

Review: The Knife That Killed Me

Despite the clichéd story, the originality of this green screen production can't be denied. [Kate Barlow](#) reviews

Tuesday 27 May 2014



Based on the novel by Anthony McGowan, *The Knife That Killed Me* is told through the memories of Paul Varderman as he reflects on his final moments before his life is cut short. Through this retrospective outlook we are taken on a journey into his life at school as a part of the 'The Freaks' and his reactions to bullying, crime and peer pressure. So far, so clichéd.

However, the most striking and certainly original element of the film is the fact that it has been shot entirely on green screen. The graphic backdrops at first take a little time to get used to. This approach has the result of not focusing one's attention on one space, unfamiliar to us with the blurred technologies of modern filmmaking, giving the viewer the power to choose where to look. As co-director Kit Monkman explained later the film is about not seeing the world through a single lens, making the viewer "present in the visual space." There is thus a two-dimensional effect, as blurred layers common to a cinema viewer's eye are destroyed. In many ways this film adaptation is therefore more similar to a theatre production, allowing you to choose where to look and which element to focus on. While using the green screen approach certainly wouldn't work for all films, in this setting it seems to.

At times it feels like the innovation of the production is used to make up for the lack of originality in the story. And mostly, it does. Dark graphic images surround the characters, setting an atmosphere of foreboding throughout, aided by the soundtrack. The abstract images work best, the blackboards of scribbled notes and the dark wastelands of the 'scummy areas', with the more realistic interior backdrops often appearing strange and a little contrived. The backdrops appear as something straight out of one of Paul's notebooks, bringing the presence of imagination into the forefront and advancing the first-person narrative of the film.

Credit should also be given to the fantastic young actors. Jack McMullen manages to carry the majority of the screen time as Paul, an especially impressive feat given the fact that the studio setting meant that all background settings had to be imagined. Jamie Shelton's Roth and Oliver Lee's Shane, contrasting as

hyper-intelligent bully and hippie-ish Byron quoting pacifist, also both deliver powerful turns.

While the sometimes detail slips, as we see images and situations not quite matching up properly (a maths lesson is coupled with a blackboard of the Battle of Bosworth, for example), these details can perhaps be excused as they slide into insignificance given the wider themes covered. The film mostly succeeds in portraying a take on knife crime that doesn't patronise the viewer, even though the dialogue can be a little stilted and corny.

The Knife That Killed Me is, after all, an independent project, being funded by a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, launched at Heslington Studios, part of the University's Department of Theatre, Film and Television, on Heslington East. Produced by York-based independent production company Green Screen Productions Ltd is set to secure a deal with Universal Pictures UK for a DVD and Video on Demand distribution.

While *The Knife That Killed Me* may not be the most original of stories, and it certainly has its faults in terms of attention to detail and the occasional bit of dodgy dialogue, the originality of the production cannot be avoided. Ultimately, it is a film that has to be seen as a whole, a broad collation of powerful themes and bold images. Original, graphic and unusual it is hard not to warm to the project.



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Dave Taylor

5 Jun '14 at 5:47 pm

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