

Fantasia Day 2, Part Two: "CHOP" & After-Party

Written by Ariel Esteban Cayer
Sunday, 17 July 2011 11:20



Following the wonderful RED STATE, I spent the next half-hour debating whether to see Tsui Hark's investigative kung-fu film DETECTIVE DEE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PHANTOM FLAME or Trent Haaga's indie CHOP. As a fan of all cinematic genres and cycles, Fantasia poses a real problem: while there is definitive logic to the fact that both films should be programmed against each other, no one can blame me for wanting to see everything. In keeping with my devotion to all things bloody and horrifying (and the fact that it was a shorter film, thus allowing me more time to attend the after-party!), I went with the latter.

Screenwriter Trent Haaga's mildly amusing directorial debut finds ordinary guy Lance Reed (TROMEO AND JULIET's Will Keenan) fall victim to the sick game of a psychotic avenger (Timothy Muskatell). Lance doesn't seem to remember him, but the avenger's relentless cat-and-mouse game, which also includes a considerable amount of chopping, will have him remind him sooner or later.

An over-the-top comedic torture film that recalls Andreas Schaap's MUST LOVE DEATH (programmed at Fantasia in 2009), it becomes clear that CHOP is designed as a spoof of the recent revenge/torture flicks that have flooded the market and thrive in popularity, both the American strand of "torture porn" and the Korean variety Park Chan-wook championed in the East with his trilogy a few years ago. Using a repetitive structure, through which sordid details about Lance's life are revealed and limbs are cut off, CHOP's script (by Adam Mnarovich) offers occasional glimpses of solid comedy carried through by both main actors. Most of the time however, the beats are missed and the humor feels forced. Haaga's direction is sloppy at best, but Muskatell does a nice job at carrying the film's comedic impetus as a poor man's Jigsaw and the two cops (Tamil T. Rhee in his first role and Adam Mnarovich himself), who are painfully forgotten by the halfway point, are perhaps the film's funniest element.



CHOP amounts to a punch line that would've made an excellent short film, but unfortunately the joke is stretched out far too long and despite running just over 70 minutes, had me looking at

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my watch multiple times. With good ideas at hand, Haaga and screenwriter Minarovich would've benefited from a bit of restraint, thus helping the film's resonance and comedic value.



Getting out of CHOP, which a few people seemed to enjoy quite a bit, I was eager to get to the after-party for a little séance of meet and greet. There, the party was well underway with everyone standing outside, from Buddy Giovinazzo to Tak Sakaguchi. Jason Eisener was getting into heated discussions about Canuxploitation with cinematographer and ex-Fantasia programmer Karim Hussain; colleague and mentor Kier-la Janisse was catching up with old friend Udo Kier; Sushi Typhoon magnate Mark Walkow was entertaining fellow guests and so on and so forth. I found my way through this star-studded chaos, striking preliminary conversations with friends until I felt at ease to approach strangers. Something has to be said about me: the club scene is thoroughly *not* my scene and despite the unholy amount of beautiful film nerds running amok everywhere, I felt terribly underdressed and ill at ease. I knew it was a feeling I had to shake and luckily, people seemed to know who I was, despite my youngish looks. Was I the youngest there? The backpack over my shoulder had me not only feeling, but looking like the new kid on the block. Thankfully I am, so I played along. RED STATE's various failings and merits were still a heated subject of discussion, but mostly, people were eager to catch up. Eisener bonded over our mutual love for the awesome ozploitation masterpiece STUNT ROCK. Knowing I would have my chance at more Fantasia conversations in the near future, I got out of there relatively early and started piecing together my thoughts.

Next up: British sensation ATTACK THE BLOCK and bloody baseball flick DEADBALL!