



January 2023

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Recommended Citation

Daschke, Dereck (2023) "Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 26.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol27/iss1/26>

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Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls

Abstract

This is a film review of *Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls* (2023), directed by Andrew Bowser.

Keywords

Satanism, Horror, Parody

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Author Notes

Dereck Daschke is a professor of Philosophy & Religion at Truman State University and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Particularly interested in the intersection among religion, psychology, and wellness, his academic work over more than two decades has analyzed the transformational breakdowns and creative buildups in the form of apocalypses, mysticism, new religious movements, psychedelics, the Bible, Bob Dylan, and, of course, film. He regularly teaches "Religion and Film" at Truman and has overseen a number of student research theses that have contributed to the conversation about just why it is that movies capture our meaning-making imaginations in the way they do.



Onyx the Fortuitous and the Talisman of Souls (2023), dir. Andrew Bowser

Self-consciously harkening to the great horror-comedies of the 1980's, writer-director-editor-star Andrew Bowser channels a viral character he created (known variously on YouTube as “weird gamer guy,” “weird Satanist guy,” or “weird Arby's guy”) into the story of Marcus J. Trillbury, who prefers to be known as Onyx the Fortuitous. Onyx is deeply unhappy as a “patty flipper” at Marty's Meat Hut and is praying to God, or Satan, “whichever is listening,” to give him a better life by letting him be selected as part of a Satanic ritual organized by an Aleister Crowley-type who goes by Bartok the Great (horror mainstay Jeffrey Combs). Whomever was listening answers his prayer, as he wins the chance to be one of five participants called to assist with raising the arch-demon Abaddon from the pits of Hell, setting up the film to be something of a Satanic *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*.

Delivering a performance somewhere between Jack Black and “Weird Al” Yankovic, Bowser's Marcus/Onyx could be the kind of shtick that grows old after a very short

time. However, the comic energy of the character and the film as a whole carries through from start to finish, while the sharp script effectively lays down what appear to be throw-away ideas early on only to have them reappear as key pieces of plot resolution and/or character development. More silly than scary, it nonetheless takes the Satanic storyline seriously enough to make the plot matter and make the motivations of the characters besides Onyx important to the storyline. Onyx's fellow invitees all make an impression, including Rivkah Reyes as the non-binary latent witch, Mack; Arden Myrin as Shelley, a formerly devout Christian who turned to Satan after her husband was killed by a drunk driver; and perhaps especially Terrence 'T.C.' Carson as John Duke, an academic with an insatiable need for knowledge, who invokes the Adam and Eve story in declaring, "The closer you get to the Devil, the closer you get to the truth." The cast also includes scream queen Barbara Crampton as Onyx's mother and horror/fantasy genre regular Olivia Taylor Dudley as Bartok's undead servant Farrah.

While not a truly original premise, Bowser's gusto in writing, directing, and, especially, acting carries the film briskly from start to finish and even executes one of the more satisfying character arcs in the horror comedy genre, turning the term "patty flipper" into a badge of honor. In addition: Come for the "Weird Satanist Guy," stay for the unexpected tribute to Meatloaf's "I Would Do Anything for Love (But I Won't Do That)"!