

“MASK MAKER” (DVD Review)

Written by Michael Koopmans
Monday, 23 May 2011 15:35



What do THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACE, FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 2, Treat Williams and Michael Berryman all have in common? Yes, they're all remarkable, but that's not where I'm going with this. Give up? They all have cameos in MASK MAKER (a.k.a. MASKERADE, and now on DVD from Screen Media), a film that succeeds in knowing exactly what it wants to be (don't you hate when people say that?) and has no problems getting lost in the extensive annals of the cookie-cutter slasher film.

Sticking to conventions, our lead is female. Jennifer (Nikki DeLoach) is a college student who seems to have only two things on her mind: investing for the future and convincing herself she cares more about her friends than they care about her. What's the perfect birthday present for a little lady like that? Her boyfriend Evan (Stephen Colletti) knows: a weekend spent at an old, dilapidated farmhouse with 40 acres of land that he plans to flip and make a fortune off of, joined by their closest friends: two self-absorbed females and their equally chauvinistic boyfriends.



Everything seems too good to be true, with the discovery of antique china, furniture and wine that was bottled “when Lincoln was in office”—but they soon learn of the chilling historical events surrounding the previous resident's departure 50 years prior. Will they heed the warnings of the local outcast (played aptly by Bernie Lomax himself, Terry Kiser!) and leave

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“that evil place,” or will they get picked off one by one by an ominous, bulky, faceless maniac with mommy issues? Will they have time for a fun little clean-up montage? And more importantly, will they bump uglies to their hearts’ content? If you’ve seen your fair share of slasher films, you already know the answers.

Two of the more unforgivably “borrowed” elements are the killer’s shtick of removing his victim’s faces and donning them as masks (*à la* the CHAINSAW franchise) coupled with the introduction of the unstoppable monster’s mother’s favorite dress, which is later used in a forehead-slap-inducing I’ll-put-this-on-to-trick-him-into-thinking-I’m-his-mommy scenario (as in FRIDAY PART 2). MASK MAKER also lacks a bit in the gore department, which is typically the area in which modern slasher films grab the spotlight. Not only are the methods stock (i.e. broken necks and impalements) and sometimes out of frame, but the post-coitus restroom break, the girl confusing the killer’s silhouette for her boyfriend and the bathtub gag can all be traced back to higher-profile films of this type. There’s a fine line between homage and ripoff, one that this film straddles unashamedly.

Although the whole experience makes you feel as if you’ve fallen victim to the old bait-and-switch, there’s still some enjoyment to be had with this film. The direction by Griff Furst (of, er, LAKE PLACID 3) is basic yet tight, and it’s not hard to stay awake thanks to the quick pacing and 94-minute running time. For the most part, the acting is solid all around—taking into consideration how exaggerated each character is. Of course, all of this is to be expected, and any aficionado of the slasher genre will more than likely welcome its familiarity with open arms. Let’s face it, the golden age of the slasher film died in the mid-1980s—it’s a fact—but that hasn’t stopped filmmakers from flooding the market with hundreds of uninspired films taking the established formula, adding one or two slight variations and served up with a pleasant sense of *déjà vu*.

The lone “special feature” on Screen Media’s DVD is the trailer, and MASK MAKER can only be truly recommended to all you slasher completists out there. Being one myself, I can honestly say I’ll watch this film a few more times before I die, but that’s only because I’m a sucker. Very few post-golden age slashers have stayed true to the formula while offering a fresh, smart take on the subgenre. It’s not an easy task, and unfortunately, MASK MAKER is not one of those few. And in the current age of remakes, this once-charming formalism just comes off as a bit too familiar.



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