

## “HOBOKEN HOLLOW” (DVD Review)

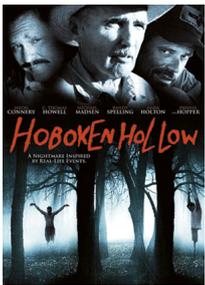
Written by Michael Gingold

Sunday, 01 August 2010 09:49

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Remember back a decade and a half or so ago, in the post-RESERVOIR DOGS and PULP FICTION days, when every B-list actor in creation was rushing to take part in snarky independent crime capers in the hope that lightning would strike again? More recently, torture-horror became the new vogue; how else to explain the presence of Dennis Hopper, Michael Madsen, Robert Carradine, C. Thomas Howell et al. in an underachieving wannabe shocker like HOBOKEN HOLLOW (previously released by Triumph Marketing, now being reissued on no-frills DVD by Echo Bridge)?



Out of this group, the only one appearing to have any fun with the material is Howell, who nonetheless goes way over the top with his lip-smacking villainy. As Clayton, one of the owners of the titular ranch where brutality is the order of the day, he's seen in an early moment having picked up a vanload of transients who think they're getting a good work opportunity. One asks what the farming experience is like, and Howell milks the response for everything it's worth: "It's *toooooo-turrrre*

!" he growls. "How long are you gonna need us?" Clayton is then queried, to which he replies, "Permanently!" Shortly thereafter, a guy is hit by a speeding truck with such force that one of his disembodied eyeballs winds up wedged under a windshield wiper, and his severed foot is left lying by the side of the road, from which it is recovered, relieved of its boot and sock and fed to the hogs.

Had HOBOKEN HOLLOW continued in this exaggerated vein, it might have tipped over into gruesomely enjoyable camp, if not a genuinely good movie. But writer/director Glen Stephens based his script on a real-life incident in Texas and seems to think he's making a revealing docudrama here, establishing a general tone of straight-faced seriousness, complete with narration to help impart a sense of "importance" to the material. In the case of protagonist Trevor Lloyd (Jason Connery), it also relieves Stephens of the responsibility of developing his hero through action or dramatically revealing his backstory. Lengthy early voiceovers explain

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everything we need to know about Trevor, from his tragic Iraq War experiences to the fact that his wife has left him because he has “lost his laugh.” (SPOILER ALERT: At the story’s end, the narrator returns to let us know that he ultimately finds his laugh again. Is this a horror movie or CITY SLICKERS?)

At other moments, the voiceovers are just plain silly. As a hulking brute leers through the crescent-moon window of an outhouse, we’re helpfully informed, “That’s Junior.” Later, upon our first glimpse of a boil-faced hag, we get, “That’s Junior’s wife, Lois.” Clayton and Junior and Lois and the others who run Hoboken Hollow show no compunction about tormenting and sadistically punishing the men they’re holding prisoner, and they also slice the skin off those they kill and turn it into jerky. One of their number does eventually come to regret his evil activities, though it’s a little confusing because his crises of conscience alternate with moments in which he enthusiastically takes part in the viciousness.

Little of the torture and murder has much impact, though, and gorehounds will be disappointed that the early bloodletting gives way to multiple scenes of people simply being poked with cattle prods. The most upsetting moment is a rape committed by the hulking, mentally challenged Junior, which is motivated by nothing beyond the fact that that’s what hulking, mentally challenged characters do in movies like this. Little suspense is generated either, in part because Stephens’ pokey narrative doesn’t bring Trevor, the ostensible hero, to Hoboken Hollow till around the 50th of the movie’s overlong 98 minutes. Prior to this, the movie marks time with a pointless subplot in which Madsen (sporting a hokey mustache) and Greg Evigan (!) try to convince local shop owner Lin Shaye to sell her property for big bucks.

For the record, Hopper turns up as the local sheriff, whose deputies have a habit of driving slowly past Hoboken Hollow every time one of its conscripts attempts an escape—just to get their hopes up, I guess. Among the imprisoned unfortunates is a guy named “Howie Beale,” though if this is a NETWORK reference, I’m hard-pressed to figure out what it’s supposed to mean. One of the associate producers was Anthony Michael Hall (yes, that one), and one of the credited executive producers is “Texas CJ Investments,” which makes sense; HOBOKEN HOLLOW feels like a prime example of what happens when a horror film is put together as a business deal rather than out of creative inspiration.



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