

“THE VICTIM” (Movie Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
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Introducing his directorial debut *THE VICTIM* at Montreal’s Fantasia festival this summer, Michael Biehn described it as the cinematic equivalent of “cotton candy.” The movie may not be sweet, exactly, but it does deliver a sugar rush for exploitation fans.

With *THE VICTIM* (opening in New York City tomorrow; see details below), which Biehn also scripted from a story by Reed Lackey, he has done exactly what he set out to do: crafted a grindhouse/drive-in-style thriller that employs an economically limited number of settings and characters and succeeds on its own stripped-down terms. Biehn also knows to open the movie with a, ahem, bang, as his camera creeps through a California mountain forest and comes upon a young woman named Mary (Danielle Harris) in a compromising position with nasty guy Harrison (Ryan Honey). Their tryst goes fatally awry, and Mary’s friend Annie (Jennifer Blanc, Biehn’s life and creative partner) is soon fleeing for her life from Harrison and his buddy Cooger (Denny Kirkwood)—both of whom, we learn, are police officers, which complicates matters after Annie winds up arriving at an isolated cabin owned by recluse Kyle (Biehn).



That name is evidently intended to put fans in mind of Biehn’s role in *THE TERMINATOR*, and *THE VICTIM* drops references to other classics like *UNFORGIVEN* as well. Its own ambitions are more modest: to provide under 90 minutes of sex and violence, both of which result from

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Kyle’s decision to let Annie into his house, despite the fact that he’s up there in the first place because he wants to be left alone. Yet even though she winds up bringing the bad cops to his door, occasioning a couple of nicely tense confrontations, Kyle takes a shine to Annie, decides to help her out and fairly quickly takes her into his bed. The knowledge that we’re watching a real-life couple getting it on means we can watch their sex scene with a knowing smile, while the fact that Biehn was directing himself and his gal can help a viewer forgive the moments when he indulges their opportunities to take their performances, which they generally attack with gusto, a little bit over the top.

The duo were clearly physically committed to their roles too, as both give and receive beatdowns without much evident use of stunt doubles. There’s a visceral quality to the hand-to-hand tussles that’s missing from bigger flicks where more impersonal pyrotechnics and CGI are the norm; financial necessity was the mother of infliction here. The tight budget also meant a small number of locations, and Biehn does his best to surmount that restriction, keeping the story bouncing—or more accurately driving—from one to another so it doesn’t bog down too much (even if you might notice that in the many day-for-night shots of Biehn’s vehicle cruising through the trees, his headlights aren’t on). Biehn also breaks up the main narrative with flashbacks to Annie and Mary, revealing how they got themselves into their predicament and giving Harris more welcome screen time.

Right down to the final-minutes twist and the lengthy end-credits sequence that gives just about every member of the cast and crew a bit of onscreen time, you can sense that Biehn is giving the audience a little wink even as he overall plays THE VICTIM pretty much straight. There are no grandiose ambitions here; he knows he’s making a B-movie, and does so with a bracing lack of pretension. THE VICTIM opens in Manhattan at the Quad Cinema, with Biehn and Blanc doing a Q&A at Friday’s 7:55 p.m. show and others; tickets can be purchased [here](#).

