



DOOM ASYLUM

Directed by Richard Friedman
(1987) Arrow Video Blu-ray

With the success of *The Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, as well as *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) and *Night of the Demons* (1988), the latter half of the 1980s saw a flood of low-budget films that combined gooey special effects with wisecracking monsters and lowbrow comedy, often with mixed results.

Doom Asylum, one of a handful of genre titles produced by Filmworld International (part of distribution firm Films Around the World), was a late entry in this cycle that, although it was shot with a theatrical release in mind, wound up going direct to video (via Academy). Code Red released an unrated cut of the film in 2008 from a tape master. Arrow now presents the film from a 2K scan of the original camera negative in both 1.78:1 widescreen and 1.33:1 versions. Both presentations include the video-generated titles and clips from Tod Slaughter films that the killer is watching on television in the 1.33:1 aspect ratio.

This is a jam-packed release for a film that is only marginally interesting, at best, and is mostly remembered as the film debut of "Sex in the City" actress Kristin Davis. After a car crash that kills his girlfriend (*Frankenhooker* star Patty Mullen), divorce lawyer Mitch (Michael Rogen) is mistakenly sent to the county morgue, where his mutilated body is further cut apart by two bumbling coroners. Rising from the table, he kills both of them and takes up residence in an abandoned asylum.

Years later, the girlfriend's grown daughter Kiki (Mullen, in a dual role) arrives at the asylum with her obnoxious friends (including Davis) where they encounter an even more obnoxious female punk band led by Ruth Collins (who you might recognize from *Psychos in Love*, *Galactic Gigolo*, *Blood Sisters*, *Lurkers*, and *Prime Evil*). The two groups torment each other, unaware that Mitch (now known as The Coroner) is lurking in the shadows, waiting to kill them off one-by-one with a variety of lethal medical devices. When he's not murdering people, The Coroner spends his time watching old Tod Slaughter movies (like *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*) on his television—Films Around the World owned most of the Slaughter titles, and used the footage to pad out the film's running time.

The Coroner, with his scarred face and horrible one-liners, is clearly modeled on Freddy Krueger, and according to the interviews in the bonus materials it was designed from the start as a spoof. As such, it winds up being a horror-comedy that isn't scary and is only occasionally funny.

That's a shame, because it squanders both Vincent Guastini's gory effects, and the incredible location—it was shot at the abandoned (and allegedly haunted) Essex Mountain Asylum in New Jersey. The film is set entirely during the daytime, though, robbing the suspense sequences of any eerie punch the location could have provided, and making the special effects look ridiculously rubbery (and the high-definition transfer exacerbates the problem). *Penthouse* Pet Patty Mullen acquires herself pretty well, but she was used to much greater effect in *Frankenhooker* a few years later.

Producer Alexander Kogan Jr. (of *Films Around the World*) also made Andy Milligan's *Monstrosity*, Straw Weisman's *Dead Mate*, the Wisconsin-lensed *Trapped Alive*, and a number of other genre films during this period. Director Friedman and producer Steven Menkin had previously worked on *Mondo New York*.

Friedman made a number of horror projects during this period, including *Scared Stiff* (1987) in Florida, as well as *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (1989). He also lensed *Deathmask* (1984) as his Master's thesis while a student at NYU, and followed that with a substantial amount of television work (*Tales from the Darkside*, *Friday the 13th, Monsters*).

While Arrow has dropped the Code Red commentary track with Friedman, Kogan, and production manager Bill Tasgal, it has added a new commentary with screenwriter Rick Marx (moderated by Howard S. Berger). There is a 2nd commentary from the *Hysteria* Continues podcast crew that includes information from the original director's commentary track and remembrances of the film's video store release.

Other bonus features include an interview with Ruth Collins, another featurette with cinematographer Larry Revene, and an interview with special effects artist Guastini. A stills gallery, reversible sleeve, and a booklet written by Amanda Reyes, (host of the *Made for TV Mayhem* podcast) round out the package.

Brian Albright



A QUIET PLACE IN THE COUNTRY

Directed by Elio Petri
(1968) Scream Factory Blu-ray

A bearded man, in nothing but an adult-sized diaper, is sitting tied to a chair, his arms behind his back, as a beautiful woman tortures and torments him. The setting is surreal, and his demeanor is serene. He does not seem to mind what is transpiring until he eventually snaps, smashes the chair and chases after her. They fight and at the point he is about to die he wakes. It is just a dream, and his tormentor is actually his girlfriend Flavia (Vanessa Redgrave). Leonardo (Franco Nero) is an artist, plagued by fatalistic, fanciful dreams and visions. His work, a cross between the action paintings of Jackson Pollack and the expressionism of Mark Rothko, communicates his insecurities and darkest desires, and with Flavia as both his manager and lover, he sells these huge paintings to an eager crowd of art lovers willing to pay high prices.

