

“RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Chris Haberman

Monday, 07 November 2011 11:43



Sneaky, charming, funny and disturbing, RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE will *not* be played vicariously in the background while we decorate the tree this year. Instead, I'll be treating this Finnish attraction (on DVD and Blu-ray/DVD combo from Oscilloscope Laboratories) like a fine bottle of port that should only be opened when friends are gathered around the glowing warmth of the tree once it's fully decorated...and the lights are all off...and my friend Kevin, who is terrified of scary-Santa imagery, is stuck here due to unsafe driving conditions.

This beautiful package does have one really infuriating legality: The Blu-Ray/DVD banner at the top of the front cover, slight as it may be, ruins what looks like the most bitchin' Christmas storybook ever. It's a beautiful piece of art that equally chills and warms the heart, and the font sports an INDIANA JONES/HOWARD THE DUCK fade of orange-red to yellow. It's delicious.



You're wondering about the plot. If you're not, the features stuff is below. For those who haven't heard, this is the frostbitten story of an excavation company drilling into a mountain to hopefully find...and I don't feel like telling you anything else. Let me explain: I went in fairly blind to this film. Couldn't be happier. All I knew was that a scrawny, irritable, nude and white-bearded old man caused a wild rift in a film with "Christmas" in the title. If you really want to learn more about the storyline, you can enjoy our initial spoiler-free review [here](#).

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I would rather impart this: Even if this isn't a legitimate “horror” film, it achieves what we as an audience appreciate about respectable films categorized under that label. The film presents a threat, and presents it with an attitude. It's the attitude of a film that we cling to the most sometimes, and this one is a real punk. We love that, don't we? That's why some of our favorites happen to jab a switchblade at sacred cultural elements. When it comes to the holiday of Christmas, let's take a very brief look at how RARE EXPORTS sits alongside of four of our most recognized and/or cherished Yuletide freakouts:

SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT, for all of the fun it is and the trouble it caused, is really just a brat of a movie that should have coal for breakfast.

CHRISTMAS EVIL holds the holiday so close that it's deliriously suffocating—you don't know whether to laugh, cry or turn it off, hide and call Mom.

TALES FROM THE CRYPT's “And All Through the House” segments, both the '72 theatrical and '89 cable versions, sink a revolting set of teeth into the oppressive greed cloud that inherently hovers above the date of December 25.

And lastly, FILMS TO KEEP YOU AWAKE: A CHRISTMAS TALE (which reminded me most of RARE EXPORTS, and not only because of the title), demonstrates the startling abilities of children when faced with an illusion-shattering situation.

To that effect, RARE EXPORTS notes this, strips, wipes its ass with any treasured notion of Santa Claus, tosses it in the snow, snickers, then whispers, “John Carpenter ruled...” while moseying out into a dark, iced forest.

Though the disc extras are all wonderful, I mystified myself by *not* looking forward to them. I had a blast with this flick—why dig right into the revelatory goodies? Somehow, it seemed unsavory to want the trick the film had played on me to be completely explained right away. I wanted it to tickle my imagination for a little while before learning the ins and outs.

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Then I came to my senses. Director Jalmari Helander’s two prequel shorts are included: RARE EXPORTS INC. and RARE EXPORTS INC.—THE OFFICIAL SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS. These are as hellishly humorous and distressing as the feature itself, and should be watched afterward. Oddly enough, the second short’s conceit would make for a brilliant sequel.

“The Making of RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE” provides a whirlwind look at rehearsals, locations, stunts, makeup, sound design and the premiere. Not a typical behind-the-scenes jaunt by any stretch. No talking heads—just fly-on-the-wall cameras capturing this and that, occasionally landing on the noses of the cast and crew. But, frankly, I was right. I didn’t really want to see this. It is excellent, and I love seeing how much effort everyone put into the film and how enthusiastic they were, despite being cold, exhausted and occasionally, unflatteringly naked. However, I think I’ll work to forget all about this and just let the movie be the movie each season. Now I’m changing my mind—do I want to see more of this journey?

“Blood in the Snow: A Look at the Concept Art” is a collection of drawings done by Pekka Veikkolainen “to help the filmmakers visualize the story while writing the script. These were also used to pitch the film to potential investors.” And they’re all worthy of frames. I’m assuming the same artist did the grand work on the cover. Stunning.

“Animatics & Computer Effects Video Comparison” makes it very clear what you suspected during the film’s more spectacular moments. If you’re into this sort of thing, it’s a very nifty segment.

A photo gallery and original Finnish trailer are also included, as is (drum roll) 1964’s SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS—a cult classic from the Oscilloscope vault featuring Pia Zadora in her first movie role. Which is...quite the...you should...I can’t. But you should.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

DISC PACKAGE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