

MOVIES

[Review] 'Peelers' Is Simple, Earnest Fun!

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By Luis H. C.



Zombies and strippers may not be the most original combination in the horror genre, but you've got to admit that the idea has a certain charm to it. From Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* to the amazingly straight-to-the-point *Zombie Strippers*, there's a reason why this trope is so popular. Director Sevè Schelenz and screenwriter Lisa DeVita are clearly aware of this, having produced *Peelers*, a neo-grindhouse film that would feel right at home in the sleazy cinemas of the 1970s.

Peelers stars Wren Walker as Blue Jean Douglas, the tough-as-nails owner of a small town strip-club. When a group of miners decide to visit her club on closing night, all hell breaks loose as a mysterious oily infection begins to transform people into bloodthirsty monsters. Blue Jean must band together with her friends, dancers, and clients in order to survive the gruesome onslaught and leave the club behind her for good. However, that's easier said than done when these creatures somehow refuse to die.

The plot doesn't contain any revolutionary twists and turns, but then again, it doesn't have to. The simple B-movie premise is played straight and executed so earnestly that you can't help but respect the love that these filmmakers have for the genre. Unfortunately, this lack of innovation is also what keeps *Peelers* from becoming the instant classic that it sets out to be. After all, I'd bet nearly half of all horror-related VOD releases have a similar setup to this movie.

That being said, the film has an ace up its sleeve that sets it apart from most other schlocky direct-to-video releases. That would be the unexpectedly likable and well-developed characters. Blue Jean really stands out as our protagonist, with a level of depth not usually seen in this kind of movie. A lot of that is due to Walker's charming performance, but the script does its best to flesh out backstories and relationships. The rest of the cast is great as well, with only a few minor amateurish exceptions.

There is a strange irony to the film, as it goes out of its way to humanize these characters that would usually be considered disposable, but at the same time relishing in their excessive sexualization and brutal dismemberment. It's not necessarily a flaw, as it doesn't really detract from the experience, but it does feel like the movie had some sort of important statement to make that somehow got lost during production.

Your enjoyment of *Peelers* will ultimately depend on how open you are to gratuitous violence and sexual imagery for the sake of having a "fun" time. I don't particularly mind these things, so I managed to appreciate this throwback to the trashy, perverted horror films of yore despite its shortcomings. Viewers who prefer a greater level of depth accompanying their gore probably won't feel the same, as there isn't quite enough originality here to make up for the movie's flaws.

Peelers will be available on DVD and Blu-Ray July, 4th.

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