

“SATAN HATES YOU” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold

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Among current independent auteurs, James Felix McKenney has built one of the most eclectic filmographies in the genre, drawing from a variety of inspirations. After starting out with the zombie opus *CANNIBALLISTIC!*, he moved into haunted-place territory with *THE OFF SEASON*, then homaged '50s sci-fi cheapies with *AUTOMATONS*. His latest, *SATAN HATES YOU* (starting a one-week New York City run today at the reRun Gastropub Theater), is modeled on the Christian scare films of the '60s and '70s.

About the only thing these movies have in common (the last three, at least) is the presence of Angus Scrimm—well-cast in each, though not as a villain in any. His *SATAN HATES YOU* role is the meaningfully named Dr. Michael Gabriel, who appears in a number of TV-commercials-within-the-film proselytizing about the saving of souls. And the story's two central souls are in dire need of saving. Wendy (Christine Spencer) is a young party girl whose life is defined by sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, belying the Catholic schoolgirl garb she occasionally wears. Marc (Don Wood) is a young man wrestling with his homosexual tendencies, his trysts ending with his murder of the guys he gets together with.



Although the two frequent the same seedy downtown bar, they don't actually meet; instead, McKenney sets their stories running on parallel tracks that seem to be running toward the same destination: hell and damnation! Much in the manner of those decades-old flicks by the likes of Ron Ormond or the Jack Chick gospel comics (and the current religious-themed “hell houses” in which their spirit lives on), *SATAN HATES YOU* tells a shocking horror story in the service of the message that violent, self-destructive and/or deviant behavior will set you on a one-way course to the hot place, and that you best mind its lesson or face the same jeopardy as its protagonists. (An opening title card even warns that if you choose not to watch the movie and

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thus ignore its warnings, you “do so at the risk of losing your IMMORTAL SOUL!”)

McKenney isn't out to parody Christian propaganda, or to make statements; he's more interested in simply replicating their tone and values in a modern context and letting viewers make up their own minds how to react. If SATAN HATES YOU never hits the heights of hysteria seen in its forebear features, it's because McKenney has avoided exaggeration and played much of his movie at dramatic face value. That's not to say there aren't moments of stylization and surrealism—McKenney and cinematographer Eric Branco drop in seriously trippy visuals here and there—or that there isn't plenty of levity. A good deal of the latter is provided by Larry Fessenden (also one of the movie's producers) and Bradford Scobie as Glumac and Scadlock, a pair of horned, impish demons who lurk around the sidelines, invisible to everyone but us, nattering in the protagonists' ears and urging them toward sin.

Fessenden and Scobie bring a rude comic energy that steals the show—not necessarily easy to do in a movie well-stocked with horror veterans. In addition to Scrimm, very effective as a voice of calm and reason in the midst of all the madness and temptation, the ensemble also includes Reggie Bannister as Mickey, proprietor of the bar Marc frequents; Debbie Rochon as Tina, a reformed sinner who holds potluck suppers next door and vainly invites Marc to join her on the side of light; and Michael Berryman as Mr. Harker, a disapproving hotel desk clerk. Christina Campanella and Turquoise Taylor Grant offer enthusiastic support as Wendy's sister and her psychic pal, while Spencer and Wood ably and bravely enact the conflicted leads.

SATAN HATES YOU is an unusual little picture combining gory excess, issues of faith, black humor and low-budget New York City grit. It's not for all tastes, but if you've got an interest in eccentric genre fare with a lot of interesting stuff going on under the surface and in the margins, give it a try. After all, if you don't, you may find yourself DAMNED TO BURN FOREVER IN THE FIERY PITS OF HELL!



{comments on}