

## “THE BURNT HOUSE” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

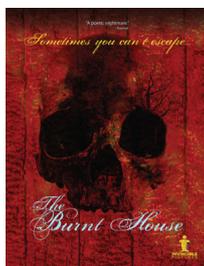
Written by Rich Mallery  
Sunday, 15 August 2010 10:37

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After Megan and Joe’s infant son dies, their marriage falls apart, driving Megan into the arms of another man. Soon after, Joe’s mother dies of a heart attack. In an attempt to salvage their relationship, the suffering couple moves to Joe’s rural childhood home, but once there, strange things begin to occur and dark secrets from the past are revealed.

Opening with a woman’s face being brutally smashed with a hammer, *THE BURNT HOUSE* (now out on DVD and Blu-ray from Invincible Pictures) begins with more potential than the usual underground horror film. Although the basic plot devices (a couple loses their child, fight constantly, move to the middle of nowhere, go insane, etc.) is nothing new, this sort of psychological scenario can spun into cinematic gold in the hands of a capable director and cast. Unfortunately, after recently watching Lars von Trier’s *ANTICHRIST*—a film with a similar setup—this reviewer was hoping for something more intense.



So, with visions of talking animals and genital mutilation fresh in this writer’s mind, *THE BURNT HOUSE* was quite a letdown. While there is some blood, this is a film that shows little of what’s going on, leaving the audience to rely on their imagination. This sets this film apart from most of the in-your-face horror lining video-store shelves, but the concept only works if there is a payoff. Unfortunately, *THE BURNT HOUSE* doesn’t deliver. Instead, it falls apart completely, with characters aren’t well-developed and act in ways that make zero sense throughout, leading to an out-of-left-field ending that makes no sense whatsoever. *THE BURNT HOUSE* also relies on film-school techniques to fill the running time, which grows tired early on. Voiceovers and off-camera dialogue can be interesting ways to set up an intriguing story, but when they’re used throughout an entire film, they quickly become boring. Artistic camera shots of the ground with eerie musical accompaniment can also be atmospheric—if they don’t fill the screen every 10 minutes.

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In a movie with a minimal cast and one location, dialogue should play a prominent role. But instead of moving the story along and developing the protagonists, the dialogue is sparse, and amounts to little more than F-bombs and go-nowhere stories. Lead actor J.D. Brown attempts to channel Jack Nicholson’s Jack Torrance from THE SHINING, but falls dramatically flat and comes across as more whiny than tormented. Despite THE BURNT HOUSE’s many flaws, however (I haven’t even mentioned the overused stock piano piece that plays over most of act one), Monica Knight is refreshing as Megan and does a decent enough job adding dimension and realism to her role, especially since her only purpose seems to be to provide a verbal punching bag for her husband. One can sense her internal despair through the way she often stares off into space, her eyes alternating between depression and terror, as she tries to cope with a losing situation. The few moments of tension are provided courtesy of her—so much so that this film would’ve played better if she were the main character and her husband played more of a supporting role. But this is not the case, and her screen time is unfairly split.

Between these flaws, the constant fading to black, the quick cuts to a “scary” face and the flashbacks, THE BURNT HOUSE is more annoying than interesting, and what could’ve been a tightly wound thriller becomes nothing more than a forgettable ripoff of a dozen other films. THE BURNT HOUSE might be a passable midnight watch for the most forgiving viewers, but if you’re like this writer, you’ll pass out from boredom long before the closing credits. If you’re interested, extras on the DVD and Blu-ray amount to merely a 16-minute making-of featurette and two music videos.

MOVIE: 🍌🍌🍌🍌

DISC PACKAGE: 🍌🍌🍌🍌

{comments on}