

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

90th Year — No. 220

Tampa, Florida

Eight Sections — 122 Pages

Friday

September 14, 1984



Casie Blanton and Will Sennett share a scene from "The Enchanted," opening in the Bay area today.

Homegrown movie stands tall

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Strange things are happening in the backwoods of Central Florida in director Carter Lord's often engaging debut feature, "The Enchanted."

The place is a remote wilderness of sun-blasted trees, an occasional rusting, tin-roofed shack and thick subtropical underbrush, laced with a silent river and unkempt groves. In the center of it all is a mysterious pocket of natural and supernatural life called Hole in the Wall.

In these woods, a black hunter named Booker T. Robertson lives with an old dog. He keeps his distance from an odd, near-hermit family of squatters called the Perdrys, the only other people for miles.

Under those circumstances, it's not surprising that Booker's heart soars when the only surviving son of the poor, landowning white family that Booker worked for returns home from the sea one day.

Royce Hagan, the heir to the land, is made to feel like Booker's own son. But the old man would offer only one piece of advice: Stay

Movie Review

THE ENCHANTED

Critic's rating: ★ ★½

(The Tribune rates movies from zero to four stars.)

Movie Board rating: PG

Stars: Julius Harris, Will Sennett, Casie Blanton

Director: Carter Lord

Location: Varsity Theatre

Inside information: Contains violence and mild profanity.

away from the Perdrys.

Mostly because the Perdrys have an attractive young daughter, Royce disregards Booker's warning.

The strongest elements of Lord's ambitious debut are impressive for a film made in-state, by a native Floridian, on a Florida-financed shoestring, using mostly non-actor Floridians.

Veteran Hollywood heavy Julius Harris does a delightful job as the cracker-curmudgeon, Booker.

Also impressive is New York artist Will Sennett, in his acting debut as simple, hard-working Royce.

The rest of the cast — all non-actors — are so low key as to be non-performers. The lazy, unemotional acting lends an eerie quality to the Perdry family, appropriate to their unknowable "special" qualities, though some audiences will simply call it "bad acting."

Charne Porter's screenplay — while correct and effective in its use of poor, Southern speech and understated menace — may strike some mainstream viewers as anti-climactic.

Still, if "The Enchanted" is a slow-moving film, it builds surprisingly chilling tension.

Grace notes are provided by cinematographer Michael Levine's beautifully rendered rural Florida scenery and Phillip Sawyer's fine, synthesizer soundtrack.

Overall, this homegrown, remarkably promising feature debut does this state's almost non-existent feature film community proud.