

Horror (2002) Movie Review

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Horror films, especially those which deal with the supernatural or demonic, are by their very nature surreal, though they generally try to derive their chills by being convincingly set in the real world. Dante Tomaselli's aptly named "Horror" goes another route, being instead an attempt to commit to celluloid the experience and atmosphere of an actual nightmare.

As such, "Horror" follows a series of lyrical narrative threads rather than any kind of coherent central plot, with only the briefest of nods towards logic or reason. This is the kind of film where strange, ghoulish things simply happen, and although Tomaselli hints at explanations in the form of excessive drug use and Satanism, the viewer is generally expected to simply go with the flow. As such, "Horror" is a film not likely to be enjoyed by viewers expecting a conventional genre effort, or indeed one which makes sense or builds towards an attainable conclusion. Though for those open minded souls hankering for something a little different, "Horror" offers an absorbing experience which at times verges on the hallucinatory.

The film basically follows a group of youths who make a bloody escape from a drug rehabilitation clinic, heading for sanctuary with the obviously less than holy Reverend Salo Jr. (Vincent Lambert, also in the director's "Desecration"). The good Reverend and his equally crazed wife (Christie Sandford, another Tomaselli regular) turn out to be psychotic Satanists who keep their own daughter hooked on drugs for some sinister purpose, and who are hiding any number of dark secrets. After the fugitives arrive, already high on mind altering mushrooms, bloodshed ensues and the characters find themselves being pulled into an insane acid trip of diabolic possession, uncontrollable violence, and of course, horror.

Tomaselli is a director dedicated not only to the genre, but to creating films which are genuinely terrifying and which assault not only the senses, but more insidiously, the subconscious, creeping under the skin and whispering dark secrets into the ear. As such, "Horror", building on the themes and techniques shown in the director's debut film, "Desecration", is a perfect representation of Tomaselli's ambitions and intentions — it is an unconventional yet determined attempt to immerse the viewer in fear.

The main challenge for Tomaselli is the budget, which was obviously low, and though this does show at times, particularly in some cheap looking makeup effects, he directs with great imagination and visual ingenuity. As with the early films of Dario Argento, Tomaselli bathes every scene of "Horror" in eerie colours and keeps the viewer on edge with a disturbing, at times jarring soundtrack that serves as a perfect accompaniment to the unfolding chaos. All of this makes for a marvelously creepy atmosphere, and one which does indeed reflect the unpredictable and essential dread of a terrifying dream. Right from the start, the viewer is made aware that literally anything can happen, and this liberation from the orthodox genre form is instantly engaging, leaving the viewer wondering what will be thrown at them next.

The downside to this, and indeed the whole film is that the characters themselves are little more than sketches or ciphers, and there is very little effort made to develop them or their motivations beyond the obvious desire to escape and survive. This gives the film a certain feeling of aloofness, and although it does serve to underline its abstract nature, it also means that the sections free of bizarre happenings are rather dull and filled with pointless dialogue, which Tomaselli himself seems unsure how to handle. Tomaselli is quite obviously less comfortable with these scenes, and they do at times come off as rather amateurish, making for an odd mix with the skilfully handled scares.

Thankfully, Tomaselli keeps things moving fast enough that the film's failings are easily overlooked, and with a wisely short running time, they never really interrupt the overall experience being created. This really is the bottom line, as ultimately it is difficult to judge "Horror" as a proper film, as it is a genuine attempt to shake off the chains of the form. With this, the director certainly succeeds, as "Horror" makes for mesmerising, discomfoting viewing that relies on effect and instinctive fear rather than simple narrative drama or cheap emotional manipulation. Tomaselli is to be praised for this brave, highly individualistic effort, and it is hoped that in the future he will be given the chance and budget to develop his ideas on a larger canvas.

