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REVIEWS

Skinned Deep (DVD)

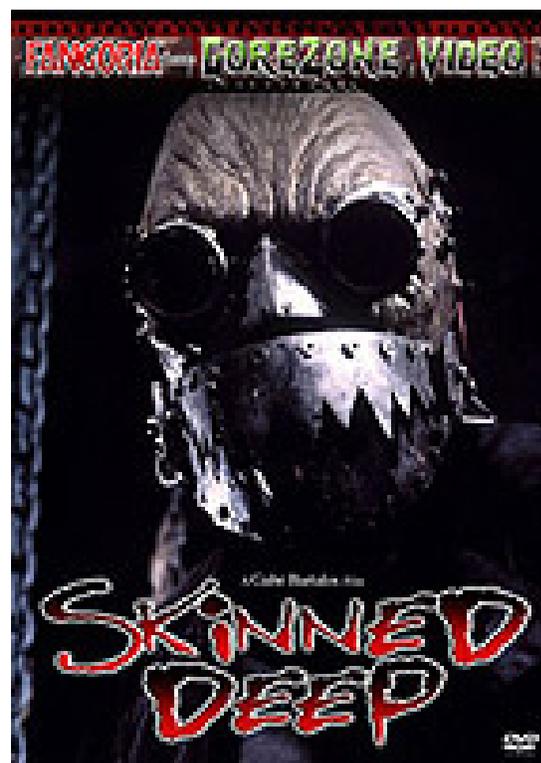


By **Steve Barton** on May 25, 2005

Every now and then a film comes along that's really hard to review. Not because there's a question of how good or bad it is, but because there's so much going on that even days later you're still not exactly sure what you just watched. *Skinned Deep* is one of those films.

Skinned Deep may not be a great movie, but it is one hell of a ride. The plot is simple (and derivative) enough: A vacationing family blows a tire (of course, you realize that the reason said family blew out the tire in the first place was because they ran over a razor sharp trap) on a road in the middle of nowhere, only to find a store and a home within walking distance chock full of down home country hospitality. You know the drill. They ask to use the phone and then end up victims of some ghastly misshapen locals.

Though that's where *Skinned Deep* really shines. The mutants or family or whatever you want to call them are some of the most crazed looking characters I have ever seen. From the



trap-jaw like Surgeon General, to a guy named Brain who REALLY lives up to his name, to everyone's favorite tiny antagonist Warwick Davis who gives the film's most memorable performance as Plates, the always on fast Forward (see the film and you'll know what I mean! I swear, I got tired just looking at this guy!) killer that maims people with, you guessed it, plates! There's quite an assortment of weirdness going on. The film also showcases a character that is every bit as important to the film as those named above yet gets zero screen time. That character? Director Gabe Bartalos.

Bartolos' attention to detail is almost staggering. It's clear that this man had a vision, and he made the film that, luckily for us, he wanted to make. In a typical low budget film we barely get any bells and whistles. In *Skinned Deep* we're treated to some incredibly detailed sets, great music, atmospheric lighting, and occasionally some okay acting. That's quite the package considering the budget, every cent of which is clearly on the screen. Hell, we even get an elderly biker gang named The Ancient Ones thrown in for a bit of comic relief and overall strangeness. Look close and you'll even notice the legendary Forry Ackerman making an appearance as one of the leather clad retro ruffians. You never really are sure where the film is going to go next. However...

While there are aspects of *Skinned Deep* that take us places and show us things we've never seen before, there are also things that are a little too familiar. The opening scene plays uncomfortably like that of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, and there are parts of the film that you would swear were filmed right after viewing either *House of 1000 Corpses* or even the short indie hit *Filthy*. This works both for the film and against it. More so against. There's so much original crazy stuff going on that you can't help but cringe when the typical horror movie clichés are thrown at you.

On the DVD extra side of things, you get the standard behind the scenes stuff, but this time it is filmed in the same strange vein as the film itself in terms of where our insider guides are taking us. I don't think I've ever seen a director being interviewed on a busy subway in between stops complete with paint pail playing homeless right in the background. This was a breath of fresh air in terms of how DVD interviews are usually done. We also have a commentary track that is almost as entertaining as the film itself.

Everyone involved in this project gave it their all. Some even got arrested for doing so. What we have here is a film that is as sinister as it is comedic, as original as it is unoriginal, and as strange as you are ever likely to see. I wonder if we'll ever see *Skinned Deeper* or maybe even *Skinned Deep With A Vengeance*. I can tell you this, whatever Bartalos and company are going to churn out next, I will be watching. So should you.

Skinned Deep (2004)

Hart Sharp Video

Directed by Gabe Bartalos

Starring Eric Bennett, Karoline Brandt, Kurt Carley, Warwick Davis, and Jay Dugre

Special Features

