**Horns**

To celebrate Halloween, I have decided to write about “Horns”, both the novel and the film, as I have wanted to do that for quite a while. I read Joe Hill’s novel “Horns” from 2010 at the time when it was announced that Daniel Radcliffe had been cast in the leading role as Ig Perrish in Alexandre Aja’s upcoming screen version of the book. My first thought was that Joe Hill, who is the son of Stephen King, must be thrilled, because the character Ig had clearly been written with Dan Radcliffe or at least Harry Potter in mind.

There are a lot of clever - maybe too clever? – references to Harry Potter in “Horns”. In the Harry Potter books, Harry Potter is the descendant of and similar to one Ignotus Peverell, whereas the main character in “Horns” is called Ignatius Perrish. In the Harry Potter books, Harry falls in love with a redheaded, independent girl and in “Horns” Ig does the same. In the Harry Potter film series, the scores to the first three films were written by John Williams, in “Horns” John Williams is a friend of Ig's dad. In the last Harry Potter book, Harry turns out to be a new Jesus, whereas in “Horns” Ig is a new Satan.

There are some similarities between Draco Malfoy in the Harry Potter books and Lee Tourneau in “Horns” as well and to make absolutely sure that the readers get these hints, both the Harry Potter books and the films are mentioned in “Horns”. Still the narrator of “Horns” makes a show of his Harry Potter “ignorance” by calling Professor Snape Professor Snail and that is a common trick: feigning ignorance to hide an unhealthy obsession with a subject. The author does the same when in his “Acknowledgements, Notes, Confessions” in the back of the book, he doesn’t mention Harry Potter at all despite the many references.

When that is said, I must admit that I really like the novel. The narrator is one cheeky bastard, the plot is strange, surprising and one of a kind and then I love how the story is told. It jumps in time and between point-of-view and as a reader, you can see the full picture, whereas the characters can’t. This way “Horns” is one of the more exiting books that I have read this century and I couldn’t wait to see Daniel Radcliffe as Ig. The film premiered in 2013 and I waited and waited, but unfortunately it was never released in my country, Denmark, so I had to wait until I was able to get it on DVD earlier this year and boy, was I in for a big disappointment!

Let me make it clear right away: you should only see the film for Daniel Radcliffe’s sake. He is good. He always is. As awkward as he was in front of a camera as a kid, as professional he is these days. Totally believable even with horns. Apart from him, there is no reason what so ever to watch the film because it strips the story of everything interesting and turns it into just another who-done-it murder mystery added a few supernatural elements.

Of course I didn’t expect the film to be as candid as the novel. After all, its main theme is that the devil is more of an anti-hero than a villain and it claims that God is a failed character too detested by his own creations to appreciate them and only the devil loves humans for what they are. I didn’t expect that to sit well with American film production companies and it didn’t. Instead the audience now has to watch this guy Ig running around with horns for the duration of the film without the Satanism to back it up. That makes things pretty incomprehensible, but that’s not all.

What is much worse is, that the film is boring! The story is told almost chronologically and from Ig’s point of view and many of the characters and circumstances have changed to fit the boredom. I’m not going to give you any grave spoilers here, but I still want to show how things are in the novel as opposed to the film, so here are the ten most important things that you’ll find in the book, but NOT in the film:

1. We know who the killer is almost from the beginning
2. Glenna is Ig’s girlfriend (or rather roommate with benefits)
3. Ig’s brother Terry is a sympathetic late-night TV star so Ig never harms him
4. Lee is a mean, blond, juvenile delinquent, severely brain damaged and psychopathic
5. Lee never pulls Ig out of the water – he just pretends to have done so
6. Eric is not a police officer but a security guard for Lee’s boss, a Christian conservative congressman
7. Eric is against Ig all the way, especially in the end
8. It is not Merrin who wants to leave, but Ig who leaves for England
9. It is not Merrin’s mother who has died of breast cancer, but her sister
10. The treehouse isn’t really real, thus its name “Treehouse of the mind”

All the spiritual, philosophical and religious elements of the novel have more or less vanished from the film along with the refreshingly new way of telling a story. That leaves us with the usual drivel of a girl being raped and murdered for the entertainment of the (male) film audience and Daniel Radcliffe having to bring the (female) Harry Potter fans into the cinemas to watch it. That kills me, because the novel is so much more than just the usual sexual exploitation and slaughtering of women in the name of entertainment and the glorification of an unlikely male anti-hero.

As you can probably guess, I’m not a big fan of the film, but that doesn’t alter the fact, that “Horns” is an obvious choice if you are in need of a novel or a film for Halloween. The novel is scary and strange and I’ll give it four out of five stars: \*\*\*\* whereas I can only recommend the film because of Daniel Radcliffe’s performance. Due to his acting with horns and everything, I’ll give the film three out of five stars: \*\*\*.

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