Quoted reviews on the back of NEIGHBOR’s DVD package claimed I was about to watch something gory and brutal—a promise at which I scoffed. I’ve been disappointed before.

I was wrong. I was very, very wrong.

This Lionsgate disc is definitely one for the gore-lover’s library. Writer/director Robert Angelo Masciantonio does a lot of things right, even aside from the splatter.

America Olivo from FRIDAY THE 13TH and BITCH SLAP stars as a nameless, mysterious, pretty-damn-hot “girl next door.” The problem is that she doesn’t actually *live* next door; she just tortured and killed the occupants and is spending a few nights with the bodies. Christian Campbell is Don, a guy long out of high school whose main focus is the band he shares with his buddies Mike (Pete Postiglione) and Sam (Joe Aniska). He feeds his landlord’s cat, is trying to get back with his ex (while crushing on another girl) and has to help his mom with the new computer he bought her. All pretty mundane stuff, but a strong point of this film is two words often dreaded in horror today: character development. Masciantonio does a great job with this; we get to know Don and his friends enough to care about them and become emotionally invested in what would’ve otherwise been a mindless torture film, but it doesn’t take so long that we get bored waiting for the action.

And oh boy, is there action. When The Girl finds her way into Don’s house, things get really, really good. Without spoiling too much, I’ll just say that there is violence in this film that could make even the most hardened gorehound cringe (with delight). Certain images have been

burned into my mind, and that’s how I know I saw something good.

One element I’ll admit I had mixed feelings about is the time-shifting. At times, the film jumps to the future, then back to the present, then into the past…and it can be a little off-putting. Although it is not used excessively by any means, this storytelling technique doesn’t necessarily fit the way it should. On one hand, it strengthens the emotional bond with Don and, perhaps more importantly, adds depth to the gory scenario by asking you to think a little. The question is, though, do you want to have to think when watching this type of film? It feels strange, like it doesn’t belong, but it also feels pretty good. It’s something different, something that sets it aside from the HOSTELs of the world. All I can say is, approach it with an open mind.

The cast of NEIGHBOR is excellent; Olivo and Campbell deliver topnotch performances. Praise is also owed to makeup FX artist Vincent Guastini and crew for the mutilation they make look so easy.

The DVD sports a 2.35:1 widescreen picture and Dolby Digital sound, both flawless. A commentary by Masciantonio and producer Charles St. John Smith III sheds a lot of light on the film’s dark spots and offers insight into their low-budget process. There is a strange addition in the form of a second track by Dr. Karen Oughton, a lecturer in media communication at a London university. She analyzes the film in detail, explaining why she believes the film is so effective. It is educational and intriguing, but you might not make it all the way through if you don’t enjoy feeling as though you’re back in a lecture hall at college. It also seems a bit forced, as Oughton claims that almost every movement, image, light placement, etc. is symbolic of something. This is a well-made film, but we don’t need to go that far. Give it a listen, though, and you’re bound to learn something.

We also get a fun behind-the-scenes featurette with cast interviews; the fight scene between The Girl and Sam and the FX get their own little segments as well. The disc is topped off with a gag reel, trailer and a pretty funny music video with Don’s band, the Low Budgets.

The common “girl next door” fantasy is sexy, yet innocent and charming. I say, screw that! This NEIGHBOR is one I can guarantee will be a lot more fun, at least until she sets her sick sights on you…

MOVIE:

DVD PACKAGE:

{jcomments on}