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Bring Out the Fear

2021 · 1h 27min

IMDb RATING **7.5**/10
11

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Explores a doomed relationship on its final day

Director Richard Waters

Writer Richard Waters

Stars Ciara Bailey · James Devlin · Tad Morari

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'Bring Out the Fear' review: Dir. Richard Waters [FrightFest]

Aug 29, 2021 by Kat Hughes



Each year Arrow Video FrightFest screens a series of movies from filmmakers early in their careers as part of their First Blood strand. The selection of titles showcase some of the more interesting creators currently working, and offers them a platform to get their work out to a wider audience. Being picked to play amongst the line-up is a great honor, but for some, it's an extra special achievement.



Writer and director Richard Waters is one such filmmaker. Not only was he a participant in the festival's New Blood programme – where new writers get guidance from industry professionals as they try to sniff out the next big thing – he has also been an avid attendee of the festival himself for years. His love for FrightFest is clear, the director even going so far as to include the voices of some of his FrightFest brethren in his First Blood offering, *Bring Out the Fear*.

Bring Out the Fear joins couple Sophie (Ciara Bailey) and Dan (Tad Morai) at a crossroads. Sophie is a recovering alcoholic who wants time to focus on herself, Dan is besotted with Sophie and thinks it's time to settle down together. A walk in the woods becomes an unexpected marriage proposal, but after Sophie says no, the trees around them take a sinister turn and the pair find themselves lost. Can they mend their broken relationship or will they be lost in the woods forever?

At just under eighty minutes long, Waters doesn't waste any time in getting to horror aspect of his story. In fact, by fifteen minutes we're already in the weird woodlands with Sophie and Dan. This forest is creepy, misty, and always changing, disorientating the distressed pair further. It also has the peculiar trait of keeping the environment in perpetual daylight. One might not think that the daytime can be scary, but when it's meant to be nighttime and the sun is still there, it's actually rather unsettling. Then there are the strange sightings and ominous whispering (provided by FrightFesters themselves) which layer the levels of fear and atmosphere. The fact that the woods used here are nowhere near the scale of the one used in something like *The Blair Witch Project*, shows great creativity from Waters, as these trees genuinely seem to go on forever.

Everything appears to have been meticulously planned to both look good and also entertain the audience it is being presented too. Feeding into the woodland setting, the colour palette is kept autumnal and cold. The costuming is in neutral shades that help Sophie and Dan blend and merge in with their surroundings, occasionally providing a challenge for the audience to differentiate between them. The mustard yellow of Sophie's coat is especially effective at this. With just two characters on screen for the bulk of the story, a lot of weight rests on the shoulders of both Bailey and Morai. Luckily both are capable of the challenge and quickly set Dan and Sophie up as a viable pair of characters. Of the two, Sophie is the more accessible, her lines feel lifted from the words of an audience member. This character isn't afraid to cast light on the strangeness of their situation, something often ignored by films. When such observation is included, it is often used as a way to work in some humour and light relief. That's not how it works here. Sophie is stating facts, and when delivered, they add a chill to the air. Morai has some complex emotions and attitudes to convey in very little time, but he manages to nail the role.

A couple getting lost in the woods isn't a new story to the world of horror, and yet somehow writer and director Richard Waters has managed to create a film that feels unlike its peers. *Bring Out the Fear* has a great aesthetic, generates a genuine foreboding atmosphere, and has two excellent central performances. An accomplished piece of work, Waters has done his FrightFest family proud.

The Kim Newman Web Site

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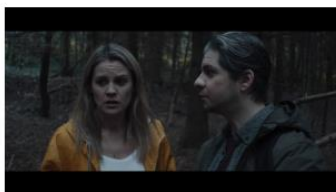
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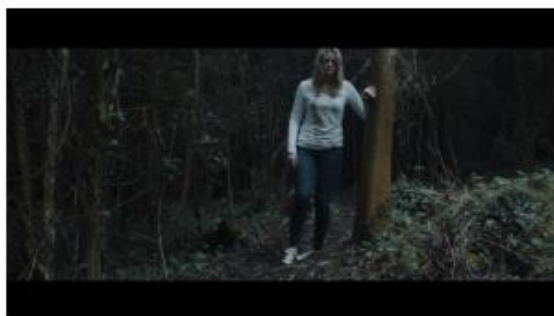
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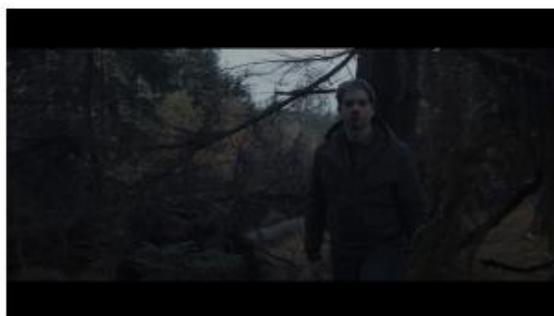
My notes on *Bring Out the Fear*



One of the creepiest underused effects in horror is daylight when there should be darkness – there's a great pull-back-the-curtains moment in *Dead of Night* (1945) that gets a jump shock out of this reversal. Director-writer Richard Waters makes sustained use of this scare tactic in his debut feature, which is also a walk-in-the-inescapable-woods movie.



Rosie (Ciara Bailey) and Dan (Tad Morari) are a couple with obvious problems – he's an American with a tendency to overcompensate, and plots to save the relationship by springing a last-ditch marriage proposal on her ... she's Irish, and an alcoholic in fragile recovery who has recently had a casual affair with an off-license clerk (James Devlin). When they set out for a country walk, Dan is determined to bind Rosie to him ... and she's made up her mind that it's all over. What isn't all over, and might never be, is their ramble, which extends well beyond getting lost and coming back to the same curious bit of folk art (a sort-of face in a broken tree) again and again since night never comes but the day isn't exactly warm and comforting. After they run out of snacks and water, the only sustenance they can find is the worst thing for Rosie – very suspiciously-placed bottles of wine. Presences which might be woodland spirits, ghosts, or the couple's doppelgangers are repeatedly glimpsed.



Bring Out the Fear works because the two central performances are spot-on – neither of these people is exactly bad, but they are bad for each other, and this being a horror movie they've trespassed in a pre-twilight zone where they'll be eternally punished for the mismatch by being stuck with each other. It's an exercise in disturbing frustration that depends for effect on us being as trapped with Dan and Rosie as they are with each other, and once the penny's dropped that they're stuck in the woods with precious little motivation to wear themselves out further by trudging on with bleeding feet or raging thirsts a certain mid-film monotony sets in as we wonder precisely what kind of doom is in store. In the end, this is more about the horror the normals bring into the woods than the horrors they find there – which makes for a thought-provoking, quietly nerve-wracking picture.