
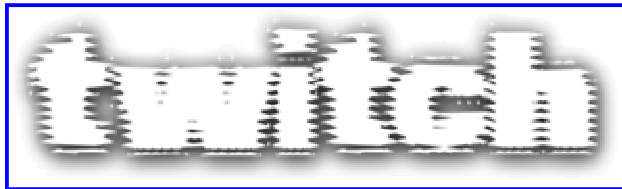


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Review of HAUNTED CHANGI



by [Stefan](#), September 4, 2010 11:09 PM

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During the time when I first [wrote about the film on Twitch](#), I was intrigued by the premise alone, given that it's about time some filmmaker took a camera and shot within the confines of one of Singapore's most haunted locations, the Old Changi Hospital, or more commonly referred to as OCH. Having followed its [production blog](#) and [Facebook updates](#), I was made curious enough to contact Sheena Chung, producer of the film and was told that crew members got sick, and they weren't really quite decided whether to make this a documentary, or a narrative feature from the footage that they obtained, though the director Andrew Lau and her team had managed to capture some inexplicable footage.

But of course she had stayed firmly in character (pretty cool, I was interacting with Sheena the producer character) at the height of their film's viral marketing campaign, unknowest to me at the point, and frankly there were some quarters who got equally interested to want to know more about the "truth" and got excited about the film, and on the flip side, the skeptical camp which grew because a local press paper picked up on an unfortunate leaked movie still, did some probing around - it's Singapore, unnatural deaths are well publicised - and pretty much threw a spanner in the outcome of marketing efforts to keep people guessing. That said, I still think the filmmakers did a great job as far as local film marketing is concerned, to try and maximise returns from a limited marketing budget, and probably one of the longest running one as well. Not forgetting that Haunted Changi could be one of, if not the first, local film to harness social media networks to keep up a parallel storyline outside of film.

For the uninitiated, the introduction of this mockumentary gives a solid broad background on the history behind OCH, where being used by the Japanese occupiers in WWII meant the whispers of the existence of the legendary underground torture chambers, a war hospital, and a public hospital that saw its fair share of deaths like any other. The Changi area was also notorious for massacres carried out by the Japanese soldiers during WWII, and all the reported history of gruesome deaths at that time just added to the spooky aura surrounding the location. For one, the hair on my back still stands each time I pass by the area, and no, it's quite insane to want to enter the premises during the night time.

OK so I'm a scaredy cat, but the footage you see here is probably the next best thing to understanding why, without having the need to walk in yourself. The filmmakers here captured tons of footage, be it within the heavily graffitied premises, or cameras placed around the perimeter to serve as surveillance time lapsed cameras (some reportedly stolen). Now as far as the first-person, found footage horror subgenre goes, Haunted Chani shares some of the common traits such as shaky camera shots, staying credits-free for that sense of reality, being relatively low budget and on track for a sizeable box office return (the receipts on [opening day already surpassed mainstream and Hollywood productions](#), which is extremely rare for an indie Singapore made film), piquing the interest of markets overseas because a horror film can travel.

But if what's captured is to be believed, the team (or what remains of the team) needed someone else from the outside to put it all together, so enter American writer-director-producer Tony Kern, who made a local feature documentary [A Month of Hungry Ghosts](#) in 2008, during which he had claimed some personal spooky encounters of the supernatural in the making of that film. It's a standard documentary about the current Lunar Seventh Month, where the gates of Hell opens for ghosts to walk the Earth, and Haunted Changi's release during this period is not uncanny to say the least. Responsible for editing and the pick up shots in Haunted Changi, Tony's involvement will undoubtedly skew the blur between reality and fantasy quite toward the latter, so we can all rest a little easy.

Those expecting a spook fest from the onset will be a little disappointed though. Running about 80 minutes, Haunted Changi spends considerable time setting up the characters of director Andrew Lau, producer Sheena Chung, soundman Farid Azlam and cameraman Audi Khalis as a close knit quartet out to make a standard documentary about OCH, complete with exploration footage, and interviews with the man on the street. If there's a flaw, the interviewees all seemed a little too polished, and had taken this aspect too seriously, especially with the interview with an unnamed, sihouletted old man in the 80s whose account got cut off halfway. Being young adults their mood is by nature playful, their day time visits to OCH and time spent in the editing room naturally don't reveal much, and conversational noises, scary shadows of a hand lingering in the frame, and sudden movements all got explained away quite logically with reasons of wind and lighting angles during their shoot.

