

Fango Flashback: "THE FACULTY"

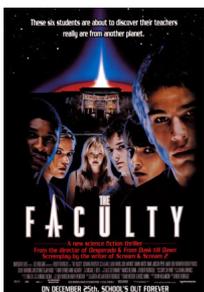
Written by Jorge Solis

Sunday, 20 March 2011 10:08



With SCREAM 4 on its way to theaters April 15, the time is right to look back at one of screenwriter Kevin Williamson's earlier projects, THE FACULTY. Aliens have invaded Earth and taken over the teachers at Herrington High School. Once these extraterrestrials have infected the entire student body, the whole world is next. With Williamson writing and Robert Rodriguez (FROM DUSK TILL DAWN, PLANET TERROR) in the director's chair, this 1998 sci-fi thriller easily became an enjoyable rollercoaster ride.

In a homage to Sergio Leone's Western masterpiece THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY, audiences are presented with the names of the main protagonists. Stokely (Clea DuVall) is the punk/Goth girl who doesn't want to be bothered with. Delilah (Jordana Brewster) is the popular girl dating the star quarterback, Stan (Shawn Hatosy). Marybeth Louise Hutchinson (Laura Harris) is the outsider, who just moved from Atlanta. Casey (Elijah Wood) finds himself bullied mostly because he's the Stephen King kid in every school. Zeke (Josh Hartnett) is the school's drug dealer and a prodigy who is repeating his Senior year.



When Casey and Delilah sneak into the teacher's lounge, they stumble onto a dead body in the closet. The two suddenly witness Coach Willis (Robert Patrick) grab Nurse Harper (Salma Hayek) and vomit a hideous parasite into her ear. Because their parents don't believe a word they're saying, Casey and Delilah are forced to return to school, while the entire faculty is infecting the students. Just a glimpse of a class full of obedient and compliant students will give you shivers!

With the aliens taking over their minds, the victims are acting out of the ordinary. When the mousy and vulnerable English teacher becomes infected, she becomes vindictive and coldhearted against her students. As the cast of misfits reluctantly end up uniting, none of them

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actually wants to believe the truth until Professor Furlong (DAILY SHOW host Jon Stewart) arrives. During Furlong's attack, Zeke slices his fingers off and stabs him in the eye with his needle drug, melting him to a puddle of puss.

Williamson and Rodriguez have stated many times that their favorite movie is John Carpenter's HALLOWEEN. Williamson even has Marybeth saying the obligatory line, "See anything you like?" When Coach Willis is infected in the opening, he intends to kill Principal Drake (Bebe Neuwirth). The slasher chases after his target across the overstretched hallway. With well-executed precision, Rodriguez edits the sequence at a suspenseful pace. Principal Drake rushes to the front doors, scrambling to unlock the chain. Behind her, the coach is slowly catching up, ready to strike her down.

Though the director and screenwriter share a common passion for HALLOWEEN, viewers can instantly tell Rodriguez loves Carpenter's THE THING more. Because Zeke's magic dust has an adverse effect on the aliens, the group has to take his drug to find out who among them isn't human. In a scene similar to THE THING, MacReady and his group have to take a blood test to find out who's the alien. Both scenes are filled with paranoia as no one seems to trust each other. Making matters worse, Casey and Stan become two uncontrollable laughing hyenas high-fiving each other. The tension builds as the last two remaining are Delilah and Marybeth, with Zeke holding them at gunpoint. Failing the test, Delilah shrieks and destroys the drug lab before crashing through the door.



The remaining students race back to their high school to find out who the alien queen is. Trouble escalates as the group's numbers begin to dwindle and Zeke's stash is running low. Stokely finds herself alone with Marybeth (the only one with a last name), the alien queen in disguise. With the entire football team chasing after him, it is up to Casey to confront the queen and save humanity.

The soundtrack is a definitive benchmark of the '90s alternative scene. The music includes tracks from Offspring, Garbage, D Generation and Oasis. The late Layne Staley from Alice in Chains even does a cover version of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall." The lyric, "No dark sarcasm in the classroom," resonates with THE FACULTY's message about teen angst and rebellion.

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Williamson's dialogue is slick and smart with its running theme about conformity vs. individualism. In irony though, the movie is nonstop product placement, because the entire cast is wearing only Tommy Hilfiger clothing. In true John Hughes fashion, Williamson depicts his characters as stereotypes and deconstructs them during the story arc. Delilah may be the popular girl in school, but her home life is a living wreck with an alcoholic mother.

How would you describe this film? It's THE BREAKFAST CLUB meets THE THING, an irresistible blend of teen and sci-fi movies. With an appealing cast and a well-written script, THE FACULTY is a smart and scary hit that viewers should definitely watch!

{comments on}