

## HORROR

Home &gt; Movie Reviews &gt; Horror

## Release Date

2002

## Director

Dante Tomaselli

## Cast

Christie Sanford, Danny Lopes, Vincent Lamberti, The Amazing Kreskin, Lizzy Mahon, Jessica Pagan, Raine Brown, Felissa Rose

## Running Time

89 minutes

## Plot

noheader



"Growing up, I had a lot of nightmares - way too many. I'd say all of my films are me purging my dreams, this swirl of images I have in my head."

- Dante Tomaselli

That statement explains a lot. You see a lot of people who are fans of horror, even though they were rarely effected by it. You also see a lot of people who were more enamored with the kitsch of horror than the actual teeth of it. Many favor **THE CREATURE OF THE BLACK LAGOON** rather than **THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH**. Hence, it's somewhat of a relief knowing that when I would be so terrified of anything remotely frightening during my first years on the planet, I was not alone.

As a child, I had a love-hate relationship with horror, with the majority of my feelings slipping into the "hate" category. I was no big fan of scary movies. In fact, they were the bane of my existence, along with any episode of **THE TWILIGHT ZONE** or any spooky tale told around the campfire. There were long stretches that you could not even mention horror without my mind conjuring up something dark and sinister. You think the power of suggestion can bring up some strange things? I had borderline hallucinations from my imagination running wild. And what the mind thought up, the dreams built upon. I saw Stanley Kubrick's **THE SHINING** and it was enough to send me into an almost traumatic state for over a year. Every time I would look over the edge of my bed, I thought I saw those two little girls rising from beneath it.

I don't think I ever started to mellow until **ALIEN**. It helped to have the scary stuff laced with something I was already fascinated with at the time, science fiction. Also, let's face it, even though it's still one of the scariest movies ever made, it adds a comfortable distance in its setting. In space no one can hear you scream. Great, just make sure it stays up there. Over the years, certain films still unnerve me, but most of them just barely penetrate a jaded persona, familiar with the pitfalls of the genre.

I could have easily avoided the things that frightened me. But the fact is that I sat down to watch **THE SHINING**. I got excited each year around Halloween. Why? If I could tell you that, it would explain a lot about the inner-workings of my strange little psyche. The obvious explanation is that I was intrigued by what it was that could cause such a childish and primal emotional response. How did these images crack into those vulnerable spots of my adorable little noggin? What did these films do that triggered such a reaction and more importantly, what is at the root of those emotions? I still have not figured out that second part.

There was a moment in Dante Tomaselli's **HORROR** when I became eight years old again. I will not spoil it for you by telling you exactly which moment that was. And maybe it wasn't the moment so much as everything that had led up to it. Suffice to say, with everything building up to the boiling point, this subtle scare from the corner of my screen made me do something I hadn't done in years. Fortunately, split-second thinking made me clasp my hand tightly over my mouth so as not to wake the neighbors. Good thing too, because I let out an amazing scream. Yes, a real legitimate scream. No little tiny, "aw, ya got me" yelp. This was a long protracted shriek... a manly shriek but a shriek nonetheless. Not an easy connection to make. But this film has done it.

From the first moments of the film, it is clear that reality takes a backseat to a feverish nightmare-like quality. Harsh camera angles and an amazing sound design penetrate the veil of anything safe. We're tipped off from the get-go that this baby is all atmosphere.

We meet a group of people who are escaping a rehab facility. One of the group, ironically named Luck (Danny Lopes, one of a few cast members also in Tomaselli's **DESECRATION**) has committed a heinous act in his bid for freedom. When one of the group scolds luck, imploring "We are not the center of the fucking universe," it could either be poorly delivered dialogue or a warning to Luck of the karmic forces he has set into play.

They take some mushrooms allegedly given to them by a visiting priest, the Rev. Salo (The Amazing Kreskin) the day before. When one of the group has a bad reaction, they stop in house they believe to be abandoned. The place is actually inhabited by the Salo's son and his equally crazed wife (Vincent Lamberti and Christie Sanford), not that have much of a chance to entertain the guests. It was once the home to Salo Sr., before he died. That's right, the visiting priest may or may not be one of the living and you never really get a definite answer about anything here. Time frames and the temporal bonds of mortality are some of the themes touched upon here. The whole film appears as if it exists between moments in time. The characters are somewhere between living and dead.

