, with all the horror films most of us have seen that fear is hard to manifest, anyway. What we do get, though, is more a feeling of dread and a definite sense of mystery about what the creature really is. The one actor I really like is the guy who plays "Jack," (Kevin Shea) but mostly because he reminds me of George Carlin.

Another flaw in the film comes near the climax. I'm not going to ruin the surprise by giving it away, but I will tell you that as a music journalist I was dismayed and disappointed from a technical point at something in the climax. That said, the concept itself was not entirely original, but also far from overdone - and very cool. All that said, the penultimate point in the movie kind of confused me, and I wish they had been a little less abstract in the way they portrayed it. All that said, the closing scene that basically bookends the movie is a nice touch.

All in all, I'd consider this a good movie. It has its flaws for sure, but it seems a nice marriage of modern horror films with older low budget fare. It isn't for everyone, but if you are the kind of person who can overlook a low budget (and honestly, it doesn't look that much like a low budget film) and some mediocre to poor acting, the story is worthwhile.