

QLH-S3E1M: Wake in Fright

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

- J** Jessi Chartier 00:04
Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.
- J** Jen Myers 00:17
Before we get started, as a reminder, when we talk about movies, we need to talk about everything in the movie. So there will be spoilers involved. If you haven't seen the movie or want to refresh your memory before you listen, you can stop now and do that before coming back.
- J** Jessi Chartier 00:31
Let's talk about Wake in Fright. After a bad gambling bet, a schoolteacher is marooned in a town full of crazy drunk violent men who threatened to make him justice crazy drunk and violent. 1971 Jen, we're in Australia,
- J** Jen Myers 00:49
yeah, it's bound to get wild. And it does.
- J** Jessi Chartier 00:54
We should start this one off, Jen, by just warning people that this is a movie that has a very violent against animals scene in it. And it is not CG or not practical effects. It was an actual kangaroo hunt. So yeah, for those of us out there that are just not okay with that. Please do

take the warning. I think that there are a couple cuts out there that you could rent that reduce that scene a little bit to something more palatable. But there is a pretty violent scene. And it's a long scene. It keeps going

J Jen Myers 01:28

Yeah, whenever I recommend this film to people, and I do because it's a good film, and I like it. But that's like the first thing, I think it's appropriate that we're doing that at the beginning of this episode, not just because that's an appropriate place for content warning. But it's like I do that even just talking about it with people. It's like, just so you know, this is a thing that happens in the movie. And when I first watched it, I did not have that warning. And it really, really, really upset me. So yeah, that's an important thing to know. I having said all that, I do think it does, like it is in the movie for a reason. It is there for a point, I don't think you need to watch the entire thing, like you said goes on for a long time to get that point. But it does have a point. And it fits into what we'll talk about here. Yeah, exactly.

J Jessi Chartier 02:13

Okay. So with the warning out of the way, let's talk about this film. So I came to this film through your recommendation. And we are pairing this with an our main one, which is the wind, because we're kind of taking the theme of isolation, psychosis or what happens when you are removed from this standard idea of civilization, or the Western idea of civilization, I should say. And so what happens when you're kind of removed from that? This movie reminded me of a lot of the other isolation films. But here's what I love about it is that it's not the isolation that attacks the main character in this film. You know, like the witch it was this ever present, omnipresent evil that was out there, The Witch itself, the devil, blah, blah, blah, same thing with The Wind, but there's this ever-present omnipresent, evil or something that is part of the land. Here, it's more like Lord of the Flies, you know, where the people are, have just kind of gone crazy, because they've been so far removed from their society, that they've, it's kind of like Escape from LA. Like, it's just like, there's just this this sense of uncivilized nature to it. And in morality, and all of these other things that threaten the main character is a sense of self that I really, I really enjoyed that approach to this idea of isolationism as opposed to the wind, which I did I loved in its own right. But this was just kind of a unique take on it.

J Jen Myers 03:49

Right? Yeah. You know, when we were talking about themes of isolation, or being separate from civilization, this is just naturally, one of the things that popped up to me Wake in Fright, which I think you know, says a lot. It wasn't even like this, this necessarily a deliberate thought process. It was just like, oh, Wake in Fright. Yeah, that's what's going on there. But you're right. It's even though it makes me think of isolation. Wake in Fright is almost like what happens to you well, at least the community of people that our main character John falls among. It's like, what happens to you after that, and then he falls into that as well. So like, the dangers of letting go or separating from civilization, I guess. And I think what is so interesting about this film, is that his process, at least in my mind, it seems like such a easy, simple thing. You know, like it's not this great big, I don't know, it's not like a huge life event. It's not like this big move or traumatic incident or something. It's a it's just kind of a night he goes out drinking and it's a

series of bad decisions that get increasingly worse and worse and worse. And then, before he knows that, he's just like, completely separated, lost in the wilderness among all these other people who have been lost in the wilderness for God knows how long it just Yes, it's just like a slide, you know?

