

“SPIRIT CAMP” (DVD Review)

Written by Michael Koopmans
Wednesday, 24 March 2010 09:52



Along with leg warmers, the Golden Age of the slasher film died in the mid-1980s. Since then, there have been hundreds of uninspired films that took the established formula, added one or two very slight variations and burned our retinas with an inferior sense of déjà vu. Very few post-Golden Age slashers have stayed true to the formula while offering a fresh, smart take on the subgenre. It's not an easy task, and unfortunately, SPIRIT CAMP is not one of those few. Its heart is in the right place, but it doesn't have the guts.

Our story begins at Camp Loomis (seriously?) Lake, where a group of male and female cheerleaders are roasting marshmallows and debating whether the campfire will get them tan or not (worth mentioning because it's the only time the dialogue made me giggle). Two of them sneak off to bump uglies, but are killed with an ax before the dirty deed is done. Flash forward two years, and we're introduced to a new batch of dingbats on their way to spend the summer at the same cheer camp. Seasoned slasher fiends will instantly recognize outcast Nikki (played by erotic model Roxy Vandiver) as our “final girl.” Not only is she forced to attend camp as part of her rehabilitation from a juvenile corrections facility, she must also deal with the threat of a psycho killer who is hacking her peers and counselors one by one. Can she learn to cope with her haunted past while struggling to keep her spirit alive? You can pretty much fill in the rest of the blanks yourself, with a lengthy list of stalker-film staples (plenty of killer's-point-of-view shots, gratuitous nudity, more red herrings than you can shake a stick at, an ax in the back, etc.).



The so-called “comedy” in SPIRIT CAMP began to bother me after a while. At first, it could be ignored, but after a while it started to pluck on my nerves. I guess the movie's idea of ironic humor (a vain cheerleader dating an overweight slob or a 10-year-old with the vocabulary of a college student) was a little too highbrow for me; the “jokes” wound up hurting the film's pace and flow. Granted, horror and comedy are not easy to mix; it takes a master chef to blend the two correctly and come out with something easy to digest. This one came out of the oven a little

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overcooked.

SPIRIT CAMP is Kerry Beyer’s first feature-length film, and took him over two years to make. Not only did he direct, he also produced, edited, wrote, acted, composed the score and handled the cinematography and some of the digital FX. That’s a lot for one person to take on, and aside from the script, he did a topnotch job with the minuscule budget he had. I’m looking forward to his next project, because visually, I was impressed. I just hope that next time, he has something a little more original to offer in the plot department.

A quote on the cover of the DVD describes this film as “FRIDAY THE 13TH meets BRING IT ON.” Now, as long as that’s referring to the recent FRIDAY THE 13TH redux, I agree wholeheartedly. You can’t blame a guy for loving slasher films, but Beyer’s homage falls flat on its face before the starting pistol is even fired. I’ll admit, at one point in my life I would have considered this tribute a very sweet gesture, but after the plethora of remakes, reimaginings and reboots this past decade, a simple imitation just doesn’t cut the mustard anymore. If you’re not going to bring something fresh to the table, don’t even bother inviting me to diner.

The unrated DVD (available to purchase on the SPIRIT CAMP [official website](#)) presents the movie in 16x9-enhanced widescreen with Dolby Digital 5.1 sound, and contains three special features: an audio commentary with Beyer that provides insight into the movie’s two-year production, the theatrical trailer and a behind-the-scenes featurette that’s basically 10 minutes of talking heads. “Who are these heads and what are talking about?” you may ask. Well, more or less every actor and actress involved in the film pops onto the screen briefly and tells you what a great guy Beyer is. Then they tell you how great the movie is, and that you need to “go see it” even though you already have the disc in your player. It can currently be purchased for \$19.95, or, for all you creeps out there, \$29.95 will get you a special limited-edition set that also includes an autographed print and a signed pair of panties. I don’t even want to know what anyone would plan on doing with those.

MOVIE: *1/2

DVD PACKAGE: **

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