

4-Star Review: MARK OF THE WITCH

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Also known as Another, Jason Bognacki's beguiling art-horror has been retitled for UK distribution as Mark of the Witch. Anyone expecting cheap, exploitative occultism is in for a surprise, for this hallucinatory hedonism mixes Greek Mythology with fairytale perversion.

On her eighteenth birthday, Jordyn (Paulie Rojas) makes a wish to know her mother who died on the advent of her coming into being. All is fittingly jolly until Aunt Ruth (Nancy Wolfe), who raised her as a child, grabs a knife and plunges it in her stomach, cryptically howling the words, "It's time!"

Shortly after, Jordyn is visited at the late-night pharmacy where she works by a grotesque woman in black, hooded cloak (Maria Olsen, a sort of female Lon Chaney without make-up), who scratches her forearm to draw blood. Then things get increasingly

weird, Jordyn waking up in strange places not knowing how she got there, taunted by snatches of increasingly depraved behaviour that she may have indulged in. The witch is laying siege to her soul, but is it a ritual of destruction or one of ancestral union?

Bognacki uses everything at his disposal to create the illusion of waking dream: saturated colour, elastic frame speed, weightless angles. The camera drifts across from the witch peering into her burnished looking glass to Jordyn doing the same, the image in perfect, kaleidoscopic symmetry. Similarly she will appear grimacing malevolently on CCTV screens before a wash of static replaces it with the confused face of the ingénue, two women being pulled into the same plane of representation.

To stop this impious coupling though, Aunt Ruth is on hand as a God-fearing advocate of light, engaging in wrist-flicked fireball duels with her infernal sister to save her niece from consummation: the film is not without, frivolous humor.

Mark of the Witch is a supernatural variant of the three Fates mythos, each female representing life, destiny and death, and at different stages of beauty, wisdom and influence.

Jordyn is callow and demure, hiding in the closet as her best mate cheats on her with her boyfriend, experiencing the orgasm vicariously yet holding her hand aloft in caution, perhaps

frightened at the power of sex, in one of the film's boldest and brilliant scenes.

To come truly of age and learn how to wield that potential, she must be seduced by the wanton fascination that the witch represents. Yet the wizened Aunt Ruth has learnt herself that the absolute power corrupts absolutely, but can only give heed to her young niece. If this all sounds heavy, the ravishing stylistic luridness is as seductive as Argento at his best.

As the film tumbles into a sempiternal fugue of voluptuous ascension, chthonian genesis and blood soaked communion, *Mark of the Witch* signals itself as one of the most distinctive genre puzzles of recent years. Bewitching.

Extras Brief but philosophical *Behind the Scenes* with the thoughtful contributions from Bognacki and all three leads, Olsen, particularly lucid: she is rapidly becoming a grande dame of independent horror. JK.