

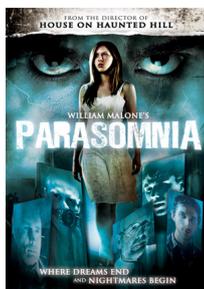
“PARASOMNIA” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Chris Haberman
Monday, 12 July 2010 12:17



Is it fair to judge a film's merits based on its creation? When watching *APOCALYPSE NOW*, it's hard not to consider the hell that Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Sheen went through while making it. Going into *PARASOMNIA* (*DREAMS OF THE SLEEPWALKER*), out this week on DVD and Blu-ray from E1, I knew that director William Malone—one of the original *MASTERS OF HORROR*—had self-financed this project. What was to be seen would be undoubtedly a labor of love. Some journalists have no trouble coping with that kind of information. *Some*.

What Malone has delivered is a dark, paranoid film focused on the fragility of people while they're asleep. A vast underworld is presented as a troubled girl's dream/nightmarescape. A brilliant, well-spoken psychopath is kept under strict lock and key in an unsavory asylum setting. And square-jawed, hard-knock detectives (enter Jeffrey Combs!) work 'round the clock to figure out just what-n-th'-hell is goin' on while moving between sets drenched in bruise-blues and pneumonia-greens.



These elements, and the film's belabored history, make for queasy reviewing of *PARASOMNIA*—a near-and-dear project that works hard in many ways to be a breath of fresh, frightening air, but somehow cannot avoid humping familiar horror hot spots that hang on an earnestly original story like an ill-fitting suit.

And there *is* an original story here: Danny (Dylan Purcell) is visiting a pal in rehab when he spots a cute girl asleep in another hospital room. Laurie (Cherilyn Wilson), we learn, suffers from a disease that has kept her asleep for most of her life. When she'll wake up, and for how long, is anyone's guess. In the room right next to hers is the most vicious maniac the hospital has to offer—literature-quoting hypnotist Byron Volpe (Patrick Kilpatrick). Danny kidnaps Laurie when he finds out that some weird experiments are in store for her at the hands of her doctors,

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only to find out that she a) doesn't comprehend the real world at all, and b) is being effectively possessed by the evil Byron. Meanwhile, gumshoe Garrett (Combs) is always close by...

Malone handles the horror gently—awfully gently. You will see some wet stuff and images you'd be upset to find in your own dreams...but you'll have to wait for both, if that's what you're here for. While you're waiting, you're really watching a teen/cop drama lit a bit like a SAW entry. When Kilpatrick's manipulative Byron comes on the screen, there's an EXORCIST III-esque anticipation of a psycho-jolt or skin-crawling weirdness—but in the end, it's aggravating that all one can really say about the character is that Hannibal Lecter would probably eat him for exhibiting too much smug swagger.

But before the film has you checking your watch, bam—the finale scampers onto the screen like a giddy, pale barn spider, meshing Malone's broken-doll obsessions with Beksinski art (Tool fans take note). It's a weird blast of subdued energy and a sickly sumptuous spectacle to behold, and leaves you wishing there was so much more of Malone's bizarre vision on view throughout the story.

A respectable batch of features appears on the discs. The 13-minute making-of piece covers a few weeks of shooting, with TV-Wire's Staci Layne Wilson interviewing folks 'round the set. The actors appreciate Malone's direction, dig the shoot—you know the drill. One nifty bit sees Wilson admitting that it was her first time in front a greenscreen for her nightmare moments, and that what she has viewed on the storyboards on set is completely different from what she envisioned while reading the script. She seems to be handling the shock well. DARK SHADOWS fans may be tickled by Kathryn Leigh Scott's interview; she plays “Nurse Evans,” or as her nametag reads, “Margaret Evans, RN.” Also included is a group of brief, individual interviews with everyone from the director to the actors to composer/longtime Malone collaborator Nicholas Pike (whose score is effectively robust without relying on easy stingers).

Malone eloquently goes it alone on a commentary, during which we learn up front that he was working on the script while filming his MASTERS OF HORROR installment, THE FAIR-HAIRED CHILD. I was happy to hear this confession, as this fact is quite apparent during PARASOMNIA due to a truly yank-you-outta-the-flick cameo. Malone is an enthusiastic speaker and hits us with good factoids pretty much nonstop, whether he's discussing the film, the shoot, his influences or his career up to this point. I love it when a director can find decent pockets during a commentary to inject good stories about how they finally arrived at the project at hand, which makes Malone's discussion a treat.

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Three deleted scenes (including a did-they-make-the-right-choice? alternate beginning) are also present, along with a still gallery, a trailer and a video montage of images from the film set to the music of Malone’s ’60s garage band The Plagues. Coolly weird tunes, but definitely a product of the times.

PARASOMNIA isn’t a bad film. Nor is it a fair film. On the evidence, it’s an *unfair* film. The idea of what a pure Malone movie could be hemorrhages through in parts, but the real deal feels buried beneath a serviceable plot and acceptable running time. Malone is, after all, the fellow who delivered two of the most haunting TALES FROM THE CRYPT episodes for HBO and pumped unexpectedly memorable shocks into the HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL remake. The Plagues and PARASOMNIA have much in common—they’re both intriguing yet conventionally restrained indie projects that leave you wanting more after their set is finished.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷👻

DVD PACKAGE: 🍷🍷🍷👻

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