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# 58

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**more than movies**



## UK PREMIERE

## Skinned Deep

USA/2003/English dialogue/Beta SP/4 x 3/97 min

**SAT 21 AUG** 23:00 Cameo 1**SUN 22 AUG** 12:00 Cameo 1

Director: Gabriel Bartalos  
Producer: Gabriel Bartalos  
Scriptwriter: Gabriel Bartalos  
Editor: Chris Seguine  
DoP: Peter Strietmann  
Music: David Davidson

Cast: Karoline Brandt, Jay Dugre, Warwick Davis,  
Liz Little, Peter Iasillo, Aaron Simms, Kurt Carley

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**Director's Profile:** Director Gabriel Bartalos started off his career as an effects artist, making Super-8 films in his free time that displayed his obsession with horror and fantasy, describing them as "The perfect blend of art and storytelling." Bartalos set up his own effects company, Atlantic West Effects, working on films such as *Brain Damage* and *Sometimes They Come Back*. More recently, he worked with director Matthew Barney on his *Cremaster* cycle (EIFF 2003). *Skinned Deep* is his directorial debut, which he also wrote.

Some survival tips from the movies: If you're a cop, don't accept a big case a few days before retirement. If you're a soldier, don't show your fellow grunts a photo of your sweetheart back home. And if you're anyone else, **DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES GO INTO THE WOODS**. Because the woods – indeed, the outdoors in general – are dangerous. *Deliverance*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Straw Dogs*, *Blair Witch Project* ... The list goes on. It's foolish, admittedly, to look to cinema for any kind of life lessons (perhaps on account of too often being made by people who have no life experiences), but this one piece of advice seems fundamentally and unassailably true. And if you do take a rural break – and if, while there, your car should happen to break down – well, it's pretty much lights out for the territory. You can either wait in your vehicle, or venture out to seek help from some 'well-meaning local': the result will be the same. You basically have a snowball's chance in hell of making it out alive.

Such a fate befalls the hapless protagonist of *Calvaire*, screening in this year's Rosebud section, and also the Rockwells, the apple-cheeked, preternaturally sunny Midwestern family who feature in this deranged little piece of business. Their name alone should signal the bluntness of the satire here – yet there's something deeply satisfying, nonetheless, about watching these all-American idiots get their horribly unjust comeuppance. While driving to ... what? a Christian rock festival? a brownie bake-off?, their station wagon gets a flat tyre – which might have something to do with the trap that gouged the rubber. They find help in a nearby café, run by Granny, an old lady so nauseatingly sweet that she can only have liquid nitrogen in her veins. She calls a repairman, and invites them to her house nearby, to wait for his arrival.

Not only will that repairman never come (is the telephone even connected?), but Granny's taste in home décor should be enough to have her visitors running for the hills. Nor, it transpires, is she much of a cook – dinner consists of what looks like boiled entrails au gratin – but her domestic failings start to make more sense when one meets her 'family'. There's Brain, a hydrocephalic goofball, the evil dwarf Plates (named after his weapon of choice) and, most alarmingly of all, the Surgeon General – a black-clad giant with a serrated-metal jaw. Though slightly discomfited by their tablemates, the Rockwells say nothing: they are, after all, nothing if not polite. However, they are quickly made to realise that good manners have their limits.

Director Gabriel Bartalos runs a special effects studio, Atlantic West Effects, and has contributed to Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* films, among others. Here he pulls out all the stops. The structure is loose – essentially, a series of vignettes, piling excess upon excess – and its sheer grotesque good humour, in the spirit of Troma and Peter Jackson's classic *Braindead*, finally triumphs. Good, sad to say, does not.