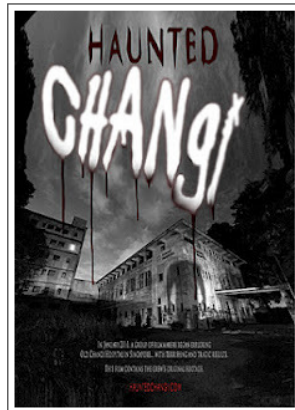




FEB 10, 2012

REVIEW: HAUNTED CHANGI



Stop me if you've heard this one before: a group of filmmakers set out to make a documentary about a creepy, isolated, abandoned location where ghosts and ghoulies and long-legged beasties are said to romp and rave and eat human skin...and then the filmmakers find out that stuff is all true OMG! In that regard, *Haunted Changi* is nothing new. Following *The Blair Witch Project* beat-for-beat, we meet our filmmaker characters, they interview locals about the legends of Changi Hospital, and then the investigation begins.

Good news, though: *Haunted Changi*, shot entirely on location at the real titular hospital in Singapore, is actually pretty decent. It won't knock your socks off with its originality (or lack thereof), and except for a few scares, it's nothing you haven't seen before. But found-footage fans should find it a worthy addition to the sub-genre, as it produces some nice scares and features a lot of pretty Asian women.

Andrew is our director. He seems down-to-earth enough, and isn't nearly as bullheaded as *Blair Witch's* Heather. Sheena is the producer/narrator of the project. She may or may not be completely, head-over-heels in love with Andrew. Farid is the soundman. If ever there were a Singaporean surfer hipster, it's definitely him. Lastly we have Audi, our cameraman who handles the bulk of the documentary's filming.

Their project is a documentary on Changi Hospital—once a military barracks during the 1930s/40s, and subsequently a military prison camp before finally becoming a general hospital until closing in 1997. It's a legitimately creepy place, and once you hear the stories of all the horrors that took place within its crumbling walls – namely the torture of prisoners and the mass beheadings of Chinese natives – the place becomes even



Musings on the darker side of movies, music, literature, and other oddities. Occasionally there will be some original fiction by yours truly.

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Well...here's one more.



THE INFECTED

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A celebration of the worst horror and cult movies ever made.

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 - THE RAVEN

creepier.

As is always the case with premises like these, shit gets real.



The Good

For the most part, our characters come across as real kids. They crack jokes and mug for the camera. They are fledgling amateur filmmakers determined to make a documentary on a very creepy legend that has permeated their home since World War 2. That includes walking the long-abandoned hospital's hallways and tunnels...

Haunted Changi tells the story in a different way—this time, the characters don't walk into their creepy location never to come out again; likewise, the characters go in and out several times. But what sets *Haunted Changi* apart from its brethren is the psychology behind it all—what their entrance into Changi Hospital does to our characters' psyches. And the movie allows us to see that—it no longer becomes a case of screaming "don't go in that room!" at the screen, but rather, "don't go back inside that place you moron!"

The movie opens with a well-done snippet from the documentary that the kids are working on, which is an interesting and unique start to the film. It's a brief, five-minute introduction that provides the audience with all the back-story they would need on Changi Hospital to appreciate the creep that is soon to follow. Part of me wishes the entire runtime of *Haunted Changi* had actually been an expanded version of this introduction, as it was well done and morbidly fascinating.

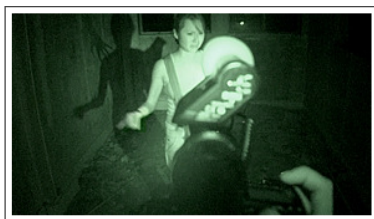
One of the joys of watching films from another part of the world – horror especially – is the inclusion of unique and culturally specific legends and myths you'd otherwise not have previous knowledge about. In this case, I speak of the "pontianak," a vampire ghost, which is said to haunt the hospital...

Begin Spoilers.

...in the form of a Chinese native who has made the old hospital her home. For part of the movie, Andrew is the only one among them to have met this character. To him, nothing about her is strange or aloof. He has no inkling of what she really is.

The pontianak does pretty much what you'd expect it to—attaches itself to a host and gradually sucks the life from it...but because it's a ghost, there's no way to fight it. It is this creature that begins to affect our characters in different ways: Andrew falls victim to her first, and becomes a mumbling, giggling fool toward the end of the movie. He begins to go almost mad, having totally fallen under her spell. Farid, too, becomes sick—too weak to even leave his home. Sheena, however, becomes furious at the notion that Andrew seems to be "involved" with this Chinese native, and the group nearly disassembles by film's end.

End Spoilers.



- SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT: PART 2
- THE SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE
- THE UNDYING
- WEASELS RIP MY FLESH



Unheralded horror that deserves a second (or even first) look.

