

Blu-Ray Review: Tense, Clever Horror Throwback ‘House of the Devil’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 3, 2010 - 11:08am

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CHICAGO – Ti West’s “House of the Devil” became arguably the most buzzed horror film of 2009 not named “Paranormal Activity” with universal critical acclaim and even a spot on a few top ten lists at the end of the year. Most movie goers didn’t get a chance to catch it in theaters, but it will have a huge shelf life on DVD and Blu-ray.

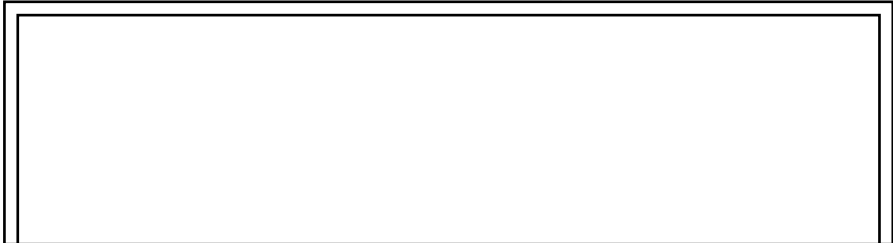


If someone came over while you were playing “House of the Devil” without knowing anything about the film, they would assume that you were spending time with a rarely-seen ’80s horror flick. It is a film not meant to merely be set in the early ’80s but designed to feel like it was actually produced back then. From the font of the opening credits to the cheesy synthesizer score, “House of the Devil” looks and sounds like a long lost Tobe Hooper film (or some other ’80s genre icon).



House of the Devil was released on Blu-ray and DVD on February 2nd, 2010.
Photo credit: Dark Sky Films

The plot of “House of the Devil,” however, has more in common with the horror of the late ’70s but that’s a minor quibble from a hardcore genre fan that probably won’t bother many viewers. The fact is that Satanism and cult paranoia were still a part of the national conversation in the ’80s too, even if most of the horror genre had moved on to the slasher flick.





House of the Devil was released on Blu-ray and DVD on February 2nd, 2010.

Photo credit: Dark Sky Films

Gorgeous, charming, straight-out-of-the-'80s newcomer Jocelin Donahue stars as Samantha, a college student who answers a flyer ad for a babysitting gig on the same night as a once-in-a-lifetime lunar eclipse. When she arrives for the interview with the creepy couple (Mary Woronov and a movie-stealing Tom Noonan), she learns that there's no baby and that they just want someone to hang around in case something goes wrong with grandman upstairs. Here's a hint for all the young ladies out there - if you show up for a babysitting gig and there's no BABY, turn around and walk away.

Samantha's best friend (Greta Gerwig) immediately recognizes something is wrong but the money is too good for Sam to turn it down. So, the poor girl bounces around the creepy house, listening to her gigantic Walkman, and looking cute for about an hour while the audience waits for the film to live up to the title. And waits. And waits. West loves the slow burn; playing with audience expectations that something will happen and dragging out the tension.

When you pick up a Blu-ray for a film called "House of the Devil," it's like signing a contract. You know that the big, crusty mansion that the cute girl is spending the entirety of the movie in is going to get crazy. It's not called "House of the Sweet Old Lady". West uses that contract to drag out the suspense to the breaking point and arguably beyond. I'm a HUGE fan of the slow burn over the excess of gore in '00s horror but there is a tipping point. When "House of the Devil" crosses the hour mark, West has pushed his experiment a little too far.

And it doesn't help that such a slow burn makes the requisite pay-off that much more anticipated. Consequently, it better pay off with some extreme fireworks. The last act of "House of the Devil" is basically just chaos and it doesn't quite deliver on the promise of the first two.

Even with that in mind, there are definitely things to like about "House of the Devil," especially on Blu-ray as the film was practically conceived to be watched late at night on television instead of projected on a big screen. Most notably, West has made a film that looks and feels like nothing else recently produced in the genre and he deserves credit for that. He also draws an immensely likable performance from Donahue and wonderful creepiness from Noonan and Woronov. I wish the film was a bit tighter but it's still an accomplishment and should definitely be seen by all genre fans and even a few who may have given up on horror back in 1989.

The Blu-ray release of "House of the Devil" includes two commentaries (one with West & Donahue; one with West, producers and crew), "Behind the Scenes," deleted scenes, interviews with cast and crew, and the film's trailer.

'House of the Devil' is released by Dark Sky Films and stars Jocelin Donahue, Tom Noonan, Mary Woronov, and Greta Gerwig. It was written and directed by Ti West. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD on February 2nd, 2010. It is rated R.



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