

DVD REVIEW: INK

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Ink is a sci-fi thriller starring Chris Kelly, Quinn Hunchar, Jessica Duffy and Jeremy Make. Directed by Jamin Winans.

This film was a very pleasant surprise.

In most cases, trying to make an effective sci-fi film on a miniscule budget is like trying to make a gourmet meal with Armour hot dogs. However, Ink is a welcome exception, as Denver director Jamin Winans uses every cent to create a captivating sci-fi thriller that turns into an engaging allegory about loss and redemption.

Two separate worlds are presented in the same story: In the "real" world, John (Chris Kelly), a successful but clearly stressed and unhappy business executive, learns that his 8 year old daughter Emma (Quinn Hunchar, in a very good performance) is in a coma. John is a widower who, due to a drug problem, lost custody of Emma to his late wife's parents. In the spirit world, we learn that there is an ongoing battle between forces of good (shown as young, attractive people who happen to be good at martial arts) and evil (eerie, distorted-faced creatures clad in black leather). These forces continually battle for our souls through our dreams.

Emma is captured in the spirit world by a deformed, ragged figure known as Ink. His aim is to turn over the soul of the child to the forces of evil in order to become one of them. The good forces follow in a desperate attempt to save the child, yet learn her only hope rests in the real world with John.

Not all of the film quite works. For instance, lightning quick cuts at a board room meeting are meant to convey John's disheveled state of mind but draw too much attention to themselves (and can make the viewer a little dizzy). Furthermore, save for two notable characters, sightless tracker Jacob (Jeremy Make) and maternal Liev (Jessica Duffy), the forces of good are not particularly interesting or engaging.

Still, Ink is a very impressive film that is well worth seeing. The special effects are quite effective (especially, again, for such a low budget effort), most notably the appearance of the evil forces: their faces are projected onto a flat screen and distorted into rather hideous grins (definitely the stuff of nightmares).

More important, however, is that Winans knows how to let the effects enhance the story, not get in the way of it (Hollywood big shots often forget this). I must also point out a key moment in the middle of the film, where Jacob sets in motion a chain of events designed to lead to Emma's rescue. The sequence is so beautifully choreographed that it is worth the price of admission alone.

How the stories converge, and the true identity of Ink are two elements of the film I dare not spoil for you by sharing. I will say this, however: the ending genuinely moved me. I definitely did not expect to be moved by this film, but I was.

There are certainly echoes here of such familiar sci-fi dream landscapes as The Matrix and Terry Gilliam's Brazil. However, the film Ink most echoed was Brad Anderson's underrated The Machinist. In both films, a main character unbearably and physically burdened by guilt is jarringly thrust back and forth between the "real" world and an alternate universe created by his guilt. In the case of Ink, however, the universe it creates is still uniquely its own.

After seeing such an impressive effort, I sincerely hope that Winans gets a shot in Hollywood. If he can make such an enthralling film as Ink on a low budget, he deserves a chance to see what he can do with a bigger one.

Extras:

- Behind the scenes feature
- Director commentary
- Interviews with cast
- Deleted scene
- Trailers