

HORROR

Colour, 2002, 77m. / Directed by Dante Tomaselli / Starring Danny Lopes, the Amazing Kreskin, Lizzy Mahon, Vincent Lamberti, Christie Sanford / Elite (US R1 NTSC) / WS (1.85:1) / DD5.1



Outside a snowy farmhouse, a young girl, Grace (Lizzy Mahon), burns her hand while hanging up Christmas lights, then gets spooked by a sinister-looking goat standing near the woods. While running inside, she's suddenly accosted by a demonic-looking man in preacher's garb. Cut to a van carrying a group of teens just escaped from rehab after accidentally shooting one of the guards. The driver, Luck (Lopes), steers them into the country to the home of a drug-pushing preacher, Salo (Vincent Lamberti), the same kidnapper from the opening scene. Upon arrival they discover Grace, who is actually Salo's daughter and is living in mind-controlled captivity under the watch of her father's creepy Satanist wife (Christie Sanford). Hallucinatory terrors are immediately unleashed, including more goat appearances, a melting doll, flashbacks (or visions) involving Salo's spiritualist father (the Amazing Kreskin), a horde of shuffling zombies, torture on a rack, blood vomiting, and jack-o-lantern acid trips.

This ghoulish, stream-of-consciousness freak-out on film from *Desecration* director Tomaselli is even more disorienting than his first effort, and its refusal to play by the narrative rules may result in more than a few viewers scratching their heads or staring at their DVD player in

confusion. However, more adventurous souls with a taste for the surreal will find plenty of juicy material here as the story giddily skips from one Gothic image to another with only the thinnest of connective narrative tissue.

Tomaselli certainly has his visual skills down pat, with the evocative snowbound setting evoking obscure '70s chillers like *You'll Like My Mother*, while the more outrageous flights of fancy include some absolutely nightmarish visuals of Sanford (in a genuinely skin-crawling performance) looming towards the camera with a devilish grin on her face. That's really how most of the film works; it creeps you out way under the skin if you let it, even though the reasons why may not be immediately clear. This isn't a "scary" movie in the way many audiences now regard the term; this is much closer to Jodorowsky and David Lynch than Wes Craven. That said, after these outings it would be interesting to see Tomaselli cutting his teeth on a script with a co-writer; his baroque visual talents would most likely meld well with a less personal storyline that could be devoured by a wider horror audience. At least his sense of narrative control is obviously being refined, as *Horror* closes with a deliberately open but tantalizing final scene more effective than the nihilist dead end that closed *Desecration*.

Elite's special edition includes several worthy extras, kicking off with a Tomaselli commentary track in which he excitedly discusses the process of creating and shooting the film without giving away too much in the way of a literal reading of the story. Other goodies include an extended *Horror* trailer (really more of a promo reel), a *Desecration*

trailer, a sometimes hilarious stills gallery with plenty of FX shots, footage of the Amazing Kreskin performing his feats on the set (which brings to mind the hypnotism performed on Werner Herzog's *Heart of Glass*), a 10-minute reel of behind-the-scenes footage, and a snippet from the original *Desecration* short film (different from the one included on the DVD for that feature).

As for the film itself, the transfer is a bit problematic; shot on Super 16, the overall appearance is usually fine with sharp but deliberately grainy detail. However, there's also a substantial amount of chroma noise visible on some white, cream and yellow areas; fortunately the snowy scenes are largely unaffected, but bright doorways and light-bulbs jitter with colourful video noise. Perhaps this was an intentional effect as the flaw is wildly inconsistent, but whatever the reason, it's an unfortunate distraction.

Audio is solid, boasting a Dolby Digital 5.1 track that's only marginally more aggressive than the already paranoia-inducing 2.0 mix on *Desecration*. Split surrounds are very limited but overall the ambience is spacious and contributes greatly to the film's mood of unease. Watch it alone in a dark room with rear speakers nearby, if you dare.

HORROR OF DRACULA (DRACULA)

Colour, 1958, 82m. / Directed by Terence Fisher / Starring Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, John Van Eyssen, Carol Marsh, Melissa Stribling, Michael Gough / Warner (US R1 NTSC, UK R2 PAL) / WS (1.78:1) (16:9)



Though it plays as loose and easy with the Bram Stoker novel as any of its competitors, Hammer's first attempt to bring Dracula to the screen remains in many respects the consummate adaptation. Shot in voluptuous Technicolor and paced like a speeding train, this film is the one most responsible for kick-starting the Hammer horror avalanche which continued for the next two decades, and while subsequent films in the series managed to outdo this one in terms of both style and bloodshed (*Brides of Dracula* hits the perfect balance), it is *Horror of Dracula* that continues to stand the test of time with admirable grace.

Jonathan Harker (John Van Eyssen) travels to the remote castle of Count Dracula (Lee) under the guise of some harmless library cataloguing, but in reality he intends to put an end to the bloodsucker's reign of terror. Unfortunately the genteel Englishman is lured in by a mysterious female guest and falls prey to the vampire's feeding habits, forcing intrepid Professor Van Helsing (Cushing) to investigate. Back in London, Dracula vampirizes the women at the Holmwood estate including Jonathan's fiancée, Lucy (Carol Marsh), and Mina (Melissa Stribling), the wife of Lucy's brother, Arthur Holmwood (Michael Gough, best known as Alfred from the *Batman* movies). Will Arthur and Van Helsing come to the rescue? Can the fanged fiend be stopped?

A zippiest and more full-blooded film (in every sense) than Hammer's previous outings, *Horror of Dracula* (or simply *Dracula* as it's known everywhere except in the US) benefits greatly from Cushing's