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The Puppet Master Massacre

2010

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When someone mentions puppets the first thing that most will think of will be that time honored television series that most of us grew up with; *Sesame Street*. Jim Henson however did branch out and work on other things which were a bit more adult such as *The Dark Crystal*, but it took those working on the fringe to take puppetry even further. Peter Jackson appalled Henson's daughter, at least that's long been the story, with *Meet the Feebles*, an unquestionable cult hit, while the more mainstream approach to things which puppets shouldn't do came with *Team America*. Puppets taking center stage in a film isn't necessarily seen often in cinema, but there are those who aren't afraid to take something which was meant for children and push it into more adult territory.

The Puppet Master Massacre is the latest effort to sully the good name of puppetry and leave scars on the under ten crowd who might have parents that mistakenly pick up the film thinking that it will work as an afternoon babysitter. The film jumps back to the past, 1985 to be exact, where young Charlie gets an invitation to stay the night in a reportedly haunted mansion belonging to Wagner, a scientist living in his small town. Charlie isn't alone however and Gwen (token love interest), Iggy (stereotype faux-Brit), and Raimi (necessary nerd) have also been given invitations with a prize of one million dollars on the line for any of them who can stay the night. Iggy has also brought along his girlfriend Mona but what none of them realize is that Wagner has other plans for them. He's been working on an experiment that he was part of in Nazi Germany and his ravenous creature is ready to help him get revenge after four decades of hard work.

You could think of *The Puppet Master Massacre* as being something of a modern day *Meet the Feebles*, a movie which it is obviously going to get compared to quite often. With both movies you have characters that swear, have sex, and there's a bit of blood and guts as well. There are differences between the films however and if you look at Jackson's movie for instance, his characters all are designed with animals in mind whereas *The Puppet Master Massacre* is going for more of a human look which resembles Sesame Street puppets to some extent although not nearly as refined.

The Puppet Master Massacre is a valiant effort, but it doesn't quite manage to hit the same heights at the movies which came before it. The jokes are most often very juvenile, resorting to bodily functions as humor in many cases which might work for some, but not for all. I'm definitely one for low-brow comedy, but this is something which has been so overused in virtually

every genre that it doesn't work at all for me here. There is a fair amount of gore, but it's computer generated, and this is another "trick" on movie making which I've grown extremely tired of but in this case I can understand a little. I'm sure that the film was made on a limited budget and it's easier to add in your blood and guts in post production rather than trying to clean the puppets each and every time you need them.

The movie incorporates a number of clichés although this would be more intentional, especially since *The Puppet Monster Massacre* is set in the 80's and that's a decade of filmmaking which is filled with predictability most often. Charlie is your average teen who is more of a loser than anything else but wants to overcome this, mostly to impress Gwen. This immediately allows us to understand that his character will undergo some type of transformation so that he can finally break out of his shell. Mona is essentially the puppet version of actresses from the 80's who weren't afraid of getting topless in slasher films, something which sadly seems to have all but vanished in favor of wanting to be more "respected" as a performer. Okay, puppet boobs are kind of funny, but if you've learned anything from horror movies it should be that any character which is considered to be a "bad influence" will perish at some point. Raimi is the nerd who is just looking to get laid at some point, but even nerds are the target of any horror creation and without them, Jason would have never got his iconic hockey mask. Most understand that these characters also meet a swift end at some point. It's the characters who seemingly stand on the side of righteousness who will survive.

Wagner is a stereotypical Nazi scientist, bent on getting revenge for the death of his wife and fellow co-workers who just happened to be working on the same creature that he's managed to bring to life once again. It's initial appearance is something of a tribute to the chestbuster in *Alien* and the creature does seem to bear a slight resemblance to H.R. Giger's creation. The film doesn't overuse it and while it's seen initially when the movie begins, it's appearance is kept at a minimum until towards the end of the film which is a nice touch. Too many movies have a tendency to overexpose their creatures and ruin them, although here this isn't quite the type of monster that instills fear on anyone, not unless you're a puppet.

I may not have found the movie to be to my liking in terms of the plot or the humor, but it is made in a rather impressive way. The puppets might not be incredibly impressive, but they are made quite well for the most part. The blending of the puppets with the sets and computer generated effects and even location is actually very good so there's a nice merging to style which doesn't seem like it would work, but it actually does.

The DVD features two commentary tracks; the first is with Dustin Mills while he's joined in the second with Brandon Salkil, and both aren't terribly bad to listen to. There are also discarded puppet designs and the one that is featured in the film was the right choice in my opinion.

The Puppet Monster Massacre will appeal to some, but I think this will really depend on not only your sense of humor, but your appreciation for puppets. There are those who are going to be less than impressed with what the movie offers, those who will find this to be the next thing that they need to show to everyone they know, and then those of us who just aren't quite willing to forget about everything we saw in *Meet the Feebles*. At the very least I'd put it on my rental list just to see if you think it's worth adding into your DVD collection.

-mike-

Directed by:
Dustin Mills

Written by:
Dustin Mills

Voice Cast:
Steve Rimpici (Wagner)
Bart Flynn (Gramps/Iggy)
Ethan Holey (Charlie)
Jessica Daniels (Gwen)
Erica Kisseberth (Mona)
Dustin Mills (Raimi)

DVD Features:
Widescreen Format (2.35:1)
Audio: English Dolby Digital 5.1, English
Dolby Digital 2.0 & Spanish Dolby Digital
5.1
English & Spanish Subtitles
Commentary w/Robert Rodriguez
"10 Minute Film School" Featurette
"The Badass Babes And Tough Guys Of
Planet Terror" Featurette
Casting Rebel Featurette
Sickos, Bullets, And Explosions: The Stunts
Of Planet Terror
"The Friend, The Doctor, And The Real
Estate Agent" Featurette
International Trailer
Photo Gallery

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