Feeling the pressure these demanding collectors put upon him, Leonardo decides that what he really needs is a quiet place in the country for the summer where he can work undisturbed by the bustling life of the metropolis. This being Italy, what he actually finds is a vast crumbling villa with acres of gardens, statues and colonnades, as well as the stately grandeur of its large gothic interiors and endless spiralling staircases and warren-like corridors. It is a property you could really lose yourself in. Unlike many of his 1960s contemporaries, Leonardo does not need mind-altering drugs to get outside himself. As a tortured artist this villa proves to be fertile ground for his increasingly consuming (and confusing) visions, as the boundaries between fantasy and reality become not only blurred but actually disappear completely.

He becomes increasingly obsessed with the fate of Wanda (Gabriella Boccardo), a young countess who was tragically gunned down by a British fighter plane in 1944. According to those in the nearby village, she was incredibly beautiful and sexually adventurous, sleeping with everyone, from the young butcher to Nazi soldiers. The bullet holes still scar a wall of the villa, and Leonardo comes to believe that her spirit may still be in his new residence, trying to communicate with him. Does she want him? Or want to kill him?

When not painting, Leonardo appears to get inspiration from both pop culture and pornography, reading aloud from the photo stories found in *Bang* or *Supersex* to his girlfriend Flavia, whilst also enjoying more cerebral material such as *La decima vittima*, Robert Sheckley's novelization of *The 10th Victim* (1965) which Elio Petri himself directed based on a short story "Seventh Victim" from 1953. Directly referencing popular culture was something which often occurred in Italian films of this period, with comic books, pop art and pornography being considered equally fashionable for Italian cosmopolitan adults in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see *Baba Yaga* (1973) or *Five Dolls For an August Moon* (1970) for other examples).

A Quiet Place in the Country is not a traditional horror film. It is somewhat puzzling that it has now been released on Blu-ray by Shout Factory under their Scream Factory label, as this has the potential to lead to dissatisfaction from someone expecting a straight Italian giallo or gothic horror. This is far more of an arthouse, experimental movie, playing with narrative and film form to create a disorienting, almost trippy experience, one which screams late 1960s almost as much as a Haight-Ashbury hippy or a copy of the *Woodstock* soundtrack on vinyl. *A Quiet Place in the Country* would seem to find a better home with Arrow Academy or even Criterion. However, Shout Factory are to be commended for acquiring the rights and helping it to potentially find a new audience. The film has been restored to as high a standard as the best remaining film elements will allow (considering it is over 50 years old). There is the occasional scratch, but that is to be expected. English or Italian languages are optional on the disc. Given how confusing the film can be at times, deliberately so, this might be one of those few instances where it is a good idea to watch it with the commentary track on first, as historian Troy Howarth's insight and research into Elio Petri's body of work will help to get a handle on the picture before a solo viewing is attempted.

An interview appears on the disc featuring the always entertaining Franco Nero, surely one of European cult cinema's last great icons. He recalls his experiences with this film, which for both him and Vanessa Redgrave was something of a personal project. It was the first film they appeared in together after meeting and falling in love on the set of *Camelot* (1967). They had a child together in 1969, but did not actually marry until 2006, having spent much of the intervening years apart. I was fortunate enough to attend a special ceremony in 2011 when they both received honorary degrees from Brunel University as part of the Cine-Excess festival, where Nero also received a Lifetime Achievement Award. This event was followed by a screening of *A Quiet Place in the Country*. They clearly have a great love for each other, something which brought an extra dimension to their relationship in the film *Letters to Juliet* (2010), and one hopes that we may still see them together on screen again soon. This affection shows through in *A Quiet Place in the Country*, where they are obviously at ease with each other on screen even when homicide is being attempted. They both give committed performances, Redgrave being comfortable as both a lover and a potential murderer, and Nero as the increasingly confused artist with an eye for the ladies who may also be about to commit homicide.

A Quiet Place in the Country turns out to be anything but quiet, but it is still a fascinating and compelling piece of work which fits well into Elio Petri's eclectic but always entertaining and thought-provoking filmography.

Adrian Smith