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Review by [Kurt Dahlke](#) | posted November 17, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#)

Haunted Changi:

I've just happily notched my first Singaporean horror movie - actually my first Singaporean movie of any type - and I'm pretty glad I did. Though most viewers will need to deal with cultural differences (such as a somewhat goofy-to-Western-eyes climax) that make the movie a singular trip, it's worth it to find a new frightful film that combines motifs in an exciting and consistently engaging way.

On its surface a *Blair Witch* clone, *Haunted Changi* throws in a heaping helping of J-Horror, and other motifs, to make something that feels new and delightfully terrifying.

Andrew, Audi, Sheena and Farid are a small crew of intrepid documentary makers in Singapore, (actually it's mostly Andrew urging the others to join in) intent on discovering the secrets of Old Changi Hospital - OCH - purportedly the most haunted place in the world. OCH, completely abandoned since the 1990s, was home to any number of atrocities over its lifespan. During World War Two the structure was used as a Japanese military hospital, replete



CONTENT

★★★★★

VIDEO

★★★★★

AUDIO

★★★★★

EXTRAS

★★★★★

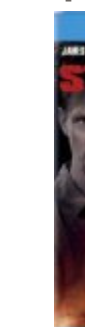
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with a torture chamber, supposed beheadings, and all manner of evil killing.

Andrew and crew thoughtfully and methodically go about investigating the site. By interviewing local kids who use the place as sort of a dare, and certainly a joint for graffiti practice, they approach their scary location with serious intent. Eventually, though, they have to actually go in, wandering around at night, checking out the torture chamber, mortuary, and network of tunnels underneath the hospital. (You must have known there was going to be a network of tunnels, didn't you?) Things go poorly, and finally we the viewers are treated to an - obviously edited - selection of the footage they left behind.

For most fans of adventurous horror, Singapore may yet be an undiscovered country, and *Haunted Changi* is a great place to start for the armchair traveler. Though containing many familiar horror tropes, the simple novelty of the movie's subtitled dialog in Singlish (English with a Singapore twist) is quite engaging, which, among other cultural differences, gives the movie a rare feel. More important, however, is the contemporary twist director Andrew Lau brings to proceedings - probably just by being young.

Lau's methodical approach to his cinematic research, coupled with a growing mental imbalance, makes a movie that feels realistic, scary and new. Nodding towards current paranormal research, cable TV hit *Ghost Hunters International* is both referenced in *Changi's* frenzied footage and technique, and also literally connected to the movie when a crew of Singapore Ghost Hunters meets Lau's crew in the hospital. Those familiar multiple infra-red cameras are deployed, as well as audio recording tools - later to be pored over - which makes *Haunted Changi* seem at least as real as those 'reality shows' it apes.

Ultimately it's up to Lau's exploitation of a ripe target, (the notoriously haunted Old Changi Hospital) knowledge of contemporary spook show motifs, and employment of truly believable cohorts that makes *Haunted Changi* so exciting. If we didn't believe in the characters Lau hangs out with, (such as his horndog cameraman) we wouldn't really care too much about their misadventures. Thankfully Lau and crew's characterizations work fantastically, so when the camera is rushing urgently through those narrow, sickly tunnels underneath the hospital, rounding corner after blind corner on the way to who knows what, we're right there in person feeling the terror, the almost unbearable tension. And when you're watching a horror movie, what the hell else do you want?

The DVD

Video:

This 1.85:1 anamorphic widescreen presentation is of fine quality for the handheld movie genre. Obviously much of the footage is a little shaky, though there are plenty of tripod shots as well. Night-vision footage presents its own fidelity issues, and shots in motion

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have a little blur. Mostly, footage represents a bit of the super-crispy digital variety, and DNR problems are a minor issue mostly in very dark scenes.

Sound:

Dolby Digital 5.1 makes good use of creepy audio atmospherics, with little noises placed here and there to startle you. Dynamic range favors screams, and dialog is relatively forceful for what seems to be mostly location audio, with no instances of source damage.

Extras:

This is the **81-Minute Version** with additional footage not seen in theaters. 23 minutes of **World War II Archival Footage** is of historical interest. You also get the **Crewblog Archived** which amounts to static shots of blog entries created to parallel production of the movie (all of which I'm sure can still be found online, too). Finally, you can enjoy the **Theatrical Trailer** and the **First Three Chapters** (text-based screens) of the book "**What Happened to the Crew of Haunted Changi?**".

Final Thoughts:

Haunted Changi gives *The Blair Witch Project* a Singapore twist, as a crew of young adults methodically documents multiple facets of a haunted abandoned hospital. A youthful, contemporary vibe adds freshness to a measured build-up to fear. Things go slightly off the rails during a culturally skewed climax that seems slightly silly, but which also wallows in the sheer terror only a panicked dash through an underground labyrinth can bring. **Recommended** for fans of Asian horror.

- Kurt Dahlke

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