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Published May 16, 2008 12:24 am - I love a good, low-budget horror movie -- the kind that uses imagination and creativity to scare you instead...

'Sugar Creek' a low-budget scare bursting with creativity

The Norman Transcript

I love a good, low-budget horror movie -- the kind that uses imagination and creativity to scare you instead of a lot of graphic murders and computer-generated junk to make up for a lack of story. They're hard to find, though. Most cheap horror movies are either laughable stinkers or too bad to watch past the credits.

"Sugar Creek" (2007) is that rare exception -- a unique, well-crafted, and genuinely creepy tale made for just \$400,000.

Our story takes place in Land's End, Arkansas, a spooky place that is perpetually overcast and dismal. It is 1889, but this is no bustling, post-Civil War community. There is no joy in Land's End; no barn dances or church socials or fun of any kind. It is an evil place, as the few numbed residents know all too well. Bad people like local land baron Pete St. Claire (Robert Miano) rule the roost but old Pete's not the worst of it. There's a demon

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JAMES COTTEN

that haunts the woods outside town.

Adam Stanton (Daniel Kruse) doesn't live in Land's End, so he knows nothing of the evil that lurks there when he wakes up inside a cheap wood coffin in the woods. Prying the coffin lid loose, Adam crawls out. He has no idea where he is or how he got there. His clothes are expensive and he carries a shiny pocket watch, but he has no shoes. There are five coffins, open and empty, around him. Confused and more than a little freaked, Adam sets off to find help.

He soon comes across an old man (Grant James) and a young man (Joshua Payne) building a fence, but the two run in terror when they spy Adam's bare feet. It's not the first time they've seen a barefoot man; there have been five before Adam, and the two fence builders know exactly what Adam's shoeless appearance means. The demon has a new victim.

Legend has it that the demon hunts men who escaped paying for past crimes. He drags them to Land's End in coffins, letting them stumble through the woods while he hunts them down and kills them -- along with anyone else who helps his prey along the way.

Most Land's End residents take the demon seriously, especially little Danielle Malory (Elle Johnson), a Bible-thumping kid who claims to see the future in her dreams. Sheriff Worten (Kevin Gage), a one-eyed outsider, is the only one who thinks it's all a bunch of hillbilly hooey. He'll prove it, too. Or so he thinks.

Writer and director James Cotten, an Arkansas native who moved to Sallisaw as a teen, worked for over two years to bring "Sugar Creek" to the screen. Friends and co-workers believed so strongly in the movie, that many, like David Itkin (who wrote the impressive score) worked for free. The Arkansas Symphony recorded Itkin's music for a fraction of their usual fee, and Civil War "re-enactors" in Arkansas (where the movie was shot) contributed period costumes and firearms. The cast, while largely unknown, is excellent, with special nods to Daniel Kruse, Kevin Gage (the hideous Waingro from "Heat") and Robert Miano, who makes Pete St. Claire both disgusting and fascinating.

While "Sugar Creek" does get a little confusing in the middle, Cotten wraps it up neatly in the end. "Sugar Creek" is not rated for some reason, although it should be rated R for violence and language. You can find "Sugar Creek" at Hastings. Check it out!

