

TERROR WAITS FOR YOU IN EVERY ROOM IN THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD!

Beginning in 1965, Amicus Productions resuscitated the dormant portmanteau horror film with *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*. They followed that with *Torture Garden* (1967), and then *The House that Dripped Blood* (1971). Subsequent to that, they made *Tales from the Crypt* (1972), *Asylum* (1972), *Vault of Horror* (1973) and *From Beyond the Grave* (1974). This series of anthology films proved quite popular and they were all very well directed and written and featured great casts, such actors as Ralph Richardson, Donald Sutherland, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Patrick Magee, Margaret Leighton, and many others.

The House that Dripped Blood was one of the most entertaining of the series. It had four stories and a bookend story. The tales were all based on short stories by Robert Bloch (*Psycho*), who also wrote the screenplay (Bloch's other Amicus pictures are *Torture Garden* and *Asylum*). In the director's chair was Peter Duffell, who'd only made one feature before *The House that Dripped Blood*, and that was the low-budget film, *Partners in Crime* a decade earlier. He did work steadily in TV both before and after *The House that Dripped Blood*. The bookend is fun – a Scotland Yard inspector is investigating the disappearance of a film star. He contacts the local police station and is told the house's history, and the real estate agent for the house also tells the inspector about its previous renters. Those scenes lead us into and out of all four stories.

1

The first story, "Method for Murder," A writer of horror stories (Denholm Elliott) rents the house with his wife. He is haunted by visions of Dominick, the psychopath lead character of his new novel.

2

The second story is "Waxworks," in which a retired stockbroker (Peter Cushing) moves into the house. One day he visits a horror museum

and there sees a wax figure that has the face of someone he knew. He's visited by a friend (Joss Ackland), and the friend goes to the wax museum and sees the same wax model – he, too, knew the woman who is the wax model's spitting image. They both become obsessed and therein lies the tale.

3

The third story is "Sweets to the Sweet." A cold and no-nonsense father (Christopher Lee) and his young daughter (Chloe Franks) are the next tenants. He does not want to deal with the daughter, so he hires a private teacher (Nyree Dawn Porter). We eventually discover the reason for the father's coldness and that the cute little daughter might not be so cute after all.

4

The fourth and final story is called, "The Cloak." In it, we have a temperamental horror actor (Jon Pertwee) and his co-star (Ingrid Pitt) moving into the house. He's starring in a low-budget vampire film. He's not happy with anything – not the director, not the script, not the shoddy-looking sets, and most especially with his vampire cloak, which he feels is cheap. He ends up buying a black cloak from a weird shopkeeper – it's much more to his liking and feels it will help him with his character. But the cloak is not all it seems and things quickly take a sinister turn.

It's all a good deal of fun, and Bloch's writing can be very wry at times. It's well filmed and the sets are very good, considering how low the budget was on the film. It was picked up for distribution by Cinerama Releasing Corporation. The film received some decent reviews: Kevin Thomas in the *Los Angeles Times* said, "Richly atmospheric settings, muted color photography, an outstanding cast and competent direction (by Peter Duffell) do justice to Bloch's fine script, which deals with psychological terror rather than relying on the typical blood-and-guts formula," while *Variety* called it "one of the most entertaining of its genre to come along in several years and should prove strong opposition to the general monopoly of that market by Hammer Films... even for filmgoers who don't usually follow the shocker market, this one is worthwhile."

One of the most interesting choices the filmmakers made was the composer, Michael Dress. Not a lot is known about Dress. He seems to have come from a notable family, the son of Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer's youngest sister. According to an article in *The Observer*, Pastor Bonhoeffer was, considered a saint – he was executed by the Nazis. Michael Dress wrote a lot of theatre music, some orchestral jazz pieces (there was a concert of his works in 1965, hated by the reviewer for *The Guardian*, where the reviewer opined that Dress seemed to have the great jazz arranger Gil Evans in mind, but felt that where Evans' scoring was buoyant, Dress's seemed "merely flatulent.") Dress also scored several notable films, including *Quackser Fortune Has a Cousin in the Bronx*, which starred a very young Gene Wilder, and an interesting sci-fi film, *The Mind of Mr. Soames*, as well as *A Touch of Love*, starring Sandy Dennis (called *Take a Girl Like You in the United States*). Each of those scores is very different from the other – *Quackser* has wonderful, melodic themes, *A Touch of Love* is certainly tonal, and *The Mind of Mr. Soames* is very out there. But his output was very small – five feature films in all, and some TV and documentary work.

For *The House that Dripped Blood*, Dress created a wonderfully atmospheric score – some of it lives in the world of Humphrey Searle's *The Haunting*, but Dress's music is his own and it really gives the stories in the film an interesting texture and feel. There's a lot of percussion and weird effects, organ, a solo female voice floating in the air, harpsichord, vibes, strings – it's all very hallucinogenic and off-kilter. It's a shame he didn't do more films.

This is the premiere release of *The House that Dripped Blood*. The transfers were made from the 35mm magnetic music-only mixing elements and the mono sound is crisp and clear and really excellent.

— Bruce Kimmel