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## Puppet Monster Massacre

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 Review by [Bill Gibron](#) | posted August 26, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)
**The Product:**

Homemade horror is in such a slump that filmmakers are now flocking around gimmicks to give it a good kick in the pants. One of the most obvious is casting. Going back through their catalog of cult considerations, they will pay middle dollar to desperate ex-icons looking for another paycheck to prove their genre worth. It's like Ed Wood and Bela Lugosi all over again. Then there are the coat-tailers, the ones who see a popular trend - torture porn, found footage, serial killer riffs - and repeat them ad nauseum, to the point where fans just grow frustrated and depressed. Zombies and vampires beware! Few press the outsides of the envelope, while even fewer find a unique means of making their point. So kudos to writer/director Dustin Mills. It takes an artist of brave temperament to attempt a splatter-filled creature on the loose title where puppets, not people, make up the viable victim/villain pool. That's right - friendly felt figures do all the heavy lifting here, and with a bit of commendable CG magic, we end up with an enjoyable, if often silly, **Puppet Monster Massacre**.

**The Plot:**

Dr. Wolfgang Wagner is a former Nazi scientist with an axe to grind. Ordered by Hitler to develop a homicidal beastie cum super soldier, he was on the cusp of greatness when Gramps and his group of Ally commandoes stormed his compound and destroyed his work. Now, decades later, Wagner has an evil plan. He will invite the offspring of the soldiers who attacked him - dorky Charlie, good girl Gwen, the angry and antisocial Iggy, and his hanger-on gal pal Mona - to his secluded mansion under the guise of a contest. If they can spend the night in his sinister manor, he will give them \$1 million. Of course, it's a ruse, a means of getting his victims in one place so that his latest genetic mutation can make mincemeat out of them, one by one. Once he makes the connection between Charlie and his past however, Gramps suits up to save the day.

**The DVD:**

They say opposites attract. Science has taught us that they also tend to repel against one another. In the case of **The Puppet Monster Massacre**, the competing concepts of outright horror, comedy homage, kid vid theatrics, and CG settings and splatter play against each other like angry relatives at a will reading. Sometimes we are laughing. Sometimes we are yawning. There are moments of great creative invention. There are also sequences of slack surprise and boredom. Mills, who walks into this efforts as the jack of perhaps too many trades, does his best to make macabre out of a muppet, but the scares and suspense and few and far between. In their place are obvious references (one character is named Raimi Campbell, after all) and a nice amount of computer generated ambiance. Indeed, the backdrops upon which our puppets are super imposed have a nice violent video game quality. It's like *Silent Hill* met *Resident Evil* and both took a platonic vacation at the *House of the Dead*. When they work, the atmosphere created is akin to spending time with a terrifying graphic novel.

Of course, when you've got Elmo's illiterate human cousins walking around in front of them, the dread drops off rather quickly. There are definitely issues with the 'performers' here. Dr. Wagner and his beast are excellent, the perfect combination of expression and rudimentary realization. Even the weird coloring


**CONTENT**

★★★★★

**VIDEO**

★★★★★

**AUDIO**

★★★★★

**EXTRAS**

★★★★★

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★★★★★

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and hideous hairdo on the mad man scientist fits the part. Gramps is also a recognizable in a stereotypical old fart ideal and Raimi Campbell is like an uber-nerd reimagined as a pus wart. That just leaves our leads, and aside from Mona's ample cloth bosom (which we get to see several times), the main characters are too crude. They might as well be socks with stock elements glued to them. Adding a few piercings doesn't distinguish them. Sure, it's a nice touch that Iggy turns out to be less "British" than he appears, but for the most part, we can't wait to see these idiots die. They make the tired teen archetype from the '80s slasher film look like players from the Old Vic. Yes...yes...yes...they are puppets. We get it. They are supposed to be crude and comical - but dull?

Thankfully, Mills' sense of humor and way with a narrative more or less save the experience. Just when we think we can't tolerate the children's party production values any further, the script comes along and delivers some excellent self-deprecating dialogue. This is a horror movie that understands it's a horror movie, that doesn't try to be realistic (duh) while still playing into all the creepshow cliches. Does that mean that *The Puppet Monster Massacre* is a 100% success? Hardly. In fact, the film is more a noble failure than a true triumph. It's just too surreal to really win us over. And then there is the blood. It's nice that Mills has amplified the gore with computer graphics, but the kills lack the impact he is looking for. Real bloodletting is less clean and polished. Here, when someone dies, the cartoonish quality of the death spray leaves us wanting something a bit more...substantive. Indeed, that's a good way to sum up **The Puppet Monster Massacre**. It's a novel idea with some intriguing approaches, but overall, it's a slight and superficial scarefest.

#### The Video:

Presented in a decent 1.78:1 anamorphic widescreen image, **The Puppet Monster Massacre** looks better than one might expect. A lot of this has to do with the way Mills sets up shots and frames his action. This is a professional looking effort with puppets instead of people at the fore. The colors are crisp and the CG sharp and detailed. There will be some put off by the blatant greenscreen nature of it all, but for the most part, the movie looks good.

#### The Audio:

On the sound side of things, the Dolby Digital Stereo 2.0 mix is mediocre. The dialogue is clear and easy to understand. The music tends to be a bit overmodulated and loud. There's no real sense of space or direction, and a sequence where Charlie and Gwen are walking through a tunnel tends to overdo the echo and reverb. Still, the overall presentation is perfectly acceptable.

**The Extras:** There are two commentary tracks included on this disc. One features Mills by himself and it's very insightful. He lists off his frames of reference, explains certain plot elements, and argues for things he would do differently. The second narrative includes assistant director Brandon Salkil and is a bit repetitive. With two, it's definitely more lively and fun. There are also two small clips of discarded monster designs. They prove that the final version of the creature was indeed the best version.

#### Final Thoughts:

Going into something called **The Puppet Monster Massacre**, you get a basic idea of what you're about to see. The actual film doesn't disappoint, so as long as you keep your expectations in check, you'll find yourself loving every laugh out loud minute. On the other hand, if you think you're about to see something similar to Peter Jackson's perverted **Meet the Feebles**, you'd be wrong. This is far less confrontational and much more mundane. Still, it earns a **Recommended** rating for how enjoyable the good parts are. Just forget the failures - and the feeling of last gasp grandstanding via gimmickry - and you'll be all right.

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