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ALONE IN THE DARK

A Lions Gate Films release of a Boll KG Prods. production in association with Herold Prods. and Brightlight Pictures. Produced by Shawn Williamson. Executive producers, Uwe Boll, Wolfgang Herold. Co-executive producers, Harry Rubin, Bruno Bonnell.

Directed by Uwe Boll. Screenplay, Elan Mastai, Michael Roesch, Peter Scheerer. Camera (color, Panavision widescreen), Mathias Neumann; editor, Richard Schwadel; music, Bernd Wendlandt; production designer, Tink; art director, Tania Richard; set decorator, David Birdsall; costume designer, Martha Livingstone; sound (Dolby/DTS), Tim Richardson; visual effects, Doug Oddy, Geoff D.E. Scott; stunt coordinators, Ed Anders, Mike Crestejo; line producer, Dan Clarke; associate producers, Jonathan Shore, Max Wanko, Philip Selkirk, Frederic Demey, Dan Sales; assistant director, Bryan C. Knight; casting, Maureen Webb. Reviewed at Raleigh Studios, Los Angeles, Jan. 26, 2005. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 98 MIN.

Edward Carnby Christian Slater
Aline Cedrac Tara Reid
Cmdr. Burke Stephen Dorff
Fischer Frank C. Turner
Professor Hudgens Matthew Walker
Agent Miles Will Sanderson
Capt. Chernick Mark Acheson
John Houghton Darren Shahlavi
Sister Clara Karin Konoval
'80s Sheriff Craig Bruhnanski
Deputy Adams Kwesi Ameyaw
Krash Catherine Lough Haggquist
James Pinkerton Ed Anders

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Very loosely based on a classic computer-game trilogy that revolutionized horror-adventure gaming in the 1990s, "Alone in the Dark" offers ample evidence that "House of the Dead" helmer Uwe Boll should put down his joystick — quickly, before anyone else gets hurt. Derivative bloodbath jettisons the games' atmospheric suspense and Lovecraftian sense of the macabre in favor of slasher movie mayhem, wit-free dialogue and endlessly protracted and gory shootouts. Fans of the source material probably won't be switching platforms to catch this bizarre Lions Gate pickup, and non-fans definitely won't.

One of the few elements salvaged from the original series is the central character, independent paranormal investigator Edward Carnby (Christian Slater), who, as revealed in flashback, was one of 20 orphans subjected to gruesome medical experimentation. Twenty-two years later, Carnby is a troubled, chronically paranoid man who, when he's not trying to solve occult crimes, spends his time searching

the globe for dangerous artifacts.

Carnby returns home with his latest acquisition and is immediately attacked by a madman in sunglasses who has to be shot, impaled and hurled through multiple glass windows before he finally succumbs.

Soon, all 19 of Carnby's former fellow orphans are reported missing, and there's a deadly monster attack on the museum where Carnby's girlfriend, brainy anthropologist Aline Cedrac (Tara Reid), works. She's convinced the creatures — as well as the mysterious golden relic Carnby has just brought back from Chile — are somehow linked to the Abkani, a sophisticated but now-extinct Indian tribe that long ago opened the gate to some unidentified evil force.

Also figuring into the increasingly nonsensical plot are a friendly coroner (Frank C. Turner), the ambitious Professor Hudgens (Matthew Walker) and an official squad of paranormal agents known as Bureau 713, where Carnby used to work before turning renegade. The bureau is represented by macho jerk Cmdr. Burke (Stephen Dorff) and staffed by lots of desk-bound ciphers who blurt things like "Electromagnetics off the scale, sir! I've never seen anything like it!" Alas, most auds *have*, and far too often.

With production values as inconsistent as its tone, pic reps a schizoid hybrid of action genres, morphing from supernatural chiller to zombie thriller to "Indiana Jones"-style escapade in roughly that order. Early scenes rip off the slow-motion fight choreography of "The Matrix," while some of the later sequences are so choppy they could have been influenced by direct-to-video release "Starship Troopers 2: Heroes of the Federation."

As for the monsters, which have the power to distort electricity (conveniently causing the lights to flicker ominously every time one approaches), they're impressively grotesque and hydra-like, even if they do look like rejected conceptual sketches from the "Alien" series.

Slater holds down his end of the frame admirably, embodying a flat character with stripped-down action-hero panache. Not so his co-star Reid, who faces the monumental task of playing a superintelligent hottie, and who unfortunately adds unintentional humor as she scribbles notes on a clipboard, wearing a pair of owlish specs.

If there's one way pic improves on vidgame, it's in the high-resolution graphics: These have to be some of the youngest, buffest, most gorgeously tanned scientists on record. In all other respects, "Alone in the Dark" offers no surprises and zero replay value.



Christian Slater and Tara Reid star in Lions Gate release "Alone in the Dark," directed by Uwe Boll.