The quote on the cover of DAMNED BY DAWN boldly proclaims “Sick of waiting for EVIL DEAD 4? Check out DAMNED BY DAWN.” Umm, OK. Right from the onset, DAMNED BY DAWN (on DVD and Blu-ray from Image Entertainment) riffs directly from Sam Raimi’s classic creepers—everything from his distinctive camerawork and rapid cuts to the jittery drop-frames and insane fast-motion tracking shots, right down to the fake-looking trees. In fact, DAMNED BY DAWN walks the fine line of cinematic plagiarism.

The story of this Australian production, written and directed by Brett Anstey, is simple. Claire O’Neil (Renee Willner) goes home to see her sick Nana, only to discover that she is dying and has a family secret to share: When members of the O’Neil brood are ready to pass on, a mysterious Banshee comes to collect their souls. If you interfere with her, the Banshee calls upon the dead to avenge the betrayal, and they won’t rest until they have tasted pure blood, blood of the family line… Guess what happens? Claire witnesses the Banshee coming to claim her Nana, and despite having been warned not to interfere, she attempts to dispatch the creature. This is, of course, a huge mistake. Why don’t people ever listen to their elders in these sorts of films? As one would expect, the Banshee calls on the living dead to assist in her payback and yes, the corpses do rise and rise and rise.

DAMNED BY DAWN takes itself way too seriously and severely suffers from a lack of true gore, humor and horror. Most of the nasty stuff occurs off camera, which dramatically reduces the shock factor and makes the film’s obvious budgetary restraints glaringly obvious. And on that note, nothing’s more painful than watching an entire film clearly shot day-for-night; it gets hard on the eyes and is just plain annoying. Add in some brain-straining CG fog, and you can hardly see any anything at all. Worse, whenever the action does pick up, it is immediately cut short by drawn-out yammering, plot exposition and lame backstory.

On the plus side, the discs’ making-of documentary is more compelling and engaging than the feature itself, and is worth checking out. You get an very in-depth overview of the filmmakers, their passion, drive and sense of humor…aspects missing from the final feature. The pair of audio commentaries are also noteworthy, especially the one delivered by the cheerful, lively cast, who obviously had a blast dodging demons. The second talk track, featuring the behind-the-camera crew, is more technical but still amusing, and the disc also includes the trailer for this and other Image Entertainment releases. And for an indie production, the slick widescreen transfer and DTS 5.1 Surround sound on the discs are impressive (especially the 1080p high-definition presentation on the Blu-ray).

But for those hungry for EVIL DEAD 4, you’ll have to either keep waiting or settle for Raimi’s DRAG ME TO HELL (which DAMNED also cribs from). DAMNED BY DAWN is a nice try, but not much else.

MOVIE: 💀💀💀💀

DISC PACKAGE: 💀💀💀💀

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