

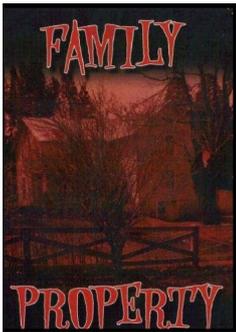
"FAMILY PROPERTY" (DVD Review)

Written by Jack Bennett

Sunday, 19 December 2010 13:23



FAMILY PROPERTY begins with a farmer telling his son, "If anything ever happens to me, you're in charge of this property. And do not let anybody whatsoever come on this property. If they do, kill 'em!" Then the farmer is gunned down by the police in a bloodless shootout in which the law enforcement is represented entirely by offscreen gunshots.



All the events I just described take place in less than 30 seconds of screen time. Then Lloyd Kaufman shows up in front of a wall of Troma 35th Anniversary flyers and tells the camera in his New York accent, "Greetings, citizens of Franklin County, Virginia! This is your mayor!" By now, microbudget filmmakers are savvy enough to realize that Kaufman will appear in any film that can meet his quote; his 40 seconds in FAMILY PROPERTY almost convinced me that the entire movie was a prank pulled in order to show how INCEST DEATH SQUAD wasn't so bad. Advice to producers: See if you can convince Michael Herz to be in your movie (not Joe Fleishaker, the real Michael Herz). Now that would be impressive! It is very, very, very difficult to know what to write about a movie like FAMILY PROPERTY. It is one thing to watch a cynical, soulless cash-grab with slick production values, or an incompetent film from a crass distribution label that thinks it can market anything to the horror crowd. Then there's a case like FAMILY PROPERTY, which looks like it was shot on camcorders by a handful of high-school students. I don't mean that as an insult...the film literally looks like it was shot on camcorders by a handful of high-school students. Any reviewer worth their salt is unafraid to offend a filmmaker's ego in order to suggest where an audience should best spend their attention and money, but who wants to rip on a sincere attempt by some ambitious kids?

As a movie, FAMILY PROPERTY is a complete waste of time, but it is also clearly an earnest effort produced under whatever circumstances were available to its creator, a guy named Derek Young who is credited with everything from the direction to the wardrobe. Young deserves encouragement, if only for picking up a camera and making his flick with whoever and whatever he had available. He also had something to do with the music, which isn't bad, but not good enough to justify repeating the title song and stretching out shots to accommodate it. The rest of the movie is stupefying. Shot on location in beautiful Floyd, VA, the story follows the deceased farmer's homicidal son, unseen but frequently heard during endless subjective

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point-of-view shots, as he defends his purportedly abandoned homestead from journalists, house-flippers and some college kids location-scouting for a rave. The story sounds simple, but the inept filmmaking makes everything confusing. There are jump-cuts and time-cuts within the body of two-person dialogue scenes, and increasingly useless superimposed titles declaring "MEANWHILE," "15 MINUTES LATER," and "JUST THEN." The murders by machete, noose, pen-knife and boot are so poorly staged and shot, you wonder if the picture has transitioned to a montage of still photographs, as in *LA JETÉE* or *SUPERFLY*. If I'm not mistaken, *FAMILY PROPERTY* was cut on consumer-grade editing software, in which the visual fade-outs are automatically linked to an audio cross-fade.

There is wall-to-wall ADR, none of which fits the speakers' mouths and is often dominated by low-end machine noise, as if they were recorded under the hood of a running El Camino with bad belts. The handheld camera wavers and swings about as if the operator isn't sure where or what the action is. The actors, including young professionals like *CABIN FEVER 2*'s Alexander Isaiah Thomas and *THE ROAD*'s Jeremy Ambler, glance into the camera, mumble their lines and in some cases seem on the constant verge of breaking into smiles (Why not? Making movies can be a lot of fun). Unless Kaufman is feeling very charitable with his distribution choices this quarter, *FAMILY PROPERTY* is not likely to go beyond self-distribution via Amazon and the movie's [MySpace page](#). While that's not entirely a shame, it doesn't look to have slowed down Young and co.; several of them are involved in the next movie by Virginia-based filmmaker (and *FAMILY PROPERTY* cast member) John Birmingham, and bad first features are par for the course in any director's career. I can only call *FAMILY PROPERTY* terrible by even microbudget amateur standards—but as of today it has over 1,700 friends on MySpace and a 10 out of 10 rating on IMDb, so what the hell do I know?



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