

Blood on Satan's Claw

(aka: "Satan's Skin", "Satan's Claw")

UK : 1970 : dir. Piers Haggard : Tigon / Chilton

: 100 min

prod: Tony Tenser, Malcolm B Heyworth, Peter L Andrews : scr: Robert Wynn-Simmons

dir.ph.: Dick Bush

Patrick Wymark; Simon Williams; Robin Davies; Linda Hayden; Barry Andrews; Avice Landon; Tamara Ustinov; Anthony Ainley; Michele Dotrice; Wendy Padbury; Charlotte Mitchell; Howard Goorney; James Hayter

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	≠	Z	☠	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"In 17th century Britain a demon is unearthed which a group of evil farm children begin worshipping, sacrificing other children to it. Richly atmospheric horror film with erotic undertones, somewhat gruesome at times. Original British title: "SATAN'S SKIN", running 100 minutes. Retitled "SATAN'S CLAW". *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A devil's claw wreaks havoc among children in a 17th century English village. Moderately frightening, rather silly but at least original period horror comic. "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Rural England circa 1670 is the setting for witch trials and an atmosphere of suspense¹. Better-than-average horror. Not for the squeamish. *** "

¹ There is no witch trial in the story



Scary – state of the art papier-maché make-up?
Source: A Pictorial History of Horror Movies

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"This very shuddery horror film is a demon offspring from "CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED"² out of Vincent Price's "WITCHFINDER GENERAL". Some very nasty things happen to Simon Williams, remembered as James Bellamy from "Upstairs, Downstairs", and Linda Hayden gives her best screen performance as the leader of the devil children behind some gruesome goings-on in a 17th-century village. ** "

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

² He means "VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED"

“Fun, frightening horror film set in seventeenth century England. A small farming community is besieged by the devil himself, who succeeds in turning the local children into a coven of witches. Familiar story is presented in a unique manner by director Piers Haggard, helped by excellent period detail and clever effects. Not for the kids, though. *** ”

Sixties British Cinema comment:

“Tigon’s follow-up to **"WITCHFINDER GENERAL"**, **"SATAN’S SKIN"** (1970, d. Piers Haggard, later retitled **"BLOOD ON SATAN’S CLAW"**) is cruder but more effective. There is the same gloomy vision of the English peasantry as stupid and brutal, but the authorities, in the form of Patrick Wymark’s earthily reassuring judge, can be relied upon for justice.

Reeves’s film is hardly concerned with the occult at all: nobody in **"WITCHFINDER GENERAL"** shows any indication that witchcraft is anything more than a convenient stigma with which to brand and destroy unwanted or unliked members of the community. **"SATAN’S SKIN"** is less cynical. The village girls and boys stumble on dark practices which enable them to call up tangible devils and to create a millennial society that challenges and undermines the existing order.

The film’s picture of witchcraft as a cruel children’s game is compelling; but, uncertain of where its sympathies lie, **"SATAN’S SKIN"** peters out disappointingly, with the witches collapsing ignominiously before the bulky authority of Patrick Wymark.”

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

“Devil-worshipping children in 17th century England cause monstrous havoc for their local village community in this super-stylish supernatural shocker with a strong period flavour. More sensational, violent and crude than its obvious model **"WITCHFINDER GENERAL"**, Piers Haggard’s tense direction keeps the cauldron of fiendish orgies, demonic tortures and Linda Hayden’s sultry turn as the devil’s advocate bubbling at an even terror temperature until the Satanic slow motion climax. Vintage British horror at its lip-smacking, exploitative best. *** ”

“A gruesome discovery in a 17th century English village leads to devil worship among the local children. *** ”

Sunday Times note:

“A coven of devil-worshipping British children start sacrificing their friends. ”

TV Quick note:

“Witchcraft thriller set in 17th century rural England, with Patrick Wymark. Not for the squeamish and involving a coven of possessed children. ³ ”

³ *Ye gods, is that a "satanic abuse" warning??*

All British horror movies, to be honest, are rubbish, and emphatically lowbrow rubbish at that, but, taken in a generous mood, this is far from being one of the worst. Of course, it is leering and salacious in its *satanism* = *unbridled lust* equation, the plot development becomes absurd even by the standards of this genre, and the climactic confrontation with Evil is laughably botched, with astonishingly poor effects work. However, on the plus side, the period feel is captured unusually well, cameraman Dick Bush composes some arresting and carefully framed shots, it has a haunting little tune by Marc Wilkinson, and the reliable Patrick Wymark lends the whole a much needed gravitas (as he did in "**WITCHFINDER GENERAL**" ('68) which this film in some respects strives to imitate).

A ploughman unearths something nasty and inhuman in his field, a young bride-to-be is visited at night by something unspeakable from beneath the floorboards of her room, and is found next morning gibbering insane with a claw where her right hand used to be. Soon, pupils of the parish school start to go missing, led astray by the wanton Angel (Linda Hayden) who attempts to seduce the village priest into inverting his crucifix for her, and when he rejects her solicitations, has him accused of molesting her (so, quite a topical film after all).

At first impatient of ignorant country superstition, visiting justice Wymark becomes convinced that some supernatural agency is indeed abroad, and presently returns from London with a bald henchman and a special sword to defeat the evil by whatever means are necessary. A sliver of furry skin sliced from the leg of a village girl by the local sawbones provides him with the key to the mystery.

The film's central premise – a vanquished demon (Behemoth) is turfed up by the plough and sets about reconstructing its limbs and skin from the yokels that come under its sway – is nothing if not original. One might have expected a script of some subtlety from such egregiously upper class names as Robert Wynn-Simmons and Piers Haggard, but at every turn they opt for the lazy rural stereotype (country folk are dumb and randy) while the censor-haunted sex sequences never rise above the level of Hammer's coy voyeurism.

There is *nobody* younger than 16 in "**BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW**", or rather there is precisely *one*, in the background, a boy of 13 banging away at a drum during a black mass (read orgy) in an abandoned church, but that's scarcely to be wondered at in a film striving with all its spleen for an X certificate.

Note how all the above reviews collude with the film itself in the promise of *depraved children*, even though there are no children at all in the cast. These rustic youths and busty wenches play at small children's games, or squirm on their church school benches when caught misbehaving at a bible lesson, their dialogue clearly implies children in the 9 to 14 range, but their mean age is 19, a handful of faces familiar from British children's television. How much more unsettling the film would have been if the producers had had the courage to cast it with players of the age required by the script. This is an *evil kiddie* film – without the kiddies.

"**THE CRUCIBLE**" is a kindred story on a more elevated plane, but see "**THE WICKER MAN**" for a counterpart of this in more contemporary setting, or the miserable "**CHILDREN OF THE CORN**" and its crop of sequels, and see subject index under **THE CHILD AS EVIL-IN-OUR-MIDST, HISTORY, HORROR** and **PASTORALS**.