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THE PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE



Reviewed by: Pat Torfe

Directed by: Dustin Mills

Starring:

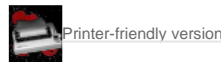
Dustin Mills
Steve Rimpici
Bart Flynn
Jessica Daniels

Movie:

DVD:

Overall:

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WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

Set in 1985, mad Nazi scientist Dr. Wolfgang Wagner has unleashed a monster parasite from another dimension that grows in size as it feeds. Wagner plans to use the parasite to gain revenge on the bloodlines of the original soldiers that thwarted his experiments during WWII. How does he plan on doing it? By inviting some teens from the local town to come stay at his house under the premise that if they spend the night, they get a million dollars.

IS IT A GOOD MOVIE?

MEET THE FEEBLES, anyone? What else do you think of when it comes to puppets behaving badly, swearing and ridiculous gore? A pet project of writer/director/editor/exec producer/puppeteer Dustin Mills, THE PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE is something more than the "lazy comparison" Mills refers to between his film and Peter Jackson's cult classic. In fact, the film aims to be a tongue-in-cheek homage to the horror films of the 80s, which when played off of the puppet gimmick, works wonderfully.

Yes, the puppet gimmick works. The look of the puppets are appropriately cheesy in spots but not to the point of being blatantly cheap. I was wondering how this movie could work if it were a live-action film instead of the puppets, and it very well could (barring some comedic mannerisms that are amplified through the use of puppets). That in itself shows that the film doesn't absolutely hinge on the puppets. Far from it, the film hinges on the writing and the voice-acting by everyone involved. Mills obviously has a love for the genre, and every part of his film has references to other horror films such as ALIENS and HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL. In fact, there's also a reference to FRIGHT NIGHT and even Bruce Campbell and Sam Raimi! Anytime you reference Sam and The Chin in your film, I take notice (*f*ck SHARKTOPUS, though).

As I mentioned, the voice-acting for the film works wonders. The voice cast deliver some great lines with just the right amount of comedy and seriousness. Yes, each character is basically a cliché. Our protagonist Charlie is a well-meaning wimp just trying to find the courage to ask out his best friend, Gwen. Gwen is Charlie's best friend (obviously) since kindergarten, and comes across as being more logical and smarter than Charlie. Probably the most notable stereotype is Raimi Campbell, your typical nerd whose has amassed an encyclopedic knowledge of horror movies but not so much with women. I also have to mention the design of the CG backgrounds as matching up perfectly with the design of the film. It doesn't hide the obviousness of it's origins, but at the same time, it's akin to the simple backdrops of a puppet play. Of course, it probably wouldn't work as well if you used real-life surroundings.

Any faults? Well, despite the voice-acting being terrific, some actors (Erica Kisseberth, for one) have a bit of a problem with delivering their lines. It sounds as if they're deadpanning it but also just reading the line without putting any sort of emotion into the delivery. Aside from that, the film obviously isn't for everyone

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(ain), since the comedy relies to a certain extent on the puppets, but even then that's stretching it. Aside from those small qualms, PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE is a wonderful send-up to 80s horror (with puppets). The actors involved in the production get it, the puppets aren't relied upon as a crutch, and it's just plain *fun*. That's the key thing for any film of this nature.

VIDEO / AUDIO

Video: The film's 1.78:1 **anamorphic widescreen** transfer looks pretty good, with nice colour saturation and good detail (well, as detailed as you can get with fuzzy muppets). The obvious CGI blood is, well, obvious, as are the CG backgrounds which all add to the film's charm.

Audio: The **Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo** track on the disc is okay. It's relatively flat and doesn't exactly pop, with some instances of uneven dialogue levels belying the film's indie origins. But overall, it's clear and distortion free.

THE EXTRAS

We're privileged to have two commentary tracks with this release. The first is an **audio commentary with writer/director/editor/exec producer/puppeteer Dustin Mills**, while the second **audio commentary features Mills and assistant director, Brandon Salkil**. Mills mentions in his solo track that the one where he and Salkil chat is his more-liked of the two, I feel both have the same amount of enthusiasm and information. There's some repetition here and there, but these are still enjoyable for the listen.

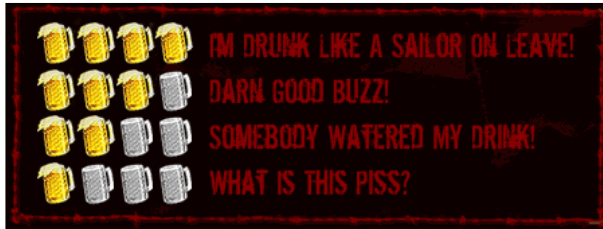
Rounding things up are two segments of the **disgarded monster design**. The design looks like a skinned sabertooth tiger head plastered onto a generic torso, and doesn't quite look the part of a creature from another dimension. An obvious decision.

Despite the presence of the teaser trailer online, it's not included on the disc.

LAST CALL

Funny and smart, PUPPET MONSTER MASSACRE deserves a shot, even if you didn't care much for MEET THE FEEBLES. The voice-acting combined with their clever references to 80s horror films was an enjoyable experience. Add in two informative and fun commentaries with the appropriate audio and video transfers, and it's a great find.

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