

"HOLLOW" (Movie Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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As found footage settles itself in as the new *raison d'être* of indie genre filmmakers, we start to see it mold and blend with time-honored tradition (the anthology, the ghost story, etc). In HOLLOW (available now on VOD from Tribeca Film), director Michael Axelgaard brings the aesthetic to the historic English countryside where it gains rich, somber atmosphere in the process.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a horror fan unacquainted with two couples in a jeep. The weekend getaway will never die, but Axelgaard and writer Matthew Holt manage to make the familiar work (and not just because of the accents) by successfully setting a tone, even before the more explicitly horror narrative comes into play. Firstly, Emma (Emily Plumtree) has organized the weekend alongside fiancé Scott (Matt Stokoe), best friend James (Sam Stockman) and his new flame Lynne (Jessica Ellerby) around clearing out her late grandfather's home in Suffolk. Coupled with the perpetual overcast of rural England, the gloom of death already hangs in the air. Secondly, the four are post-grads and as James' previous relationship with Emma is revealed, as is his refusal to let go, a melancholy sense of moving on from the days of weekend getaways and tolerating awkward social circle drama is palpable.



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James, damaged and timid, is the cameraman for much of HOLLOW, which does a fairly brilliant job at the now obligatory "why are we still shooting." The film uses his own warped outlook, as well as the fact that the camera's light only works when recording to justify, and coupled with the strong character work on display, it's more than enough. In fact, much of HOLLOW's strengths come from its lead foursome. Of course, there's a heaping of help from the all-natural production value of Suffolk and the surrounding legends of a thousand year-old tree and the suicidal lovers it continues to attract, but when the film attempts overt scares, it stumbles, achieving the standard in shaky running. The true unsettling nature lies in watching Emma, James, Scott and Lynne intersect and interact, coming face-to-face with their expectations for themselves and each other, and the fallouts from where they differ.

Axelgaard wisely stays away from relying on frequent jolts. Knowing the effect of sudden shriek drifts quickly, the director instead finds the tragic nature of both the possible supernatural threat and the group's relations. This is ultimately what keeps HOLLOW both an eerie experience and a lingering presence after the fact.