Dante Tomaselli (director) / Dante Tomaselli (screenplay)

CAST: Kreskin Reverend Salo

Lizzy Mahon Grace Salo

Danny Lopes Luck

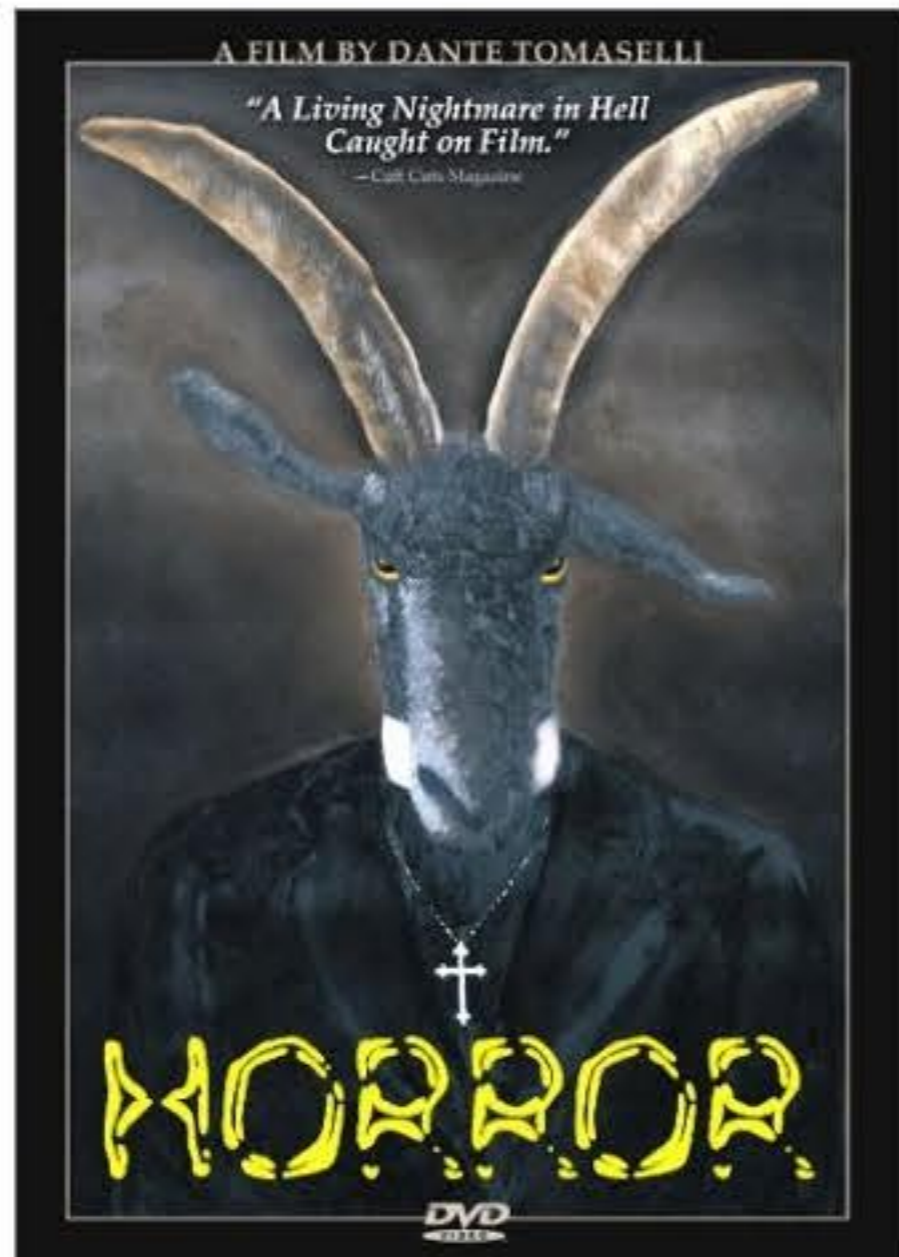
Vincent Lambert Reverend Salo Jr.

Christie Sanford Mrs. Salo

Jessica Pagan Marisa

Raine Brown Amanda

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