

Indie Horror Films

All genres of suspense, terror, and horror will be reviewed by Richard Gary. His address to send preview copies supplied upon request to rbf55@msn.com.

Saturday, August 25, 2018

Review: The League of Superheroes

Text © Richard Gary / Indie Horror Films, 2018

Images from the Internet



The League of Superheroes (aka **ABCs of Superheroes**)

Written and directed by Jens Holzheuer and Oliver Tietgen

Boesewicht Film / Wild Eye Releasing / MVD Visual

86 minutes, 2015 / 2018

www.facebook.com/ABCsofSuperheroes

www.wildeyereleasing.com

www.mvdvisual.com

Oh man, the cinema and other mass media have just been *inundated* with superhero films. These mega-monsters are as big on CGI and they lack in story, or soul. As someone who grew upon comic books from the Silver Era into the Modern, who got to hang out with Jim Steranko and Grey Morrow in a semi-private manner, I find it just too... overwhelming is the word that comes to mind. Each film seems to need to add more heroes, bigger villains, more destruction, and it all becomes numbing. In the similar way as we drown in Freddy-Jason-Michael-Leatherface franchises, the same is true with the Marvel Universe (and to a lesser extent the DC Universe as they have generally been less financial successful than their rivals in the past couple of decades).

Every once in a while, a non-major, independently sponsored superheroes release makes it out there, and they tend to widely range from the excellent (such as *Kick Ass*, and the obscure and goofy *Surge of Power* mini-franchise) to the pretty bad (e.g., *Rise of the Black Bat*). There are lots of phenomenal fan videos out there as well, including the “Super Power Beat Down” series on YouTube. That’s why I was interested in seeing this German film, which began its life as *ABCs of Superheroes*. Alternative superheroes films are definitely a mixed bag, and then combine that with Euro-trash sensibility that has replaced Expressionism, I’m going in hoping for some wild rides.



Well, the original “ABCs” title makes way more sense than the new “League,” as like the *ABCs of Death* series, these are short tales of about 5 minutes each that follows in alphabetical order. One seriously needs to think about how you’re going to approach this film on a few different levels. For example, it’s recorded in English with some definite German dialect; it’s not hard to understand, fortunately. Next, the acting is *atrociously* bad and campy (I’m going to say purposefully), the effects are quite amateurish albeit fun, and the writing is kinda hokey; in the right frame of mind, however – and I’m there – one can see this for the amount of fun that it is.

There is also a bit of a wit about it among all the tomfoolery. For example, there is a He-Man send-off where the Skeletor (all with different names, of course) character goes through a portal and arrives on modern Earth, to become a hero; He-Man and She-Ra realize how boring their lives are without him.

What’s used as a framework to join all these stories together, which we return to often, is an inattentive mother and her young daughter trying not to be bored by reading a comic given to her by mom to quiet her called, what else, *ABCs of Superheroes*. Each of the stories comes from this comic, and we see the girl’s reactions to them while her mom either ignores or chastises her.

There is certainly a level of social commentary that can also be found if one scratches down, such as a Yul Brenner-ish *Westworld* character (“Cowboy Man”) who



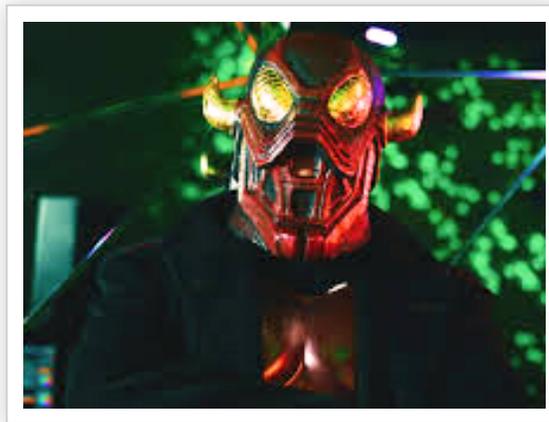
Bai Ling

goes against a Mexican Villain (Cheddar Guevara... get it?), which turns into a reality television show somewhat like *Storage Wars*. A great quote in this segment is, "This is how I roll: I got one hand on my Bible, one hand on my gun, and one hand on my credit card." So you can see that while it's not very serious and lots of WTF moments, it still occasionally manages to keep a level of witty smarts on some level. That's what I like about the film.

There is lots and lots of female nudity of various body types, the blood splatter effects are almost all digital, and the costumes are, well, pathetic (one looks like the Muppet Grinch Who Stole the Hulk If He Was an Ape).

