

Blu-ray Review: 'At the Gate of the Ghost' Offers Fresh Take on 'Rashômon'

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CHICAGO – Two short stories conceived by Ryunosuke Akutagawa were brilliantly fused in Akira Kurosawa's 1950 masterpiece, "Rashômon," a picture destined to eternally rank alongside the all-time greatest films. Like "12 Angry Men," it's the sort of universally relevant morality play that can be adapted countless times and still retain its power in full.

Though "Rashômon" could be considered an amorality play, since it views a hideous crime from different perches, it's the revelations that occur through the ever-shifting perspectives that allow the judges (and audience) to find enlightenment. M.L. Pundhevanop Dhewakul's "At the Gate of the Ghost" is a deftly compelling version of the classic tale that evokes some of Kurosawa's visual majesty in its painterly compositions, which achieve pristine splendor on this gorgeous Blu-ray release.



Blu-ray Rating: **4.0/5.0**

Instead of a priest, Dhewakul's protagonist is a young monk (Mario Maurer, frozen in a state of solemn contemplation) who has a crisis of faith when he parses through the conflicting stories of witnesses to—and potential participants in—a murder. The monk dissects each story with the assistance of a timid woodcutter (Petchtai Wongkamlao) and a flamboyantly morbid undertaker (a scene-stealing Pongpat Wachirabunjong), though their scenes are merely a framing device for the central action portrayed in opposing flashbacks by Chermarn Boonyasak, Dom Hetrakul and Ananda Everingham. These actors are required to play such disparate versions of their characters that their work here can be perceived as four distinct performances molded from the biases and ambiguous intentions of an unreliable storyteller. Boonyasak has perhaps the juiciest role(s) of all as a victimized damsel who starts out helpless and ends up as a dominating force who reduces the two men vying for her heart to mere marionettes. By turns heartbreaking and ferocious, Boonyasak's performance is a tour de force. Even the spooky medium that theatrically recounts one of the stories proves to be a show-stopper.



At the Gate of the Ghost was released on Blu-ray and DVD on April 16th, 2013.

Photo credit: Magnolia Home Entertainment

Is there anything new to be gleaned from this 2011 version? Not very much, but that shouldn't be held against it. With so many needless retreads wasting space in mainstream multiplexes, it's refreshing to see one of the great stories in the history of cinema get such a stellar update. In an opening title card, the film dedicates itself to Kurosawa, Akutagawa and the Thai statesman M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, who certainly knew a thing or two about justice (he founded his country's first political party in 1945). The card is a clear indication that Dhewakul has a great respect for the subject matter and its spiritual dimensions. After all the havoc has been wreaked and all the blood has been shed, the film ends on a note of meditative serenity epitomized by the hypnotic tones of Chatchai Pongprapaphan's masterful score.

"At the Gate of the Ghost" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Thai audio tracks and includes two disappointingly glib featurettes. The picture quality, however, is nearly worth the price of purchase alone. Cinematographer Panom Promchard only has a couple credits to his name, but after filmmakers get a load of his work here, his filmography is sure to increase tenfold.

'At the Gate of the Ghost' is released by Magnolia Home Entertainment and stars Chermarn Boonyasak, Dom Hettrakul, Ananda Everingham, Mario Maurer, Pongpat Wachirabunjong and Petchtai Wongkamlao. It was written and directed by M.L. Pundhevanop Dhewakul. It was released on April 16th, 2013. It is rated R.



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