

## Blu-ray Review: 'The ABCs of Death' Mistakes Endurance Test for Entertainment

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on June 5, 2013 - 11:16am

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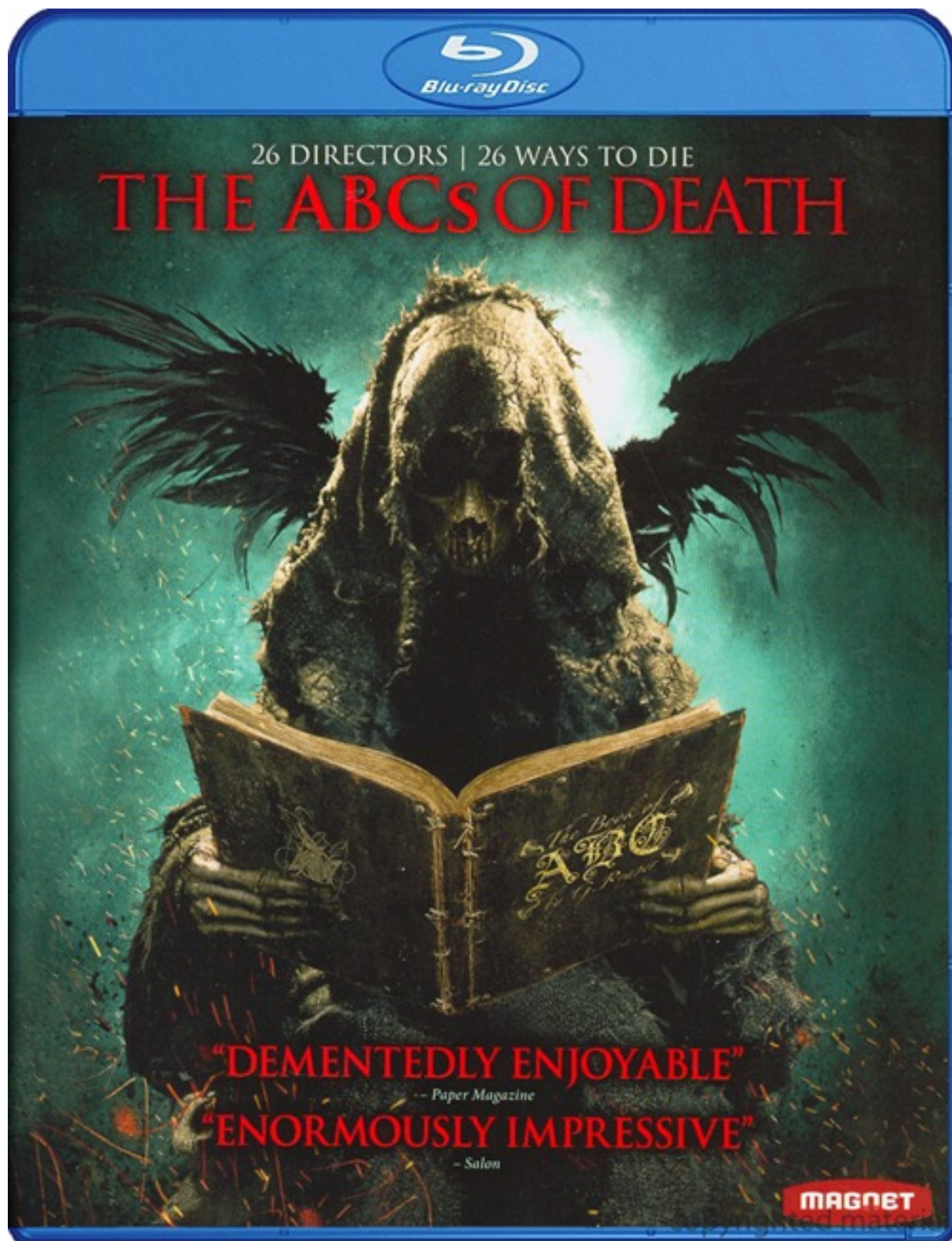
CHICAGO – “The ABCs of Death” may easily rank as the most repugnant two hours I’ve ever had the displeasure of being condemned to review. But don’t let that entice you, gorehounds. It’s also uninspired and thoroughly monotonous. The only thing that scared me was my realization after the first short film had ended that I still had 25 films left to go. This isn’t entertainment. It’s an endurance test.

