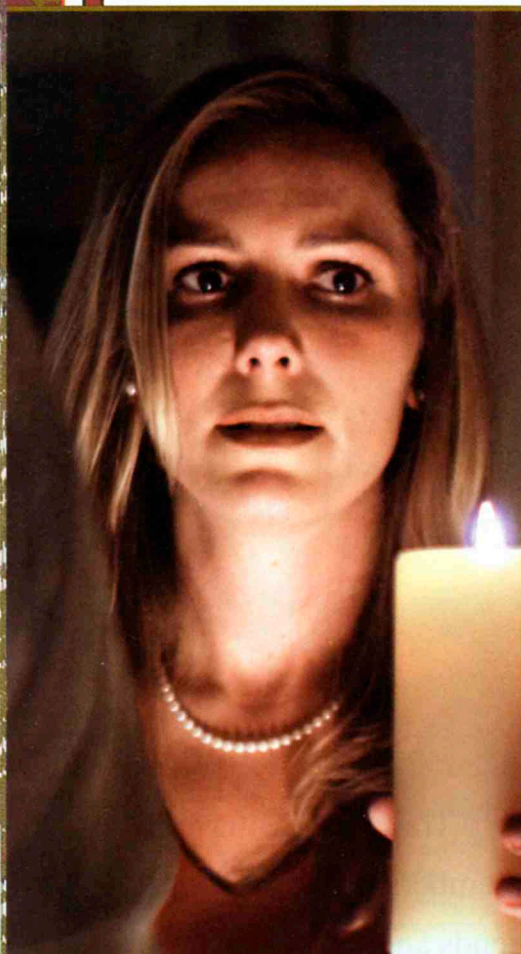


"SOLITARY"

Too much alone time



The darkest places are in the mind of Sara (Amber Jaeger).

If horror—true horror—is that sweaty state of mind when confronted with the arcane, then all the monsters and visceral jolts in the world can't replace the power of the human psyche. It's hardly a new idea that our worst enemy is our own unreliable perception, and genre movies have been mining this ambiguity for a century, whether it be within the inky films of the German Expressionist movement or the abstract dramas of David Lynch.

But in the case of the ultra-low-budget thriller *Solitary*, director/co-writer Greg Derochie took many of his cues from the master of the psychological morality tale, Rod Serling. "I am a devout fan of *The Twilight Zone*," Derochie says of Serling's landmark series. "But when it came to creating *Solitary*, I had practical as well as aesthetic reasons to consider. I had written several scripts, and there were always problems getting Hollywood interest. I didn't want to make an effects-heavy piece, so I took a

page out of Serling and wrote an intimate movie that could literally be shot in my house."

And it literally was. The finances he had to make *Solitary* were so meager that Derochie actually filmed the entire thing in his modest LA abode. The picture's premise centers on Sara, a lonely woman at the mercy of her psychosis, fueled by her acute agoraphobia. Trapped in her home, she ranges from paranoia to outright terror as her husband mysteriously disappears—and, due to her already volatile condition, she is powerless to leave her home and properly investigate. As Sara becomes more and more mentally agitated, reality and fantasy bleed together in upsetting ways.

The film is an ingenious cheat on its limitations, focusing on internal horror and paying off with a white-knuckle third-act twist that is just as frightening as anything a big-budget shocker could muster. But the real twist in this poverty-row tale is the fact that Derochie is one of Hollywood's most prolific and accomplished digital FX artists, something he refused to call attention to in *Solitary*.

"I had nothing to prove," he says. "I've worked on *Spider-Man*, *Starship Troopers* and *Alice in Wonderland*, and I didn't want *Solitary* to be like that. Since I basically funded the whole film out of my own pocket, I couldn't have afforded effects anyway, but I wrote *Solitary* as a character piece."

In a picture so tightly structured, so focused on a single location and—for a majority of the running time—a single character, it became integral for Derochie to find an actress who could handle ample amounts of dark, emotional weight and react to it convincingly. Thank heavens he stumbled upon locally based Amber Jaeger, an attractive—but not distractingly so—thespian who makes every inch of the imploding Sara believable.

"We were incredibly lucky to get Amber," Derochie says. "We had a three-month-long casting process to find our small ensemble, but the lead character was pivotal, obviously. Without a strong Sara, there would be no movie. She's in almost every scene. Amber just kind of fell into our laps. She totally got it, and she's brilliant."

Despite the absence of gore and anything overtly visceral, make no mistake: *Solitary* is absolutely a horror film, and a disturbing, nerve-shredding one at that. Strange, then, that the multitasking Derochie (who also handled all the postproduction chores) claims not to have a particular passion for the genre, citing instead more serious-minded strains of sci-fi—*Twilight Zone* included—as his main creative inspirations.

"I'm probably the only guy who really, really loved the American remake of

Solaris," says Derochie of Steven Soderbergh's dark, oft-maligned redux of the Andrei Tarkovsky classic. "It was so sad, so haunting. It was more about mourning death and coming to terms with that than anything else. Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain* was trying to do what *Solaris* did, but just didn't quite get there. I really tried to capture that same tone in *Solitary*."

Solitary, as of this writing, has yet to receive a distribution deal, but Derochie is currently fielding offers. After a run at several international film festivals, the movie won the coveted New Visions Award at the Cinequest festival and has been a solid word-of-mouth winner with audiences, and it's only a matter of time before the rest of the



Greg Derochie (pictured) stepped up from the FX world to pursue a *Solitary* directorial vision.

world gets a chance to see it. *Solitary* is a classic case of the truth in the cliché, "It's not what you've got, it's what you do with it." For more information on Derochie and the film, go to www.solitarymovie.com.

—Chris Alexander

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