As a host of filmmakers continue their efforts to ape the dirty, gritty aesthetic of ‘70s American horror, it’s refreshing and winning to see a film that so captures the veneer of the same period’s Eurochillers. And however much it intended to or not, 11-11-11 hits that nail on the head, generating plenty of charm amidst its faults.

Oddly enough, six films in, it felt as if Darren Lynn Bousman was a director we still hadn’t been properly introduced to, despite having set the tone and style for much of the SAW franchise and garnering a rabid cult fan base with REPO! THE GENETIC OPERA. It could be that it was difficult to separate his own contributions within something as expansive as the Jigsaw series, but with 11-11-11, his style finally feels recognizable, and all his own.

Bousman’s script sees pulp author Joseph Crone (Timothy Gibbs) still reeling from the death of his wife and child in a fire (an incident that provides an absolutely great nightmare/flashback). As he wishes to join them, he’s called to Spain to see his terminally ill father and preacher brother Samuel (Michael Landes), where the sense that the numbers 11/11 hold significance in his life, and that something supernatural is gaining on him, becomes all too real.

This is an often beautiful-looking film, positively filled with strong visuals and steady, elegant camerawork. Bousman makes wise choices when it comes to the chills (many of which find success), eschewing loud jumps and instead filling the shadows and deeper sections of his shots with silent, surreal threats (apparitions that handily loom closer as Joseph falls deeper into it all). And while the makeup on the demons that are so prevalent throughout is often borderline silly, their presence is so intense, the visages take hold and still manage to cast a creepy, gonzo spell. Even when he does shoot for old-fashioned jolts, the music rarely spikes;

they prompt the audience to pop up on their own accord, not because a sound cue tells them to.

Operating on a nightmarish feel and logic, the film’s similarities to the aforementioned European fare extend to its negative aspects as well, as it feels at once rushed and yet a tad too lax in the way only the dreamy terrors of Italy and Spain could. 11-11-11 begins with a furious pace, pushing our protagonist to his new obsession. As he nears the truth of it all and the eponymous date approaches, however, the urgency wanes and the movie becomes slightly repetitive preceding the finale. It even sees Joseph take support-group friend Sadie (Wendy Glenn) for a picturesque stroll through Barcelona amidst it all, reminding one of the baffling lunch detour in Lucio Fulci’s GATES OF HELL/CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD as the two leads are supposedly racing to prevent the end of the world.

Like Fulci’s more apocalyptically inclined films (GATES, THE BEYOND), 11-11-11 ends up feeling personal and not terribly grand in scope, likely both due to a limited budget and its basis on a phenomenon/theory that largely goes ignored. But as it does with Fulci fare, this works in the film’s favor, bestowing it with an oddball personality and benefitting from a particularly quiet, eerie ending.

No doubt, following the current immediacy of the 11-11-11 date, subsequent viewings will add yet another layer of kitsch to a film already packed with brooding zooms and a tortured protagonist who wears his grief in his stubble. And that’s seriously fine. 11-11-11 bears its share of clunkiness, both in dialogue and story, but does so on its own, wholly memorable and endearing terms. It’s the type of flawed gem horror fans are meant to cherish, and its many attributes promise damn good things to come from its director.