

October 25, 2023

The Et Cetera

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Latin horror is often underappreciated or unknown by American audiences despite being far superior by my metric. I mainly attribute this to Latin horror's tendency to focus on tension and artistry more than American mainstream horror. To celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, I've prepared a list of my personal favorite Spanish horror flicks from across the Latin world to check out this Halloween.

The Bar (2017)

A man drops dead in a bar and the occupants are subsequently caught in an elaborate conspiracy as they become quarantined therein. Directed by Alejandro "Álex" de la Iglesia, "The Bar" is a fast-paced comedic horror film with so many twists and turns it's sure to have your head spinning by the end. Iglesia masterfully balances comedy and suspense, such as when the characters attempt to escape the bar by squeezing through a small opening in the cellar after lubing themselves up with olive oil. This film is highly entertaining with a well-rounded cast of memorable characters and a story that doesn't fail to bring the laughs and thrills.

The Devil's Backbone (2001)

After the death of his father during the Spanish Civil War, a young boy is sent off to an orphanage and begins to unravel its many dark secrets. This 2001 drama-thriller horror flick was directed by legendary Mexican director Guillermo Del Toro. It's one of his earlier films and worth watching for its engrossing mystery and interesting balance of gritty wartime drama, murder mystery and supernatural horror. Del Toro's direction here also does wonders to bolster its setting, presenting an interesting world with an engaging story driven by well-written and well-acted characters. This film is both eerie and touching, doing a good job of showing us the impact of war on children and dealing with loss and betrayal.

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The Hidden Face (2011)

After his lover vanishes, an orchestra instructor struggles to move on as his new girlfriend finds herself beset by a series of strange events, making her question if his old flame ever truly left. This film has been remade numerous times in various countries, but the original 2011 Spanish-Columbian version is the strongest in my opinion. "The Hidden Face" starts off as a cheesy romantic drama, but eventually the film shows its teeth as an intense psychological thriller as we learn the unfortunate truth about what happened to the protagonist's missing girlfriend. Its tension is thick, and the payoffs are quite satisfying and shocking.

Terrified (2017)

After a series of strange deaths in an Argentinian neighborhood, a group of paranormal investigators band together to unravel the mystery. Similar to "The Morgue," "Terrified" starts off as somewhat of a slow-burn thriller, but as events unfold the film comes together as a horrifying thrill-ride oozing with tension. Demián Rugna doesn't hold the viewer's hand and explain what's going on. That's the true magic of this film: It builds on the fear of the unknown to disorient, disturb and shock audiences as we come to realize we may not be dealing with the typical ghosts we thought we were.

The Morgue (2019)

A security guard working the night shift at a morgue comes to realize he's not alone as strange occurrences plague his otherwise mundane job. This Paraguayan horror thriller takes advantage of its limited production budget by focusing more on atmosphere rather than resorting to cheap scares. The film takes place in a static location with one lead, so it's bereft of dialogue with a lot of slow buildup. The ever-shifting tension and increasingly dangerous setting of the morgue lead to some truly frightening moments. The makeup for the creatures in the film is also top notch and adds to the creep factor when you see these things out of place in the background. The impeccable suspense this film delivers is sure to keep audiences on edge.