J

Jessi Chartier 05:09

Yeah, let's talk about that progression. I think this is a great movie for us to talk about in sequence of the movie, because there are clear beats and points that he can make choices. And then there's but there's, you get the impression that once he's at a certain point, he can no longer make choices just caught up in it. So the movie starts with him. He's a school teacher, really out in the middle of nowhere, where there are two, it's at a train stop. And there are two buildings. It's the school house, and the hotel slash bar slash everything else general store. That's it. And you can tell from the opening scene, that he's a rule follower, but he's also not a really good teacher. Because the scene opens with, he's literally sitting with the kids in silence, waiting for the clock to come like countdown for their, their summer break, basically their six weeks to summer break. And so he he, all the kids leave. He's obviously very educated, he's in this beautiful beige linen suit, walks across, goes to the hotel, packs up his stuff, has a modest drink, and says I'm off to Sydney to see my girl. So the stage is set like he is a man in total isolation, you get the impression that the only adults in this whole area are him. And the hotel owner and the hotel owners wife, that's it. So like you talk about true isolation, like that's where he's at. And he gets on a train. And there's a stop off that he gets to. And it's a town so it's bigger than what he currently is in. But it's the people are like, Oh, are you only staying a day, you should really stay longer. This is the best place on earth. And he's like, you can kind of see him being like, really, since you guys are kind of out in the middle of nowhere. Like, you've got more buildings than we do like you're an actual city, but you're not like really a city. In his mind, he doesn't mean and he ends up going to the bar that night to have another modest drink. And suddenly, the sheriff comes over and is like, oh, you're a new guy. Let me treat you to more drinks and more drinks and more drinks. And he ends up sliding into this life where he learns about this gambling ring. And of course, that's the impetus for everything right? Like the moment we see gambling ring, we're like, Well, yeah, it's over. Everything's going to help. And for if you if you watch this movie, you might miss it. But there's some of you wouldn't miss it, they do do a nice job of like, hovering over it. But it was not uncommon. And this is true in some professions as well, that when you get into a profession, you pay an association fee, that's pretty steep. And then you go wherever that association tells you that you need to work. So like in Australia, at this time, you paid 1000 pounds to get a license as a teacher, but you had to go wherever they were going to need you. And so until you paid back that 1,000. So of course the gambling thing is like super appealing, because he could make 1,000 and be out of the teaching profession. And he ends up just getting caught up in this city of sin that clearly loves living on the edge of nowhere, because they can kind of do whatever they want and have no consequences. And that is like the impetus for everything he does.

J

Jen Myers 08:47

Yeah, the thing that I don't want to interrupt kind of like talking about the progression here, because I think we're kind of only halfway through that. But if I can do a quick sidebar, to kind of point out like, where he's going, as opposed to where he's been, you know, you talked about in the beginning how he was so even though he didn't seem to be like, super into his job or

anything like that. Yeah, everything was so put together and orderly and controlled. And, you know, cool, I guess, but it makes you wonder, like, how much of that is just kind of unthinking I must do this. And then once he's given choices for things, these are the choices that he makes, it seems like I always I feel like I got the impression of like, oh, he was just kind of floating along. And it doesn't seem that that was actually really having any control over his life. And maybe on a subconscious level. He felt that and was you know, acting out and so he starts making bad choices.

J

Jessi Chartier 09:44

Exactly, exactly. I think the appeal of just the uncivilized nature of things like quick mud started him on this journey. So he's gambled all of his money away, and then the sequence of events you I'm not going to ruin the whole movie for you, but the sequence of events that happen. I mean, it's just typical utter debauchery, it's heavy drinking, they passed, they imply that they've passed a woman around before, because that's what you do. And that's what you know, she's the you get the impression that she's consensual. But you know, it's also told from the male perspective. So you don't really know how true that is. But then there's also things like, the doctor who lives in the area lives in a shack because he doesn't have to have any money. And just just just the idea of live as loose and free as you want, because that's what we do out here. And then of course, that descends even further into this kangaroo hunt, where it's just rampant, killing and mutilating of these kangaroos. And then there's also the implication a clear implication of just falling into utter eroticism, and just fulfilling all of your base desires, regardless of what you think. Now, this obviously was made in the 70s. So there's some commentary, a 70s commentary view of like things like homosexuality, etc. Where people were, we're not as enlightened as we are now. But there's it just this idea that you lose yourself in this animalistic view of who you used to be. And then, at the end, he returns to the schoolhouse, he returns to civilization, which is actually farther out than Sydney, right? Like, so like, what he thought he was returning more closer to civilization, he actually has to go back out into the ice, like further isolation in order to find it. It's kind of interesting in that regard.

J

Jen Myers 11:41

Yeah. Yeah, it's the thing with this movie is there's, it's so binary, there's, there's these two extremes, right is is the there's like nothing in between, which I think is where it doesn't really work as a, at least from our more modern perspective as a morality tale anymore, where I feel like maybe it did at one point, or it's like, everything that is not proper civilization, where everything is, you know, structured and conforming, is just immediately it's debauchery, and rampant violence and sex, and, you know, and then that's where you start throwing things. And also, it goes all the way to homosexuality Isn't that awful. And it's just like, you know, there's, that's where it starts getting a little weird for me, where it's just kind of like, all of these things are equated, is just like, you, you throw open the floodgates, and, you know, so and we can't, and you basically, it feels like the lesson. So, you know, whatever there is, in the terms of a lesson here is like, we can't possibly open the floodgates, because who knows all that cup. And so we have to keep everything, you know, structured and buttoned down, and things like that. And so it's, you know, he doesn't necessarily end up in a more, at least to my mind, mentally or emotionally healthy place. He just goes back to the buttoned up style of life. And it just, I don't know, you know, it's just kind of like, well, you only get to do one or the other. And it's, it's nothing in between is good at all. There's no such thing as moderation. There's no such thing as

anything that deviates from that. It's just it's just a strange. I mean, it's it's interesting in a film, but it is I feel like something that contextually along with the times and place and all of that is just a little kind of I don't know, it just it just a little strange, from my perspective now of how it's so clearly, these two things and nothing in between.

