

Supernatural series 'Miracles' delivers more chills than others

The new ABC show follows a paranormal investigator as he encounters 'eerie miracles' while halting religious evils

Television review

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Editor in Chief

When I was much younger, I saw things. Not quite dead people, but I had some strange experiences. I can't exactly describe them, but they left me with an emotional resonance that cemented my belief in a metaphysical world.

The makers of "Miracles," ABC's new supernatural series, must have some familiarity with these experiences as well. At 10 p.m. Monday, I was trying to do some homework when the show came on, and I was hooked by the grainy, flickering opening sequence in a graveyard. No homework got done the rest of the hour, but I have new hope that I'll be entertained and creeped out on a weekly basis.

"Miracles" tells the story of Paul Callan (played by Skeet Ulrich with an intense demeanor that sits well on his chiseled face), a modern-day investigator of miracles who has grown tired of easily debunked "phenomena." He goes on sabbatical to recapture his faith in both God and

miracles and has a life-saving mystical experience.

Then he meets Alva Keel, another paranormal investigator (played by Angus Macfadyen with a sense of knowing urgency), who tells him this miracle may not be the work of God at all. Paul sees the words "God is now here" written in blood, but Alva says other people have seen these words as "God is nowhere." And so the two are off to figure out the mystery and save the world.

This setup — searching for eerie miracles in a bid to stop a religious evil — makes for a pleasant twist on the horror-TV genre. Some shows, such as "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Big Wolf on Campus" or "Dark Shadows," are campy or comedic and based on mythological creatures. Others, like "Poltergeist: The Legacy," "The Dead Zone" and "Friday the 13th," set up an alternate schematic universe, with psychometry, telepathy and supernatural superheroes. None of those series paid off for me in genuine creepiness because their premises didn't allow for it.

What's fun about "Miracles" is that the suspension of belief required isn't that great — for many people, I would imagine. Spirituality and religion as a basis for paranormal events is easier to relate to on a realistic level than are werewolves. And the clever way the show mixes visions

with reality makes it genuinely frightening when the sky starts to rain deep red blood.

The premiere needed to establish the storyline and draw viewers into the world of the religiously creepy, so the plot may have been just a lot of bang for the early buck, but other aspects of the program give me hope that it will continue to provide chills.

The opening sequence, with its surreal, jerky black-and-white quality, wasn't the only cinematic visual in the show. The camera work was superb throughout, and the framing, perspective and tonal quality continued to give me the feeling I was watching a movie.

The dialogue was natural, the acting was skillful (especially by Hector Elizondo as "Poppi") and the producers used volume in an intriguing way, moving from near-whispers to near-shouts with a fluidity that kept the viewer on edge. Plus, Ulrich really is a treat to look at for an hour.

Some of the show's scary moments were archetypal images bordering on the stereotypical, but as long as "Miracles" builds on those — and doesn't just reuse them — Monday nights could continue to make me feel like a scared little kid again.

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addicted prostitute after producers paid him \$100 to have the word "bumfight" tattooed on his forehead. The artist who applied Brennan's tattoo said he seemed sober and wasn't forced to do anything. Brennan seemed unconcerned while he was getting the tattoo and told the artist that he was going to be a movie star.

The movie also features footage of a man pulling out a tooth with a pair of pliers, a homeless woman named Porkchop attacking someone in a public bathroom, a man smoking crack and defecating on the sidewalk and many other repugnant scenes.

When asked how they came up with the idea, producer Ray Laticia said that he and his friends were, "interested in the inherent humor of something that hasn't been touched upon in mainstream entertainment, which is homelessness."

The inherent humor in homelessness. What's wrong with that picture? Many critics herald this film as the final step into the cultural toilet. No single work should deserve credit for that great feat, but this video makes a strong contribution.

Supposedly, all participants were lucid enough to sign agreements and willing enough to perform the stunts; some even did it voluntarily, but what was the reasoning behind it?

According to various reports, producers paid the "stars" with alcohol,

money, shelter and, when one of them was injured, they would take them in for treatment or let them recuperate in a hotel room. The "stars" also had a phone number to call when they were ready for more booze or money. Many of the participants were either alcoholics, heroin addicts or crack addicts.

With three of the film's "stars" now speaking out against the filmmaker's practices, it should be obvious that the creators of this movie took advantage of people who were desperate not only for material goods but for attention as well.

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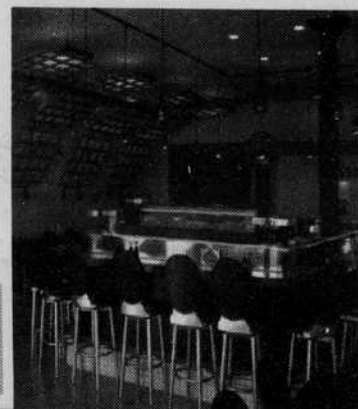
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