



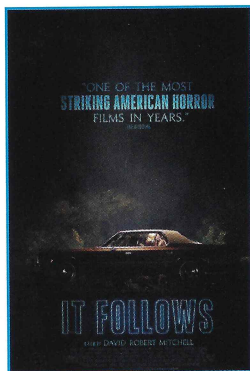
## HELLHOUND ON YOUR TRAIL

### IT FOLLOWS

Starring Maika Monroe, Keir Gilchrist and Olivia Luccardi  
Written and directed by David Robert Mitchell  
Mongrel Media

Films like *Phantasm*, *Prince of Darkness*, the original Japanese *Pulse* and much of David Lynch's filmography achieve that literal nightmare feeling of logic being clawed away by something reaching up from the subconscious. *It Follows* doesn't claw as much as it steadfastly pursues – hence the title – but it's effectively nightmarish in its own way.

Based on a recurring bad dream suffered by writer-director David Robert Mitchell, the suburbs-set film uses a very basic – *Nightmare on Elm Street*-influenced – premise to terrify: what if a shape-shifting something that no one else could see pursued you relentlessly? Maika Monroe (*The Guest*) stars as Jay, a suburban teen who goes out on a date with Hugh (Jake Weary). After a shag on the bench seat of his car, he drugs her, ties her to a chair and drops a bomb. No, he's not a Nickelback fan – slightly worse: he's passed along a sexually-transmitted curse for which the recipient is pursued by a murderous, shape-shifting entity. It can take the form of a stranger or someone familiar, it can



only be seen by its target or someone it's targeted before, it can only walk but never rests, and if it kills its victim, it moves back up the line to whoever infected that person.

So you can run but you can't hide, or barely rest, and you need to pass it along to someone who can hopefully do the same before getting hate-fucked by the thing. With the help of her Scooby Gang of neighbourhood pals, Jay evades and eventually tries to destroy the entity – all to the driving beat of a spectacular score by Disasterpiece.

*It Follows* presents an endless nightmare scenario that's simple and effective. Less effective, though, is Mitchell's attempt at a timeless setting. With a dreamy nostalgic atmosphere similar to his previous feature, *The Myth of the American Sleepover*, most of the movie screams '70s/'80s, except for some modern cars, a cell phone at the beginning and a clamshell e-reader thing one of the characters uses. It's a distracting bit of *Jetsons* tech that the filmmaker apparently invented for the movie that adds nothing.

Some of the plot is similarly perplexing (what happened with Jay and the guys on the motorboat?). And no, films don't need to explain everything – we never find out if gay sex or condoms affect the curse, for example – but why confuse your audience when you're already doing a helluva job scaring the pants off of 'em?

DAVE ALEXANDER

## GREATEST STORY EVER MOULD

### MOTIVATIONAL GROWTH

Starring Jeffrey Combs, Adrian DiGiovanni and Danielle Doetsch  
Written and directed by Don Thacker  
Parade Deck Films

Trying to describe Don Thacker's *Motivational Growth* to someone who hasn't seen it is sort of like describing red to a blind person. It is an unapologetically bizarre hour and forty-four minutes laden with practical effects so realistic and disgusting that each scene will squeeze your stomach into knots, begging the question, "Can this movie get any stranger?" But in spite of its bleak, mouldy aesthetic, this is a highly stylized piece with an incomparable script that makes it one of the most unique films you can get your filthy paws on right now.

Ian Folivor (Adrian DiGiovanni) is a loner. Barricaded in his apartment amongst years of dirt, grime and a fear of the great outdoors, he spends his days with his only company, Kent, his television set. After Kent unexpectedly dies, Ian realizes that all he has left to occupy his time is each precious moment that he goes to the bathroom for a bowel movement. Once this dark reality sets in, Ian decides to kill himself. When his attempt at suicide is thwarted by a nasty fall causing him to smash his head off of his bathtub, he wakes up to find that the festering growth of mould on his wall has become sentient (voiced by Jeffrey Combs), and it informs him that it's



Motivational Growth

going to help him get his life in order, no matter the drastic measures that might need to be taken.

The writing and cinematography in *Motivational Growth* work in perfect harmony with each other, depicting Ian's bizarre journey to self-respect through shifts in the intensity of the narrative and in the colours of particular scenes. Aiding the overall cohesiveness is the fact that Thacker's characters are exceptionally portrayed by DiGiovanni and Combs, who present an Odd Couple for a new generation of viewers in love with bad taste. Whether it's unexpected gory blood baths, gallons of mossy vomit or Ian suckling from a mould-sprouted teat with hallucinogenic properties, this twisted narrative is unmatched in its pursuit of insanity. *Motivational Growth* may gross out even the most seasoned viewer, but even they will have to admit that it is as hilarious as it is unsettling.