Consider the vignette about an obese woman who decides, in a fit of depression, to slice off her fat. Her self-mutilation is juxtaposed with footage of a skinny model striking poses in a commercial. The director, Xavier Gens, cuts back and forth between the imagery with such mechanical repetition that the viewer develops a mixture of nausea and whiplash but not, alas, fear. What a sad encapsulation of modern horror’s exceedingly sorry state. Horror used to be about atmosphere, suspense and psychological thrills. Now it’s been reduced to that kid in the cafeteria forcing his friends to look at grody pictures. I never much liked that kid, and I loathed this film for the exact same reason.



Blu-ray Rating: **0.5/5.0**

Co-producer Ant Timpson devised the idea to assemble 26 short films, each inspired by a letter of the alphabet, into a single horror anthology. It’s humbling to observe how the combined efforts of 26 filmmakers can’t come within a trillion light years of equaling the exquisite eeriness and nightmare-inducing impact of David Lynch’s four-minute short film entitled “The Alphabet” (currently available on YouTube). A troubling majority of Timpson’s participants don’t seem interested in unsettling audiences with anything other than knee-jerk money shots. There are only so many decapitations and blood geysers one can stomach before it quickly becomes old hat. Some of these shorts are so derivative that they appear to have been plagiarized directly from Alvin Schwartz’s book series, “Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark,” which featured illustrations by Stephen Gammell that are infinitely more disturbing than anything on display in this film. Only Lee Hardcastle’s stop-motion short, “T is for Toilet,” comes close to creating a sort of depraved grandeur. Too many of the narratives are designed to astonish us with a twist that requires flashbacks, which are often an unmistakable sign of desperation in a film running less than ten minutes.



The ABCs of Death was released on Blu-ray and DVD on May 21st, 2013.

Photo credit: Magnolia Home Entertainment

The overarching flaw of this picture is the same one shared by Adam Wingard's "V/H/S." The viewer has absolutely no breathing room. Horror must have a gradual build in order to seep under the skin. By stringing together a series of breathless climaxes, these anthologies completely lose the point of what makes a horror film work. Since the audience has no chance to become invested in any of the characters, they simply sit detached awaiting the next repellant onslaught to their senses. That being said, many of these directors (Wingard, Simon Rumley, Ti West, to name a few) have made good films before and will undoubtedly make good films again. This travesty does them no favors.

"The ABCs of Death" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.78:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish subtitles, and includes a solid array of extras for 14 of the short films. There's also a commentary track featuring over 30 filmmakers, short film contest submissions and a featurette.

*'The ABCs of Death' is released by Magnolia Home Entertainment and stars Kyra Zagorsky, Erik Aude, Dallas Malloy, Sarah Bonrepaux, Fraser Corbett, Adam Wingard and Hiroko Yashiki. It was written by Kaare Andrews, Simon Barrett, Hélène Cattet, Bruno Forzani, Adrián García Bogliano, Lee Hardcastle, Noboru Iguchi, Yoshihiro Nishimura, Simon Rumley, Jon Schnepp, Srdjan Spasojevic, Nacho Vigalondo, Dimitrije Vojnov, Ti West and Yudai Yamaguchi and directed by Nacho Vigalondo, Adrián García Bogliano, Ernesto Díaz Espinoza, Marcel Sarmiento, Angela Bettis, Noboru Iguchi, Andrew Traucki, Thomas Cappelen Malling, Jorge Michel Grau, Yudai Yamaguchi, Anders Morgenthaler, Timo Tjahjanto, Ti West, Banjong Pisanthanakun, Hélène Cattet, Bruno Forzani, Simon Rumley, Adam Wingard, Srdjan Spasojevic, Jake West, Lee Hardcastle, Ben Wheatley, Kaare Andrews, Jon Schnepp, Xavier Gens, Jason Eisener and Yoshihiro Nishimura. It was released on May 21st, 2013. It is not rated.*

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