

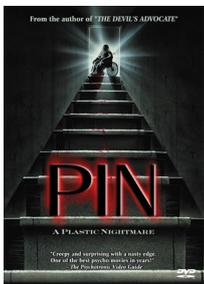
Fango Flashback: "PIN"

Written by Michael Koopmans
Saturday, 29 January 2011 10:17



As with many of you out there, the fright films of the 1980s hold a very special place in the sewers of my heart. One thing that's great about being a cinephile is the fact that no matter who (or what) you are, there'll never be validity to your claim to have "seen it all," and there will always be long-forgotten gems to discover. Some might be criminally obscure and take a great effort to uncover, while others might simply have been at arm's length all along, but for whatever reason, you just never get around to grabbing them. 1988's PIN fell into that category.

I want to kick myself when I think of all the opportunities I had to rent PIN on VHS when I was young, but chose some unmemorable trash instead. Sure, there are worse regrets to have, but damn, this is a great film I could have been enjoying and infecting others with for years now! Luckily, a friend infected me recently with the remembrance of its existence, culminating in a newfound treasure!



It should first be noted that PIN is based on the novel of the same name by THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE's author Andrew Neiderman. I just bought it yesterday and have yet to crack open, so I cannot tell you if and how the novel differs from the film. But the movie is, quite possibly, the most disturbing psychological thriller you will ever see.

Pin is the name of a life-size, anatomically correct medical dummy that resides in the office of Dr. Frank Linden (original Stepfather Terry O'Quinn). The good doctor uses ventriloquism so Pin can explain to his son and daughter how the body works, including sexual functions, in an effort to keep the conversations from becoming uncomfortable for the parties actually involved. Everything seems to be going smoothly. Ursula (Cyndy Preston) enjoys her father's quirky lessons and gleefully examines Pin's exposed body. However what the emotionally detached Dr. Linden does not realize is that his son Leon (SPICE's David Hewlett) is in fact a

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schizophrenic with traits of disassociative personality disorder with no real friends and believes Pin is actually alive.

Jump to the present, Leon is 18, has mastered the art of ventriloquism and still has only one friend, Pin. His father catches him having a conversation with the dummy and finally begins to realize the extent of his son's psychosis. Unfortunately he can do nothing about it because shortly after, he's killed (along with his obsessive-compulsive wife) in a car accident. Leon gets his hands on Pin, brings it into the house now owned by his sister and him, dresses it in his father's clothes, plops a wig on its head and things start to get really disturbing.

One of the most beautifully bizarre films I have ever seen, PIN truly is a nightmare put to film. The VHS art and poster were misrepresentations, giving the impression that the film is a typical slasher where the killer may or may not be a living dummy. There could possibly be initial uneasiness about whether Pin is alive or not, however any veteran genre fan would be able to see past this ploy within the first 20 minutes of the film. Still, I've watched it three times now and considering the tense, creepy atmosphere created, there are a few silent, drawn-out shots of Pin where you'd swear in terror it moved of its own free will.



Your standard amount of grisly moments are present in this low-budget, Canadian gem, but thankfully the gory FX are kept to a minimum, leaving the true visual horror to the impact of the situations and the performances themselves. You can't even begin to explain how psychologically messed up this family is! Hewlett's chilling performance as Leon sets him well above your run-of-the-mill facially expressed movie mental illness we've come to expect. He plays it subtle and sympathetic, turning in a plausible, blank portrait of an average, handsome young man on the surface. But once we get to know him, it becomes frightfully apparent he is an extremely disturbed, sheltered adult whose life revolves around the decisions a medical dummy makes for him. One particularly disturbing glimpse into his mind comes when he reads a bit of his "poetry" to Ursula and her new boyfriend, in which a man rapes his sister. The viewer is left on edge when you realize he can bounce from simple and lost to vicious and vengeful in a split second. But no matter how horrid an act he commits, he's impossible to hate, but not to

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pity.

Ursula, on the other hand, is not insane like Leon. However, she was still raised by the same detached parents and has always had her brother (and Pin) to take care of her. She is the stronger of the two, having a job and leading a somewhat normal life. Preston plays the part flawlessly. She is genuinely sweet and understands her brother is sick, but she still flashes slight hints of dependent personality disorder.



Seldom is this film spoken of, and that's a crime. Extremely well-written and tightly directed by Sandor Stern (who scripted *THE AMITYVILLE HORROR* and directed a slue of made-for-TV films), this underrated psycho-thriller must have been welcome with (at least a few) open arms at a time when most of the genre's output were carbon copies of a film about a one-dimensional, undead maniac stalking and hacking up a pile of annoying teens with no personality or redeeming qualities. A film like this is one of those rare treats that remind us just how monstrous and moving man can be.

Now for some bad news: although released back in 2001 on DVD from Anchor Bay, *PIN* is currently out of print. But where there's bad news, good news sometimes follows. It won't cost you an arm and a leg like the majority of OOP horror DVDs. You can snag a used copy off Amazon.com for a little under 20 bones, and if you're in need of a nice vacation into the dark recesses of man's mind, it's worth every penny. Let's pray for a well-deserved Blu-ray release of *PIN* sometime in the near future!

{comments on}