For fans of Stevan Mena’s accomplished, classical 2004 slasher opus MALEVOLENCE, his prequel BEREAVEMENT (screening tonight in Manhattan as part of the New York City Horror Film Festival) is worth the long wait. For those unfamiliar with MALEVOLENCE, you don’t need to have seen that film to appreciate this one.

What those familiar with MALEVOLENCE may not expect is how grisly the follow-up feature gets. Its production company isn’t called Crimson Films for nothing; while writer/director Mena goes for the same slow burn of tension as in his first movie, the punchlines in BEREAVEMENT are far bloodier. If MALEVOLENCE played like a salute to the shadowy suspense of John Carpenter’s HALLOWEEN, BEREAVEMENT’s excesses seem more informed by FRIDAY THE 13TH, albeit with a more complex plot.

BEREAVEMENT is partially the story of Martin Bristol, the deranged villain of MALEVOLENCE whom we first meet as a young boy in 1989 Minersville, Pennsylvania. (Marco Cappetta’s cinematography on PA locations gives the movie’s events a palpable rural atmosphere that’s one of the film’s key assets.) No sooner have we learned that little Martin has a physiological disorder that makes him incapable of feeling pain than he is abducted by a local nutcase named Graham Sutter (Brett Rickaby, the jailed crazy in THE CRAZIES). Cut to five years later, and Sutter has been raising and serving as a twisted father figure to Martin in the abandoned slaughterhouse he calls home, “teaching” the boy his practice of kidnapping, stringing up and murdering young women.

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