Salo Jr. and his wife (Christie Sanford) keep their daughter (Lizzy Mahon) drugged, corrupting her and keeping her purity confined. It is no accident that despite this evil, the daughter's name is Grace. Luck finds Grace in her predicament and reacts - mostly for his own benefit. These actions continue to haunt the entire group throughout the night as they are confronted with strange apparitions that manipulate their bodies, minds and souls.

This of course just scratches the surface. Things move so rapidly that an important subplot involving a sister almost passes you by. Actually, the above synopsis was the hardest part of the review to write. After all, how do you write an accurate description of a film whose very plot is hidden beneath everything else that's piled on top?

**HORROR** is a very abstract film. The title tells you more about what the film tries to accomplish than any description. I have my own theories about the puzzle to **HORROR** but I will not share them here. Conceivably, people could go on for years debating the meaning behind this film, much like David Lynch's **MULHOLLAND DRIVE**. The film is more interested in bombarding us with images, strange sounds and nightmarish dreamscapes than conveying anything linear. In this respect, it is not unlike Dario Argento's **SUSPIRIA**, although **HORROR** does not share Argento's childlike vision.

Tomaselli is forming a bit of a repertory company that began with **DESECRATION**, continues with **HORROR** and is sure to go on in **SATAN'S PLAYGROUND**. The actors do a decent job for the most part. There are a few supporting players who could have used a few more days to hone their craft, but they are not very obtrusive. Danny Lopes plays a flipside to the innocent he portrayed in **DESECRATION**. Lopes has really matured as an actor and it will be interesting to see him in future productions, both with and without Tomaselli.

But the real gamble here, the one that could have stunk up the place and instead winds up paying off bigtime is the casting of The Amazing Kreskin as the Rev. Salo. I never thought I'd be praising the performance of anyone with "Amazing" in their name. But the fact is, Kreskin really was born to play this part. He does not play the villainous Salo with a single wink. He portrays Salo with complete conviction. For years, Salo had demonstrated his mentalism techniques on latenight television with Johnny Carson and David Letterman. Here, he applies those same principals but with a darker turn. It is the "powers" of mentalism used to their darkest and most atrocious purposes. Sort of a "there but for the grace of God" performance. Kreskin even demonstrates the techniques on film and there are testimonials that what we are seeing is not staged. The result is absolutely chilling.

Some of the sequences suffer from just a touch of clumsiness. Typically, this is in poor delivery of dialogue, something most of the cast avoids. Other times, it's in incidental effects. When it comes time for some zombies to rip a victim apart for instance, they seem to do it awfully quickly.

All the same, one of the most impressive things about **HORROR** is how everything seems perfectly placed. Every shadow, every contour, every camera movement seems planned with impeccable detail. And yet, this does not harm the flow of the film. If anything, it makes the film a success. The film is also made up of a beautiful array of colors, much more pleasing to the eye than the earth tones in **DESECRATION**.

Tomaselli likes to focus the action on close-knit communities. This can be seen from the private school in **DESECRATION** to the friends in **HORROR**. Likewise, family plays a part. In **DESECRATION**, the family is hanging by a thread, held together entirely by Bobby's deeply religious grandmother and his emotionally distant father. In **HORROR**, the family tree is even more twisted as the daughter is at the mercy of two perverse and controlling monsters - monsters for whom she nonetheless feels compassion. The group dynamics explored in these films gives the terror a more personal touch when these institutions that root us in reality are destroyed, sometimes by their own hand.

**HORROR** may seem like a vague and generic title. But in actuality, it sums up the purpose of the film quite well. This is an emotion, a feeling, something that explores just what scares us. It's a safe bet that **HORROR** is not for everyone. In fact, I believe the majority will either not "get" or appreciate what Tomaselli has accomplished here. It can be a frustrating experience, especially if you were expecting more than a fluid collection of moody settings. Most will be screaming, "What the hell is going on!?"

But this is why I really liked **HORROR**. Your enjoyment of **HORROR** depends entirely on whether you surrender control and allow it to draw you into its web. If you stick with it, and ponder it, it will get under your skin. I have now seen the film three times. The more I watch it, the more fascinating it becomes.

**HORROR** is a \$250,000 marvel and a major technical achievement. It has amazing imagery, frightening set-pieces, one of the greatest sound designs I've ever heard and delivers more than a few jolts - particularly when you take them within the entire context of the piece. Feelings of dread, sadism and even a little bit of wonder permeate throughout the whole film. It's like a living, breathing nightmare and personally played like something plucked right out of my subconscious. You may love it or you may hate it. But so long as you're really watching and truly open to it, you will not be able to shake it.

Reviewed by Scott W. Davis