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Thanks to the talent of filmmakers Chan-wook Park and Ji-woon Kim, it’s seemed most recently that South Korea was tops for tales of morally murky vengeance. This year however, Hong Kong seems poised to leave you breathless. The country last wowed us with its penchant for brutality in the standout DREAM HOME just a few months ago and making its U.S. premiere at Fantastic Fest this week is Ching-po Wong’s devastating REVENGE: A LOVE STORY.

REVENGE: A LOVE STORY is a complicated affair. It shares a companion-like relationship with the aforementioned Kim’s I SAW THE DEVIL, not in any story similarities mind you, but in the way both admirably challenge your sympathies and condoning of the proceedings. As is often the case, the less known about REVENGE: A LOVE STORY the better, but the film opens with a pair of truly heinous acts, namely the murders of two pregnant women followed by the removal of the fetuses inside them. It’s something irredeemable, until the remaining chapters (the film is structured in specific chunks, titled with heavy reference to the relationship between God and Satan) spell out what led us to this place.

The meat of the story concerns the fairly slow Kit (an excellent Juno Mak, who co-wrote) and his pining love for the beautiful and also slightly mentally ill Wing Cheung (Sola Aoi). When Wing’s Aunt passes on, the young girl is moved to a care center and Kit proceeds to jailbreak her for a romantic evening that sadly turns disastrous through misunderstanding.

Wong does an incredible job with difficult material, crafting a brutal, unflinching film with style and thoughtfulness throughout (despite an action beat late in the game that feels a bit much). Its specific chapter/act breaks bring a fittingly epic, classical tragedy-like feel to the story, while their respective titles serve to underline parallels drawn between Kit, his opposition and the left and right hands of god. There’s a particularly pointed look at the way authority feels the power of the lord and thusly uses it in a corrupt and disgusting manner.

Like many of its ilk, REVENGE: A LOVE STORY is not a fun time, but it’s heavy and damn good and absolutely a film worth your attention when it hopefully nabs U.S. distribution.