

## “POSSESSION” (DVD Review)

Written by Bekah McKendry  
Monday, 08 March 2010 17:57

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We’ve been hearing about POSSESSION for years. Literally, it’s been that long since the film’s release was announced. First set to play theaters in 2008, POSSESSION was bumped to January 2009, then to a straight to-disc debut in May 2009. Now, finally, it’s arriving on DVD and Blu-ray, and I wish I could say it’s been worth the lengthy wait. Although it has some strong points, the film ultimately plays less like a horror film and more like a slightly intense Lifetime TV movie.

A remake of the 2002 South Korean film JUNGDOK (ADDICTED) directed by Joel Bergvall and Simon Sandquist, POSSESSION focuses on the busy life of lawyer Jess, played by young horror veteran Sarah Michelle Gellar. Endlessly occupied with work, Jess can barely find time for her overly devoted husband, Ryan (HOMECOMING’s Michael Landes), though she still takes some very long scenes to show how much she adores Ryan as he sends her love letters and makes her sentimental jewelry. Then enters a stick in their happily spinning wheel: Our lovebirds met when Jess defended Ryan’s criminal brother, Roman (Lee Pace from PUSHING DAISES), against an assault charge that landed Roman in jail. Now freed and still brooding and violent, Roman shacks up with the happy couple. All seems lovingly uncomfortable until, one foggy day, Ryan and Roman get into a car crash that sends both of them into comas. After endless scenes of Jess’ anguish, Roman wakes up—but with Ryan’s full memories of everything he and Jess did together. Confused yet relieved to have her man back (even in a different body), Jess not only starts a relationship with Ryan-in-Roman, she also becomes pregnant with his child. Then she begins to wonder if Roman is really “possessed” with Ryan’s spirit or if the previously brutal felon is just conning the hell out of her.



I wish I could call this a horror movie; I really wanted it to be one. But it just isn’t “genre” enough (and not just because gore is absent). Though there are some slightly supernatural themes, the film contains absolutely no scares, with the exception of maybe two “Oh, I didn’t realize you

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were standing behind me!” moments. The whole story is strongly focused on the love/relationship drama and Jess’ internal debate on whether Roman could be Ryan; if not for a very mild sex scene, this movie could have been rated PG. I guess the long embraces of Gellar’s unclothed back earned the extra “13,” because it’s certainly not due to anything horror-related. POSSESSION is much more about the quest for true love and really knowing your perfect mate than anything else; in fact, I don’t believe the word “possession” is ever even mentioned, beyond a short glimpse on a computer screen (Jess Googles it).

The numerous love scenes are so sugary-sweet, they could quickly lead to a mental cavity. The acting, however, is commendable and makes these moments slightly bearable. Gellar is her usually bright and cute self that fright fans know from BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER and THE GRUDGE. She effortlessly carries the emotional, dramatic bits (often featuring her alone) and plays Jess’ indecision of which brother to choose quite well. Accustomed to seeing Pace in his quirky, comedic DAISIES role, I wasn’t sure how to take him as the tattooed and violent ex-con, but he comes across well, and his acting is one of the movie’s high points.

Though POSSESSION is well-filmed, be prepared for some very trite scenes and overdone “symbolism”; the group I watched the movie with actually groaned at several moments. The idea of the entwined double (the two brothers) is hinted at with imagery throughout the movie. Wait, did I say “hinted”? I meant “repetitively forced.” When the brothers have their accident and lie on the ground injured, their blood pools into a yin-yang pattern of good and evil. The weather vane on Jess and Ryan’s house is a two-sided man—one side smiling, one side scary. Sculptures, faces in photos and even people are constantly split in two, either by camera framing or other objects. At first, this is kinda cool, but by the end of the first 45 minutes, it’s just kicking the viewers in the yin-yang.

Despite all its faults, I didn’t walk away hating POSSESSION. This is a movie I could sit down and watch with my mother, who hates horror but enjoys a mild thriller. In the genre realm where I dwell, this is a bland snack of a very dry, unsalted cracker—but I’m guessing that in the world of chick flicks, this is a hot smorgasbord of love, betrayal and supernatural thrills.

The DVD and Blu-ray feature a short making-of featurette, trailers and a number of bonus and deleted scenes, including an alternate ending. Some of the cut bits are quite good and could possibly have made the movie a bit scarier. In one particular extended sequence, Jess takes Roman to a psychiatrist (played by none other than William B. Davis, THE X FILES’ “Cigarette Smoking Man”). In the film itself, this passage is short and ambiguous, but the complete version, though only a few minutes longer, takes the characterization a step further, explaining that Roman either truly is “possessed” by Ryan or is a complete sociopath capable of

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unremitting lies. In one deleted snippet, Jess and Roman attempt to take Ryan off life support but are unable to do it, revealing that Jess is still not fully convinced that Roman is Ryan reincarnate. There's a subplot in the movie where a girl whom Roman used to date disappears; it's never fully clear if he has anything to do with that or not, but the deleted material resolves this question as well.

As for the alternate ending, I won't go too far into details, as I don't want to blow any twists, but it did address one question that had been drilling into my brain throughout the film. Wouldn't Jess' law firm and friends have a little something to say about the fact that 1) she's pregnant with her brother-in-law's kid while bro is still alive and in a coma, and 2) wouldn't they be a bit concerned about lawyer Jess being all romantically entangled with an ex-felon/client? The answer to both is “yes”...but only in the deleted conclusion—which is, it should be said, even more “Lifetime movie” than the one seen in the release version.

And don't be fooled by the very misleading disc cover. Gellar never turns into a skeleton, and the movie features no supernatural FX.

MOVIE: \*\*

DVD PACKAGE: \*\*1/2

{jcomments on}