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The Cottage - DVD

Comedy farce or fright?

by Neil Queen published on 11 July 2008

It's funny, but the tricky thing about British film is its violent polarity. Our flicks are either canny literate pieces from the likes of Shane Meadows, Danny Boyle and Pegg & Wright cracking or St Trinians weak. The question is which end of the spectrum does *The Cottage* belong in? It's a curious case. Looking at the cast and set-up, they clearly wanted to attempt to be fresh, and the choice of leads may not inspire the greatest of confidence, but still they don't send out stink wafts.

We meet dysfunctional brothers Peter (Reece Sheersmith) and David (Andy Serkis), who are spending the night in a remote cottage, the latter having dragged his sibling into some kind of scam. Turns out they've kidnapped Tracey (Jennifer Ellison), the daughter of a strip joint boss, in the hope of squeezing some cash out of him.

Efficiency and competence not being their core skill, the plan rapidly goes to pieces and ye olde "crime gone wrong" genre tics rear up and Tracey's mob pa is soon able to track them down and set a pair of triads to get all medieval on them with some sharp instruments.

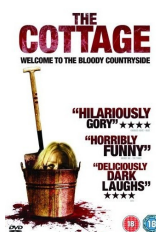
So we've got a bunch of tooled-up wrong 'uns in the middle of nowhere. This not being a Jane Austen adaptation, it's clearly going to get messy: it's just a question of how and when. Yea and verily the claret does indeed flow. The problem is that the decision to switch the film into a slasher movie isn't executed with any logic, as what has come before fails to set you up for it.

The real difficulty is that the film tries to be too many things to too broad a crowd, and in the end fails at every turn. Clearly, in the extended exchanges early on between the brothers in the rustic cottage, there's the hope of threading in a *Withnail And I* wry charm. Neither the script nor

THE COTTAGE
WELCOME TO THE BLOODY COUNTRYSIDE



"HILARIOUSLY GORY" ★★★★★
"HORRIBLY FUNNY"
"DELICIOUSLY DARK LAUGHS" ★★★★★



...cont.

the performances give any chance for this to happen. Sheersmith, on board to widen the appeal by bringing a smidge of the League Of Gentleman black humour this project cries out for, is far too mannered and comedic, which jars noticeably with Serkis' more muted style.

When the bloodletting begins, it still plays it for laughs. Yet when it delivers our slasher, it yearns for a Halloween gravitas that it has just spent the entire film undermining. The plotting to introduce said rotter is also too weak for words - greater cohesion and logic could be had listening to Stephen Hawkins explain the work of David Lynch when the batteries are running low on his voicebox thing. In short, it's hard to know what you're supposed to think, and by the time that happens, you're beyond caring.

Still, Jennifer Ellison is at least entertaining. Clearly employed as the eye candy, she gets to fishwife her way through proceedings. If ever you want to see a busty blonde using the "C" word with frightening abandon, this film will sort you out a treat. Actually, that's possibly the most frightening thing about the whole thing.

VERDICT

It's a genuine pity that this doesn't work, as the intent is at least there to make it distinctive. It's just that it puts its efforts into badly conceived ideas and falls into the gutter as a result.

Rating: 18

Starring: Andy Serkis, Reece Sheersmith, Jennifer Ellison

Directed by: Paul Andrew Williams

Extras: Director commentary. Outtakes. Making-of featurette

At a glance

What is it?

Comedy horror

Good

The fact that neither John Cleese or Tim Curry are in it

Bad

The frustration of knowing it could have been so much better

Verdict

An enthusiastic but fundamentally flawed effort

Price 19.99

Our score

4/10

Your score

?/10