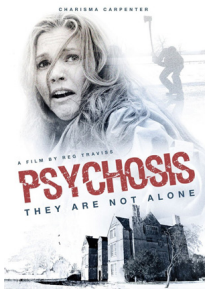
Written by Gil Geigel
Sunday, 06 February 2011 11:10

Based on “Dreamhouse,” one of the better segments of the 1983 anthology SCREAMTIME, Reg Traviss’ PSYCHOSIS (now on DVD from Entertainment One) is an unsuccessful reimagining about a successful novelist, Susan Golden (Charisma Carpenter), escaping to a large mansion in the British countryside with smug boyfriend David (Paul Sculfor) to finish off her latest work. Too bad the home may, or may not, have a bloody past.

The film kicks off with the most cleancut squatters ever put to film pitching a tent in the forest. In what seems very reminiscent of the FRIDAY THE 13th remake (of all things), two of them begin to get touchy-feely in the tent, forcing the others to disperse into the woods. Eventually, while one couple plays a game of hide-and-seek (in two feet of snow?), a sloppily built madman bursts out of nowhere and executes them one by one, hanging and axing them to death. Our snarling murderer eventually makes his way to the love tent, and for no apparent reason, licks one of our dreadlocked squatters’ feet while she is engaging in missionary; it seems to be the director’s way of letting the audience know that this guy is *really* demented. Despite the suffocating stench of the tent, our killer manages to get on with the carnage. For a moment, it seems the guy from SLING BLADE is the killer. I mean it’s him, just not Billy Bob Thornton. But it doesn’t really matter because, well, PSYCHOSIS—despite what its cover art would suggest—isn’t a slasher!



Following its prologue, PSYCHOSIS jumps to the present day because apparently (as Traviss points out in the commentary, but isn’t made evident in the film), the opening sequence is set in the ’90s. As Susan and her deadpan loverboy are easing into their new mansion, she begins to see figures walking about the house and even a hooligan dribbling a soccer ball in her front yard. There’s one completely expected problem, however: David doesn’t see them. Yawn.

Most of the film is fueled by the question of whether or not it’s all in our protagonist’s head. Jarred by one particular sighting, she notifies the local officials. When no evidence is found, Susan becomes frustrated by the lack of support from David (who seems to only own cardigans) and the dismissive detective. In an attempt to get a rise out of the lazy-looking gumshoe, Susan lays this laughable gem on him: “If we get murdered in our beds, I’ll be sure to let you know." To which I replied out loud, “But how would you even be able to do that!?”

PSYCHOSIS is full of such silly dialogue, and even sillier setpieces. At one point, Susan takes a stroll through the surrounding woods and ends up stumbling upon a very loud couple doing the dirty. Oddly, she doesn’t embarrassingly speed-walk away, but instead just stands with mouth agape like a 4-year-old who’s walked in on her parents. At this moment, the argument for Susan’s insanity becomes stronger simply because of the sheer ridiculousness of the moment, especially when the ginger-bearded fiend turns his head and smiles at her while he continues to violently hump his squealing partner. It’s a moment that seems more suited for an Adam McKay comedy and, like Carpenter’s performance throughout, just doesn’t seem very believable.

Through winks and nudges, it’s inferred that Susan might have suffered from some type of “psychological breakdown,” and without giving too much away, it turns out her boyfriend is a scumbag. When the explanations finally emerge in the last 30 minutes, it’s with the help of a psychedelic mushroom stew (I’m not kidding), but even this isn’t as much fun as it sounds. Traviss manages to make bland a mentally unstable woman who’s just ingested at least seven grams of hallucinogen. While she was great in BUFFY and ANGEL, Carpenter is flat and uninspired here, and so is her love interest. (Sculfor’s IMDb bio claims he was “trained in the Meisner Technique” of acting, and from his work in PSYCHOSIS, I’m assuming the Meisner Technique is an exercise in the incredibly stoic.

The DVD supplements are fairly solid, highlighted by a 31-minute making-of documentary which provides some extra insight from Traviss, Carpenter and others. There are also a number of deleted scenes, most of which were rightfully cut, and an audio commentary by Traviss, producer Patrick Fischer and actor Ricci Harnett. Unfortunately, the track is dry and uninteresting, often amounting to nothing more than three people trying to talk over each other.

PSYCHOSIS is a terribly boring film with an ending that doesn’t reward viewers for undertaking it’s gruelingly sluggish pace. While there are moments where Traviss displays flashes of talent, they’re completely overshadowed by the flat performances and overall drab storyline. After indulging the commentary and featurette, it’s clear that the director might’ve valued this story for more than it’s worth. He refers to it as a multilayered film with classic literary characters, but in the end all that comes across is a one-dimensional story with an uninteresting twist.

MOVIE:

DVD PACKAGE:

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