

## Fango Flashback: “WITCHERY”

Written by Bekah McKendry

Sunday, 05 September 2010 12:19

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We all have one of those movies—a flick you saw in the past that you can’t remember the name of, or who is in it, or even what it’s about...you can only remember one scene. So you incessantly describe the scene to every horror fan you meet, in hopes that somebody will remember the film’s title so this lone moment stops slowly drilling a deep and bloody hole into your brain.



For years, I had one such memory stuck in my head. I could only recall this bit where an old woman had her lips sewn shut. She was then strung up inside a lit fireplace and melted. I described this scene endlessly to anyone who would listen. I remembered watching it on my parents’ giant console TV, so it must have been a VHS rental from the late 1980s—but that’s all I could ever remember.

I was beginning to think I had dreamed the whole thing and just had a really twisted imagination until finally...at San Diego Comic-Con, a fan finally plugged the hole in my brain. Comic-Con was doing this huge promotion for the David Hasselhoff Comedy Central Roast and had been handing out these Hasselhoff masks (I’m not kidding about this) to attendees. Thousands of David Hasselhoffs were walking around Comic-Con. A horror fan came over to the FANGORIA booth with his Hoff mask on, and I asked, “Is The Hoff into horror?” The fan replied, “Well, he was in WITCHERY.” With that single phrase, a mental spark ignited the memory in my brain.

Yes, WITCHERY! I remembered now! That scene was from WITCHERY! My memory had been recovered, though I think I may have forgotten basic algebra in the process. With that spark, I recalled a few other details about the flick: Linda Blair was also in it, they were on an island and there was a scene of demon rape. Feeling there were some big gaps, I ordered my own copy of WITCHERY as soon as I got back to the hotel room that night, and when I finally got home from

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San Diego, it was waiting on my doorstep.

This 1988 flick was produced by legendary Italian exploitation god Joe D'Amato, and although it was released in the U.S. under the WITCHERY name, the screen titles read WITCHCRAFT: EVIL ENCOUNTERS. And if that wasn't confusing enough, the film was actually made as the fourth installment of the LA CASA series, with part three an unofficial sequel to the EVIL DEAD series, which means this film is a.k.a. EVIL DEAD 4 and has also been titled GHOST HOUSE 2! My head hurts...

WITCHERY (for the purposes of this article) is set on a small island about 50 miles off Boston. Long ago, many witches were put to death on the island. One in particular was pregnant and chose to take her own life by jumping out a window instead of being toasted on a stake. Thus, the island and its hotel are forever haunted.



Flash-forward to the modern day...well, the height of the 1980s. Gary (a post-KNIGHT RIDER Hasselhoff) and his weird virgin friend Linda (Catherine Hickland) are camping out in the deserted hotel. Linda is studying witchcraft; Gary is there to photograph the ghostly lights and to convince her in an awkwardly sexy manner that he has a knight that needs riding (I had to work in a reference somewhere). But she resists the Hoff's unbuttoned shirts and maintains her purity.

Then enter the Brooks family, who are interested in buying the hotel and includes the bitchy family matriarch, the lecherous dad, the pregnant daughter (Blair) and the young son Tommy, plus a realtor and a renovator in tow. The two parties discover each other just as a crazy storm breaks out and carries their boat away, making it impossible for anyone to leave for the night. Well, gang, I guess we'll just have to spend the night in this creepy house where a pregnant witch killed herself and still comes back to take the souls of the living! This villainess is joined by a few demonic minions to help her maintain the hotel as a causeway to hell. The satanic group

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works to get the "elements" into place which will allow the witch to return to Earth by taking over a new human form. Oh, which of our bunch will she choose to possess?



One by one, the witch starts picking off our group to help fulfill the needed "elements." Mama Brooks gets her lips sewn shut and melted in the fireplace (ahhh, the scene), the realtor is burned on an upside-down cross, and so on and so on. Linda gets raped by a demon, which fulfills the final needed element of virgin blood. And so the transformation can take place. I won't blow the not-so-twisted "twist" at the end, but I will say that Blair ends up in a white nightgown with gruesome make-up and teased out hair looking almost identical to her role in THE EXORCIST. This happened a few times in the actress' '80s career, a little subgenre I like to call "Blairsploitation." So yes, Blair ends up in her EXORCIST outfit, but I'm not blowing the ending too much. It's clearly the film's central gimmick, considering it's on the box cover and in the trailer.

Before I rewatched WITCHERY, I remembered it as being fairly good. Parts of my memory were flawed, but the movie does have some appeal. I have to say it really is a yin-and-yang situation: There are times I thought Fabrizio Laurenti's direction was amazingly trite, with rack focuses on people's shocked faces during suspenseful scenes. All that was missing was the "duh duh dun!" music. But at other times there are some very cool shots, including some filmed on a wheelchair-cam and great scenic views of the island and sea. At times, the gore looks ridiculously fake, as in the aforementioned lip-sewing scene and a moment of fetus-eating, but other gags (like the melting body) look great.

Even the acting offers high and lows. Hickland (who, by the way, was the Hoff's wife in real life at the time) as the virginal Linda has a strange speech pattern that often makes it sound like she's drunk. Michael Manchester, as Tommy, also seems inebriated in the annoying monotone way he keeps repeating "I love Jane" (his big sis), while the realtor (who looks about 15) also delivers a really bad performance. Surprisingly, Hasselhoff, though his presence is campy, carries the role and movie rather well. And the plot itself is pretty interesting, and kept me watching and rewatching.

