## House of Ghosts

A film by:

Christopher R. Mihm

From the DVD promotional statement:

With his first supernatural thriller, "House of Ghosts," writer/director Christopher R. Mihm pays tribute to the works of the master of classic horror, William Castle! ("House on Haunted Hill")

House of Ghosts is for sure a great little homage to William Castle. The DVD is a delight. Besides the feature film, which borrowed heavily from the 1959 version of House on Haunted Hill, (which most of my friends and fans know is my all-time favorite film of any genre), the DVD contains the usual special features but also a tour of the home in which the movie was filmed. After a William Castle-like prologue from Chris, warning of the risk the viewer incurs when viewing such a frightening film, the story begins when several friends gather in a very atmospheric old house and a spiritual medium is hired to provide the evening's entertainment. The partygoers are quite disappointed when nothing happens during the séance. But, soon they experience more than their money's worth when strange things begin to happen, for the medium has "opened a portal to the great beyond." House of Ghosts is part House on Haunted Hill, part Night of the Living Dead and all parts fun. A twist ending that explains what has happened, a la House on Haunted Hill, pays homage to the science fiction films of the 1950s. At film's end, General Castle, played by Mark Haider, is seen with a huge cigar, reminding the viewer of the legendary William Castle himself.

As with all Christopher R. Mihm films, it was filmed in glorious black and white (B&W). Chris explained his preference for this in the audio commentary, saying the B&W coloring also defines 1950s characterization. In those films, there were good guys and bad guys and not the shades of gray we see today. Characters were good or evil, black or white with no in-between.

The use of 1950-ish "Psycho-Rama," is a nice touch. For those of you are not aware, this is the embedding of a single frame of a word or image to affect the viewer subliminally. It can be a single word such as "death" or "fright," or a photo of something. In horror films, a demon or skeleton head was often used.

The cast for *House of Ghosts*: (Running time is 77 minutes)

Michael (Mike) Cook – Harlan Mark Haider – General Castle Catherine Hansen – Mary Anthony Kaczor – The Butler Michael G. Kaiser – Deputy Hayes Sid Korpi – Leigh Christopher R. Mihm – Himself Stephanie Mihm – Ursula James Norgard – Arthur Justen Overlander – Ray Mark Scanlan – Isaac J. Andrew Wilkins – The Medium

As you can see, many members of the Mihmiverse company of performers appeared in this story. (I like the way the characters interweave from film to film). Chris also lists an impressive number of associate producers, those who provided economic support in the making of *House of Ghosts*. (The IMDb states the budget was \$3,000. Now, THAT is impressive! Perhaps because of the filming location, the look of the film suggests a higher amount. More about that later). Chris, now with seven films to his credit, has quite a thing going with the Mihmiverse and all who work to support it. Because of this, Chris is, in his words, "living my dream." He also stated that he treats the making of 1950s style B-films very seriously and is very appreciative of his actors. Most of them are local to the Minneapolis area where Chris lives and his films work because of them.

The DVD includes something I have needed for many years. The Fear Shield has already proved to be invaluable in protecting me from excessive fright when viewing horror and science fiction films. I am certain this free gift from Chris will add five-10 years to my life expectancy.

The DVD tour of the wonderful old Victorian house, (the George F. Bates House in the South Minneapolis Historic Healey Block Preservation District), built in 1886 and owned by two of the actors in the movie, Sid Korpi and Anthony Kaczor, is beautifully done in color.

It was pleasing to see Chris get away from filming in basements and outdoor locations. The use of the Korpi-Kaczor home is really a nice and welcome change. Sid Korpi, who played Leigh, especially seemed to be having a good time. I suppose she felt as if she were the production's unofficial hostess, as the film was shot in her home and her four very handsome pet Westies appeared in the story. (As an aside, I got to know Sid when sending her an email after viewing the online tour of her home. Her piano, shown prominently in the film, is identical to one my wife and I owned many years ago.) Now is a good time to also point out that Chris was very complimentary of Sid and used many of her ideas for the making of *House of Ghosts*.

The costumes and makeup are inexpensive but very creative. The smoking jacket worn by the character Isaac is an altered men's suit jacket and Harlan's ascot is in reality one of Mike Cook's wife's silk scarves. The inexpensive (I hate to say "cheap") wig worn by Harlan was professionally groomed to make it look

exactly like what it is - an inexpensive toupee with a professional perm. (My favorite role of Mike's remains as Gustav the canoe cop, but in *House of Ghosts*, the wig drastically changed his appearance). The zombie people were awesome and reminded me of the original *Night of the Living Dead*.

## Random thoughts:

Chris very nicely played on the fears of viewers with his use of spiders, darkness, shadow and subliminal messages.

The death scenes were impressive and genuinely frightening. You'll have to trust me on this because to say more would be to give away important plot points.

While most of the film was shot in the Korpi-Kaczor house, a couple of scenes were filmed in a hallway of the Mihm home.

Chris needed a snowfall for an outdoor shot of the house, but despite the movie being filmed in Minnesota in December, it didn't happen. Instead, an obviously subpar special effect was used, which Chris said he was OK with. It gave the film an added element of 1950s cheesiness.

The Old Man Yates whiskey bottle, with a photo of Chris's father George, was previously seen in *Attack of the Moon Zombies*.

Chris offered public credit to Omaha-based super fan Mitch Obrecht for coining the term "Mihmiverse." All fans and members of the Mihmiverse, myself certainly included, owe Mitch a debt for this, for this term defines a subgenre of horror and science fiction that is unique and cannot be duplicated.

This is the last entry in the Christopher R. Mihm Summer Reading Festival. All seven of Chris's films have now been critiqued and reviewed for your pleasure. I will now commence work on a future article for *Scary Monsters* magazine. That will come out in one of the quarterly issues, hopefully in the not-too-distant future.

However . . . since this is the Mihmiverse, even if it is published in the winter issue, it can still be part of the Summer Reading Festival, for what are seasons in that magical place we love so well?