

‘The Signal’ Sports Plenty of Style, Little Substance in Sci-Fi Twist on Torture Porn

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on February 22, 2008 - 2:38am

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CHICAGO – In the last several years, the horror genre has become hot because of its return on investment. The strategy is to market the hell out of the scare factor, get a good opening weekend (which usually takes care of the filming costs several times over) and make sure the blood spatters well. There is no need for pricey star power because the “star” is always the quality kills.



“The Signal”.
Photo credit: IMDb

While “The Signal” has an abundance of them, it’s not for the usual reasons.

The film opens with a woman named Mya (Anessa Ramsey) having an extramarital tryst with Ben (Justin Welborn). She’s late getting back to her husband and doesn’t notice the strange, random noise and light blobs coming from Ben’s bedroom TV screen.

She also doesn’t give second thought to the same sound coming from the now non-working mobile and landline phones.

When she returns to her apartment, she finds her husband, Lewis (A.J. Bowen), and his friends dealing with the same TV issues.

Suddenly, everything changes. Her husband has become an aggressive monster and starts killing one of his friends with a baseball bat before being contained.



Anessa Ramsey in “The Signal”.
Photo credit: IMDb

In fact, all around her apartment building and the city Mya has to contend with random murders as even her most trusted neighbors and fellow citizens have suddenly become crazed killing machines.

The “signal” from the screen and the phones seems to be the cause of the mass unnerving. How are they to escape it? Mya must hope for her lover, Ben, while her now blood-lusting husband pursues them both for the kill.

There is plenty of style but little substance in this sci-fi twist on torture porn. It’s divided into three parts – thread points of view – which adds some indie credibility to the usual bloodletting. Still, this adds nothing to the overall conclusion.

The focus is on the various ways the softened minds (of both the characters and the filmmakers) can carry out the various killing techniques. Not content to dispatch their victims with a simple gunshot, there is a protracted torture sequence in an apartment complex that features beheadings, a skull crush, rat poison burning the eyes and the popular death by compressed helium wand.



“The Signal”.
Photo credit: IMDb

The film had some potential. My wish was for directors David Bruckner and Dan Bush to explore more of the source for the broadcast and phone disruption. Is it an alien force or perhaps the Bush administration’s final solution?

“The Signal” could have been much better if there was as much imagination exerted in this narrative potential as in the quality killings.

The weird, pulsating signal along with some deadpan humor in parts (a clueless party guest adds some necessary comic relief) promised more intrigue than a man threatening death with a hedge clipper. Counting the bodies – despite how creatively the casualty is applied – is getting pretty tedious in this genre.

As one character in the film exclaims: “This is the most f**ked up day in the history of mankind!” If only the filmmakers had creatively followed up on that expression they might have been onto something. Do not adjust your antenna for this one.

“The Signal” opened on Feb. 22, 2008.

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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 4:25pm):

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