There is a certain cheapness level, which adds to the fun,

such as someone shooting people with his fingers as he makes a gun shape with his hand.



Playing with convention and clichés is common by turning them on their heads, such as a an electric eel being bitten by a radioactive human, which turns it into a beautiful woman (mostly nekkid) fighting evil, including a cameo by action actor Bai Ling. Throughout, other cameos are the likes of Lloyd Kaufman and Fred Olen Ray. I'm sure there are some that fans in Germany are going wow about, but I don't know them.

There are certainly more superheroes than there are letters, and some are way more bizarre than others, such as MenstruGirl and Queen Osiris (interesting change of gender for the Lord of the ancient Egyptian Underworld). There are a number of different "leagues" here, including the First Fuck Force (Power Rangers), a bunch of martial arts pandas that certainly must be (more) profane Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (including a product commercial to mock the saleability of hero toys), and one group of topless women which comprises one who is pregnant, an older one who is "Bored Woman," and a boy with a cat nose.



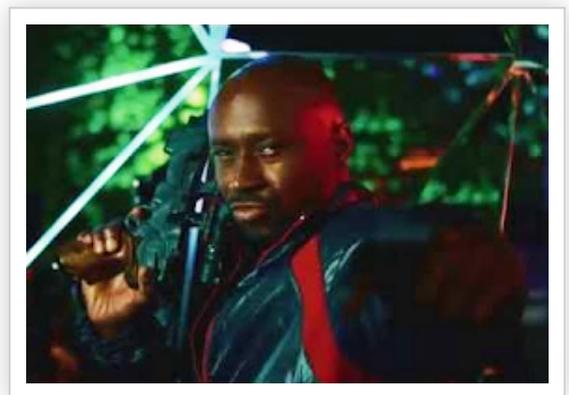
Each short has a particular focus, such as a profane version of an “Alf”-like television program, and sometimes weird combinations such as “Gerry Atricks vs. Hitler’s Brain” and “Jesus Space Missionary vs. King Satan (*Star Wars*).

The whole film, honestly, is just ridiculous, from the writing to the reading by the actors. However, and this is important, it is more towards *why* it works rather than works against it. When you’re dealing with pure insanity, sometimes it pays to go over the top, and this one goes *waaaaaaaay* over. In fact, there was only one bit that didn’t work for me and was quite unsatisfying, which was a *The Terminator* spoof called “Rape Robot,” which is uncomfortable in so many different ways.

Another important note is even with the different styles for each segment, because it was directed by the same two people, there was a motif of *consistency* in feel throughout, defining this as a single piece in different chapters, something that sometimes gets lost when a film is a compilation of individual shorts by various directors. What’s also nice about this is that it’s easy to have characters overlap and show up unexpectedly in different stories.

The film takes no prisoners. While no real animals are involved, we see the bloody killing of men, women and children indiscriminately, as well as the elderly. That being said, it’s also pretty even-handed when it comes to reflecting the large Afro-German population, including a Black Jesus. This was brave.

There are some nice extras, including a 35:56 Making Of featurette, which essentially is the two directors talking individually and spliced together going back and forth – in German (with subtitles). It’s actually quite interesting as they take the viewer through the usual inception, writing, financing, shooting, post-production, and showings. Rather than being dry, they both have an enjoyable sense of humor and come across as nice guys. Other topics include shooting anecdotes, how they got some of their cameos (there is a brief piece by Uwe Boll, also speaking German), and they even address the female vs. (lack of) male nudity.



Cool Jeebus

Other extras are the original trailer, some of the great Wild Eye collection, and part of the “Hero Boy” segment (the one with Kaufman) at 4:31 which includes outtakes inserted. The last are two short films by the directors individually: “Licht aus Licht” (2012; 1:59, translated as “Light of Light”), which is similar in theme to the infamous Swedish short from 2013, “Lights Out”; “T is for Testicle” (2011; 2:55) that was titled “Testicular Apocalypse” in the 2016 anthology film, *World of Death*. In this quickie, a man’s testicles become sentient and escape while he’s watching some softcore film, and he goes chasing after it. It’s both gross and humorous.

Sometimes goofy fun is just what is needed in a world where superhero films just seem so serious in its wider zeitgeist, rather than some snappy Ant-Man / Iron Man / Deadpool quips within a gazillion dollar extravaganza. Like *Badass Monster Killer* (also 2015), the CGI was used for the good and cheesy, and makes it all the better for its off-the-wall, see if any of it sticks to the wall, WTF! G’wan, take a chance.

Robert Barry Francos at [12:01 AM](#)

Share



No comments:

[Post a Comment](#)

