

Skeletons

Cert 12A United Kingdom 2009
93 mins

Crew

Director	Nick Whitfield
Screenplay	Nick Whitfield
Cinematography	Zac Nicholson
Editor	Rachel Tunnard
Production Design	James Lapsley
Music	Simon Whitfield

Cast

Ed Gaughan	Davis
Andrew Buckley	Bennett
Paprika Steen	Jane Barron
Tuppence Middleton	Rebecca Barron
Jason Isaacs	the Colonel
Josef Whitfield	JoJo
Paul Dallison	Marcus
Keith Lancaster	the father
Kirsty Williams	the mother
Jasper Williams	young Davis

Synopsis

The English countryside, present day. Bennett and Davis work for the mysterious Verridical organisation, which specialises in the extraction of skeletons from closets. These agents use special equipment and psychic techniques to help clients bring their murky pasts into the open, though the methodical Davis differs from the compassionate Bennett. Their boss, the Colonel, promises them promotion if they succeed with their latest assignment, though he expresses concern that loner Davis has been indulging in dangerous 'glow-chasing' -entering his own childhood at the risk of attracting problematic psychic detritus.

Abridged from Sight & Sound, Sept. 2010



Tuppence Middleton as Rebecca

Despite winning the Michael Powell award at the Edinburgh Film Festival in June, *Skeletons* has had a limited cinema release highlighting the difficulties facing low-budget British films on the multiplex circuit. Over to Film Societies to give the film the audience it deserves!



Reviews

We might just have found our own Charlie Kaufman in Nick Whitfield, a former actor and stage dramatist whose feature-film debut, *Skeletons*, won the Michael Powell award at the Edinburgh film festival this year. It's intensely and pungently English, eccentric, strangely heartfelt, and very funny: a film I watched to the incessant accompaniment of my own giggling. Newcomers Ed Gaughan and Andrew Buckley play Davis and Bennett, two hassled functionaries in ill-fitting black suits. They are the representatives of a shadowy company that specialises in exhuming difficult and painful memories, inaccessible to every other kind of therapy, lancing existential boils and dragging out metaphorical skeletons, by pointing their strange bleeping equipment at bedroom closets – this being, predictably, the place where occult energies are at their strongest.

But Davis has a secret of his own. He has been "glow chasing", using the equipment to delve into his own painful memories, a practice forbidden by the company – like a drug dealer getting high on his own supply. Stealing the scene is Jason Isaacs, as the Colonel, the two men's gruff employer, sporting a cap, a tache of hostile dimensions, and a worrying scar across his throat. He has the disconcerting habit of addressing his subordinates as "mush" (rhymes with "push"), a mannerism I haven't heard for a couple of decades and which made me laugh every time he said it. The Colonel has promised his boys a promotion, work with the grandest names in society: "I've got a couple of Saxe-Coburgs next week: imagine the *filth!*"

Balancing oddity and fantasy with real emotions and pain is a difficult trick to pull off. Whitfield has managed it nicely. The critical tradition, incidentally, when two shadowy figures turn up arguing among themselves, is to compare the proceedings to Harold Pinter, but Davis and Bennett are probably closer to Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. *Skeletons* is also a film that could be shown in a double-bill with Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Afterlife*. The humour is as dry as a bone.

Peter Bradshaw, Guardian July 2010

You wait ages for a film about mysterious agents with a device of unspecified origin that can place them into someone's brain and then two arrive at once. This low-budget British sci-fi/ supernatural comedy (of sorts) beats *Inception* by having more originality, wit and ingenuity; characters (instead of walking, talking plot devices); no pointless CGI - and all for a fraction of the price. Actor-turned-writer-director Nick Whitfield's film is a complete joy from [beginning to end. Comedy duo Ed Gaughan and Andrew Buckley play Mr Davis and Mr Bennett, two bickering operatives for a psychic cleansing company wandering the Peak District. They travel to the houses of customers with dark(ish) secrets that need to be unearthed - the skeletons of the title - and enter their memories via a closet in their homes with the help of two mysterious stones and various meters. They hit their biggest challenge when they are hired to find a missing husband, and their fearsome boss, The Colonel (Jason Isaacs) arrives. It's been compared to the work of Charlie Kaufman and Terry Gilliam, and those are pretty spot-on comparisons, but it has a style all of its own - even managing to add an emotional punch to such an oblique tale. Of the two films that cover similar ground, this is the only one you'll need.

Phelim O'Neill, Guardian October 2010

Programme Notes