J Jessi Chartier 13:42

Yeah, and I feel like that that's pretty true of I think that's pretty true of a lot of horror films is like everything is either life or death is true. Like there isn't, there isn't a whole lot of in between. But here what I like about it is that there really is no, but what you come to realize is that the threat is not actually external. Right? The threat is actually internal is what is what is unacceptable behavior to you. And it's clear that this main character, John, just didn't really have. I don't know I can't even blame him because it like it started. It starts out so benign, you know, it's like, look, I'm trying to be hospitable have another drink. And where it loses it is when he said was when he gambles everything away, you know, where he buys into it for just a moment. He buys into the illusion of this, this world of just utter sensual illness on the extreme. I mean, it really is a city of sin underneath at all, but the horror isn't that it's, it's the fact that someone as put together as buttoned up as you say, can lose that in this environment, you know

J Jen Myers 14:58

Right, and the idea that all of his earlier life was maybe just covering up that this, these darker desires were in him in the first place, which I think is really kind of what the film, if it has a statement to make and saying that about people in general, is that this is inside people. And you can cover it up as much as you want. But if it find, you know, there's a crack or if there's an opening, it's going to come out. And I kind of feel like it also shows that the people who maybe are the most covered up or the people who do the less the least amount of interrogation about what's underneath are the most susceptible to being completely overwhelmed when it finds that crack.

J Jessi Chartier 15:49

Yes. Oh, yeah, for sure. I think that that's a yes, that was very clear, because he is so put together. Like he thinks he's got everything organized. And then this one world starts to potentially threaten it, and he just falls victim to it. You know, he falls victim to his own desires and his own drive throughout the entire film.

J Jen Myers 16:09

Do you think we should talk a little bit about where this film takes place? Like we've mentioned that is, oh, yeah, Australia. But I also feel that like, and I have to say, too, I'm clearly not Australian, I've never been to Australia. But I feel like this film does have a really clear sense of place like you really, like this is not a film that I feel like you could very easily take the characters and story and drop it down in a different environment, like the environment is a part

of this film. In a way that's I don't know, I don't even know exactly how to describe it. I just know it as a fact. Did you get that same impression that this? It's almost like another character in this film?

J Jessi Chartier 16:47

Yeah, I did. I mean, yes, I think that there's a lot to be said about stereotypes about Australia in the outback that they pander to a little bit here it is based on a book by an Australian author. So I think that, you know, some of it is probably rooted in some kind of reality, but they do pander a lot. And they leverage the the stereotypes, but I think they do it in a way in order to tell the story better. So like, something as simple as this idea that those who live on the edges of civilization are kind of outlaw ish. Like they kind of play into that reality or not reality, they play into that stereotype of those who live on the outskirts are kind of crazy. Yeah. And they don't, they don't fit the norm. And they have their own rules and their own laws, which is common in every kind of external edge of civilization story, whether that's the West, the wild west of the Americas, or Australia, etc. There's a lot of parallels there. And I think that there was also like, I don't know, I just think it played well. I think you're right, though, I think that there was a clear, this would not have worked in any other setting. Because Australia, so much of Australia is still so I don't know how to explain it. It's, it's not uninhabitable, because that is not the appropriate term. But it is still very, it's still very wild. Sorry. It is.

J Jen Myers 18:18

Yeah, describe it, I think. And I think that it's very much in the kind of the framework of this film is thinking about it. It's like, well, it's not what kind of traditional Western civilization is, it is far more open. And it just works by different rules. And I do think that this film is right, right. Yeah, I talked about how you couldn't really drop this film into a different environment. And and, but it is also true that this goes back to kind of there are plenty of horror films that are about kind of city versus country, and different stereotypes that go along with this. But this one really does dig into the surrounding environment, what Australia is like it is very much like that kind of traditional western perspective on that. And there's definitely like kind of this this fear and what it doesn't undergo, I think that that that really comes into this as well. And I think that's that is a part of this, this film, where there's a lot that is not understood or not conquered in this film, and it creates fear and horror in the characters of the film.

J Jessi Chartier 19:33

Yeah, yeah, this film is definitely I don't know if I want to call it a traditional horror film, but it is it fits into this podcast because of that. That looming threat that kind of comes from within, you know,

J Jen Myers 19:50

Civilization is a lie. Basically.

J Jessi Chartier 19:54

Get used to it, everybody. Well, I think that this is a really good mini for our main episode, The Wind because The Wind also deals with isolationism, but instead of from a male perspective, it's from a female perspective. And that's really interesting for us to look at and instead of an internal threat, it's an external threat. Although I would argue and I will argue when we get there, that the external threat is probably an internal manifestation of what's going on.

J Jen Myers 20:24

Yeah, it's not so simple, but I totally get your centered on both counts. Yeah,

J Jessi Chartier 20:27

yep, exactly. So I'm excited to explore more on this theme in our main episode, for sure. Wake in Fright my friends. Check it out. But be warned about that kangaroo scene it's crazy pants. Yeah, crazy pants.

J Jen Myers 20:41

Watch out for the kangaroo slaughter.

J Jessi Chartier 20:43

All right, all we will see you in The Wind, which is our main episode, Jen. Thanks so much for joining me. Thank you. And we will talk to you soon. So thanks, everybody. Have a great one.