

“CHOOSE” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Tuesday, 03 May 2011 12:36



From the way it's being sold, CHOOSE (currently available on-demand from IFC Films) comes off like the latest SAW derivative, but the movie itself proves to be equally indebted to SE7EN. Needless to say, it's not as good as either.

“Whole town's in a tizzy because there might be a madman on the loose,” says Sheriff Tom Wagner (Kevin Pollak—*really?*)—this after three people have fallen victim to a sadistic killer. Just like Jigsaw, this black-clad figure subjects his victims to life-and-death choices, though the voice with which he delivers these fateful instructions is decidedly less than menacing. In an admittedly bravura opening sequence, a teenage girl is forced to choose whether her mother or father will die—and to do the deed herself—or else they'll both be killed. By the time the malefactor gets around to a model who's forced to sacrifice either her eyesight or her looks, the SE7EN echoes have gotten louder, and at this point the film abandons its torturous scenarios to concentrate on a similar investigative plot.



Inevitably, Sheriff Tom and his cops are out-investigated by his journalism-student daughter Fiona (Katheryn Winnick from AMUSEMENT and SATAN'S LITTLE HELPER), who's got a nose for the truth, a conveniently faulty lock on her door and a long-dead mother whose suicide is equally inevitably connected to the present-day crime spree. In fact, everything's pretty much inevitable in CHOOSE, because it plays as if writers/producers Brandon Camp and Mike Thompson did a little on-line research on “choice therapy” and outdated library bar-code systems, and plugged it into a screenwriting program called Gritty Serial-Killer Plot 2.0. It's giving nothing away to say that all the victims are connected to each other as well as Fiona's past (with these revelations, the film becomes strongly reminiscent of UNTRACEABLE as well); that an elaborate symbol will be left in blood at the crime scenes; that the trail Fiona follows will lead to an elderly former doctor (Bruce Dern—*really?*) from a now-abandoned psychiatric hospital; and that Sheriff Tom and his men will bust down the door of the villain's grotty, foul-smelling lair too late, after the killer has vacated the premises.

There's a familiar visual ring throughout the movie as well, from the fetishistic title-sequence glimpses of the murderer's preparations through David Darby's shadows-and-gloom cinematography. CHOOSE's director of record is one “Marcus Graves,” apparently a pseudonym for veteran visual FX artist Robert Legato, whose credits include TITANIC and

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ARMAGEDDON and thus evidently knew a disaster when he saw one. Well, OK, to be fair, the film isn't *that* terrible, but it is relentlessly unsurprising on both a narrative and visual level, winds up with a conclusion that goes from disappointingly generic to disappointingly silly and gives genre fans no reason to choose it over the many screen predecessors it recalls.



{comments on}