RICHELLE CHARKOT

## BLACK SABBATICAL

### ANGELS OF DARKNESS

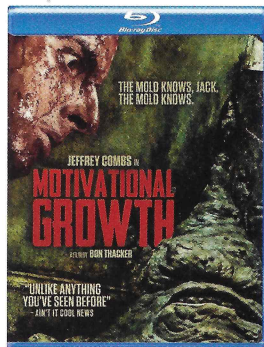
Starring Eleanor Tomlinson, Julia Pietrucha and Stephen Rea  
Written and directed by Mauricio Chernovetsky and Mark Devendorf  
Revolver

For over 200 years Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* has been adapted for stage, screen and print. In cinema, the gothic novella about lesbian vampires was remade by Hammer as *The Vampire Lovers*, by Roger Vadim as *Blood and Roses*, and even Christopher Lee appeared

in a version titled *Crypt of the Vampire*. Mauricio Chernovetsky and Mark Devendorf's *Angels of Darkness* moves the story from 19<sup>th</sup> century Austria to the similarly authoritarian Iron Curtain era of the late-'80s and layers on the emotional and the supernatural thicker than petticoats on a 19<sup>th</sup> century Englishwoman.

When troubled Lara (Eleanor Tomlinson) gets kicked out of prep school, her father (Stephen Rea) takes her along on his academic sabbatical to Styria, Hungary, where he's studying the ancient murals that adorn the walls of the mysterious, condemned Karnstein Castle. The locals are less than friendly to their British guests, and Lara's strained relationship with her father provides little respite from the tension. When she witnesses Carmilla (Julia Pietrucha) fleeing the lecherous General Spiegel (Jacek Lenartowicz), the two begin a complex and intimate friendship. Carmilla seems to know all the secrets and mysteries of the Castle, and lures Lara into late-night slumber parties and skinny dips. Meanwhile, the young women of the nearby town have started to go mad and commit suicide, and the locals blame Lara and her dad. Lara discovers that the secrets of the Castle have strange parallels to her own sordid family history, and that Carmilla has much more to offer her than friendship.

The film's slow pace may alienate some viewers, but those predisposed to the gothic will make



much of the foggy, atmospheric setting and the dark dream sequences loaded with symbolic imagery. Chernovetsky and Devendorf avoid the easy, exploitative route of a teen-lesbian vampire thriller in favour of an interesting amalgam of vampire and witchcraft mythology, making for the most novel portrayal of the monstrous, bloodthirsty feminine since 2008's *Let The Right One In*. The slow-burning mystery and the gothic artwork amid the crumbling architecture in *Angels of Darkness* are intoxicating to say the least, so sip slowly and savour it.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

## BEAR ESSENTIALS

### BACKCOUNTRY

Starring Missy Peregrym, Jeff Roop and Eric Balfour  
Written and directed by Adam MacDonald  
IFC

We humans are so sure of our place in the food chain that we socialize our own offspring to be friendly with deadly predators – particularly bears. We give them plush teddys to sleep with, read them stories about Pooh and show them cartoons about Yogi. Reality check: bears are not for snuggling, they don't wear sweaters or comically snatch picnic baskets – they are big, bad predators which, if given the chance, will swat your face off, gargle your brains and poop out your eyes.

Adam MacDonald gets it. The writer/director of *Backcountry* has made a film that hones in on the absolute horror of becoming prey. City types Jenn (Missy Peregrym) and Alex (Jeff Roop) go for a camping trip in the wilds of Ontario. The tension in their relationship simmers when he insists they leave their phones behind, begins to bubble when a strange loner named Brad (Eric Balfour) joins them for dinner one night and finally boils over when they find themselves lost in the territory of a particularly large black bear that wants its lunch wrapped in fleece and Gore-Tex.

*Backcountry* is a simpler story than your average Hollywood nature survival thriller in which a manly hero is lost in a spectacular way and must use his cunning to escape a vicious predator (*The Edge*, *The Grey*), and it's not a monster movie that portrays animals as seemingly unstoppable killing machines (*Grizzly*, *Day of the Animals*). Instead, MacDonald keeps things very realistic, which makes his movie that much more gripping. These are average people