Things start to pick up only when the team goes for their night shoot, and when Andrew Lau recounts his lone encounter with a Chinese prostitute "Xiao Juan" who had sought refuge in OCH, you know things aren't quite what they seem. While I can sit through the likes of *Cloverfield* and the *REC* movies without issue, the dizzying camerawork here is nauseating, coupled with quick edits that makes it an unpleasant experience to sit through, working of course to the film's favour of sustaining the mood, when all we get to see through the first person camera is via night vision, or illumination from a lone light source. There's also a fair bit of shots along claustropobic, dank corridors that provides that level of suspense during the film's climax, where the power of your imagination and expectations run into overdrive to fill in gaps you don't get to see. In fact, the film's structure is pretty much like *Paranormal Activity* given that you get repetitive shots from the same location and angle, coupled with no major "action" which were all reserved for the last 10 minutes.

The verdict by Singapore critics for this film has thus far been mixed, but I'm throwing my weight behind this one because it goes to show that an indie Singapore film can garner an audience here. Without a doubt the primary draw here is that of

OCH as a horror institution in itself, but it does take some balls to shoot from within, then come up with an engaging storyline aligned to flavours of the moment in cinematic horror, spend enormous time working to crank its modest marketing machinery, and getting results when it spooks people. Having watched this film with a regular audience, it's quite indicative that the filmmakers succeeded in making them squirm in their seats, seeing people around the hall covering their faces and peeking through fingers, engaging in nervous whispers and some even looking away from the screen when things are building into a climax.

If only they can modify that tacky poster design and title font which does look a little too cheesy for a found-footage mockumentary, the film is nothing but a worthy entry Singapore's limited, though growing, horror filmography. It does go to show there is enough in the tank to go up against the best in the world in this sub-genre and hopefully it does get to reach markets overseas so I can also read what you think of this film.

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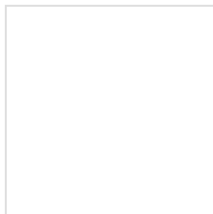
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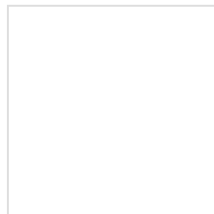
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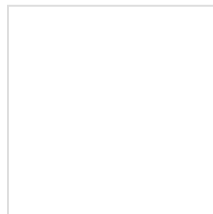
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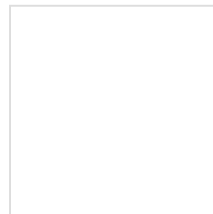
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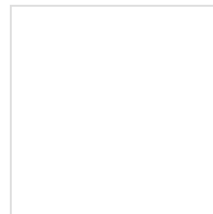
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by [Ryland Aldrich](#), September 5, 2011 2:39 PM

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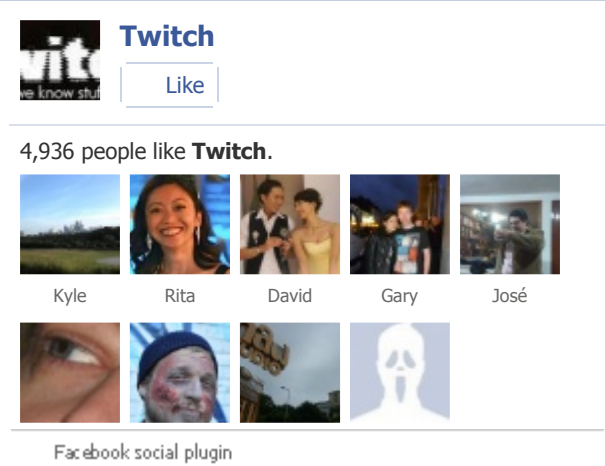


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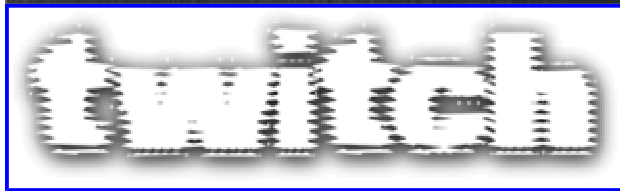


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