- INTRO
- THE CALLER
- COPYCAT
- FRAILTY
- LAKE MUNGO
- THE NIGHT FLIER
- RAVENOUS

MOST READ THIS WEEK



RANT: FRIDAY THE 13th (2009)

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THE CRYING BOY

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UNsung HORRORS: COPYCAT

Every once in a while, a genuinely great horror movie—one that would rightfully be considered a classic, had it gotten more exposure and lov...

The Bad

While Singapore is a territory that utilizes twenty different languages, their primary language is English. Despite this surprising fact, our English-speaking cast does not speak 100% comfortably in this tongue. To avoid sounding like a complete ignoramus, I disclose that I am clearly not from Singapore, so I can't speak with great confidence as to the languages our actors know and don't know. All I can say is this: their English isn't the best – not their understanding of it, but their delivery of it – and at times it became a disservice. For a movie like this, the characters have to seem absolutely genuine, or else it just won't work. Because it's shot to look real, it has to feel real, and when it becomes clear that some of the actors aren't entirely comfortable with some of the English dialogue, it takes you right out of the movie. Based on the cast's delivery of their lines, it leads me to believe that they normally utilize another native language with which they are more comfortable. Perhaps shooting in English was a decision made early on in an effort to make the movie more appealing to a wider range of territories. (Let's face it, us 'Mericans don't like to read.) If that's the case, then it's a forgivable decision. But let's just say I'm glad the DVD came with subtitles.

My only other real complaint about the film would be the ending. It's not a bad one—not at all...but I wanted more. Found footage movies tend to throw everything and the kitchen sink at you during their last five to ten minutes. And while *Haunted Changi* does show you more during the ending than it did previously throughout the movie, it leaves you feeling unsatisfied. For instance, the groundwork for mass beheadings has already been laid—and while this is exploited during the movie for a clever and creepy scene, it feels as if it could have been exploited just a bit more. I'm not saying include a scene of a headless body chasing our characters down the hallway with blood shooting from the neck...but maybe – far, far down the hall – have the kids see a barely visible headless specter quickly pass from one doorway through another.

But that's just me. I like dudes with no heads.



The Low Down

Found footage movies all follow one basic framework to tell their stories: meet the characters, learn the history of their investigation, see the characters die. It is a tried-and-true formula that, to me, is generally a recipe for success. Are all of these movies basically the same? Sure, you could say that. But as far as I'm concerned, a decent movie is a decent movie. If it's a concept I've seen a hundred times, I don't care—so long as it's well told, written, and acted. Also, creep helps.

GRADE: B



SHITTY FLICKS: THE AMITYVILLE HAUNTING

Shitty Flicks is an ongoing column that celebrates the most hilariously incompetent, amusingly pedestrian, and mind-bogglingly stupid movies...



DO YOU WATCH SUTTER CANE?

Found this custom-made DVD insert the other night. Pretty cool. Props to its (unknown) artist.



THE HANDS RESIST HIM

In March of 2000, the below painting, officially titled "The Hands Resist Him," was sold on eBay with the description "The Haunted Painting..."

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...a blogger community dedicated to the individuals that pour their tireless effort, heart, and soul into writing about the horror genre.

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Ghost Stories

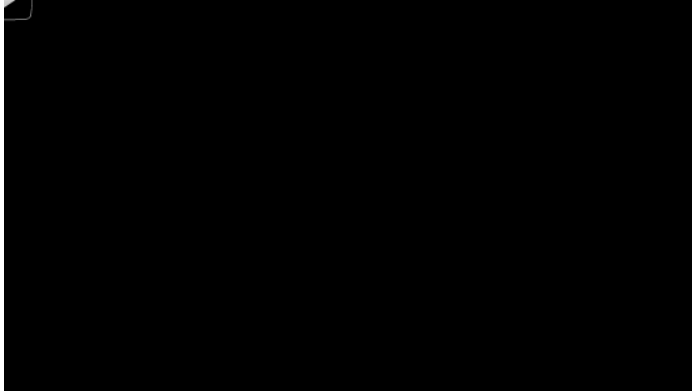
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TRUE
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END OF SUMMER

*An agitation of the air,
A perturbation of the light
Admonished me the unloved year
Would turn on its hinge that night.*

*I stood in the disenchanting field
Amid the stubble and the stones,
Amazed, while a small worm lisped to
me
The song of my marrow-bones.*

*Blue poured into summer blue,
A hawk broke from his cloudless tower,
The roof of the silo blazed, and I knew
That part of my life was over.*

*Already the iron door of the north
Clangs open: birds, leaves, snows
Order their populations forth,
And a cruel wind blows.*

Stanley Kunitz
1905–2006

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