

Horror Anthology 'The ABCs of Death' Wastes Clever Concept

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 7, 2013 - 10:43pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The ABCs of Death,” now playing On Demand and opening in select theaters, tomorrow, March 8, 2013 features a few notable short films buried in an anthology of disappointing misfires. The idea for this horror feature is super clever, as are the best of the shorts within it, but the bad far outweighs the good. If you’re gonna bother with this alphabetic orgy of gore and carnage, do it On Demand so you can fast forward through the unbearably bad ones.

Twenty-six directors from around the world (actually more since some were co-directed) were assigned a letter and a low budget and asked to come up with a short film about death related to their letter. The nature of the piece forces you to spend a lot of time trying to figure out what the letter will be given that the title card is at the end. Is it “A for Aspyxiation”? “A for Aortic Rupture”? “A for Assault”? It’s none of the above (and is actually one of the best of the entire piece by far). A few are inspired but a few are so bad that they have no place in cinema. And the entire piece wears thin much more quickly than you’d expect. I was ready to bail at about “F is for Fart.” (Not kidding.)



The ABCs of Death

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

Some of the directors seem inspired by the letter they got, some barely put in any effort, most feel like student short films. If it was a shorts program at a film festival, you’d be pissed. In fact, it wouldn’t be a shorts program at a film festival because half of these wouldn’t be accepted. They should have had multiple options for each letter. Instead, it feels like they took everyone’s first effort.

Why the Hell does H feature people dressed like dogs? Wait, is it “H for Hell”? (You’ll never guess this one.) Always asking questions leads to frustration. Mood is never set. Nothing feels as smart as it should.

Several of them - “C,” “D,” “F,” “I,” “K,” “M,” “P,” “X” - are truly horrendous to the degree that they’d be cut from a film that didn’t require all 26 segments but the editor here had no choice.



The ABCs of Death

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

So, while a few work, the ones that don't bring the average grade down so much that the few brief highlights don't resonate like they should. I'd love to cut "The ABCs of Death" down to the few letters that worked and ALMOST recommend it to true horror fans just for those segments — Nacho Vigalondo's clever "A," Angela Bettis' stylish "E," Timo Tahjanto's truly insane "L," Adam Wingard's brilliant "Q," the claymation gorefest of Lee Hardcastle's "T" — but then it would just be "The Random Letters of Death". And before you think that all the name directors delivered and the newbies did not, wait for Ti West's truly uninspired take on the letter he was given. Like too much of "ABCs of Death," it feels half-developed. Or maybe less than half.

That's the overall feeling I get from "The ABCs of Death" — that some directors took the assignment with the inspiration that its clever concept warranted while others just took it as an assignment, almost as a joke that would never be seen. The guys that truly came up with something original like Tahjanto and Wingard (who, perhaps not coincidentally, were involved with the far-superior anthology film "S-VHS," which played at Sundance and Magnolia will release to horror fans glee later this year) deserve to have their work seen by the horror audience that will appreciate it. Just don't expect every letter in this English lesson to be one worth remembering come test time.

"The ABCs of Death" stars and was directed by too many various people to list. It is now available On Demand and opens in select markets, tomorrow, March 8, 2013.



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