

A Day of Violence

The Scar Crow

Zombie A-Hole

If there's anything we've learned from Guy Ritchie and Bob Hoskins it's that British gangsters are the equal of any organized-crime entity – or the CIA, KGB and Al Qaeda, for that matter – when it comes to inflicting pain on informers, cheats and turncoats. The Cockney slang and Savile Row suits only add to the fun. Darren Ward's stylishly made, if extremely gory “**A Day of Violence**” adds large dollops of giallo, splatter and torture-porn to what already was an extremely violent offshoot of the gangster genre. It wouldn't be too far-fetched to suggest it represents a subgenre of its own, gangster-horror. Mitchell Parker is a freelance debt collector for several crime families in the port city of Southampton. On one particularly shabby assignment, he stupidly elects to steal the 100,000-pounds he discovers, instead of turning it in to his boss. Unbeknownst to boneheaded behemoth, his victim managed to record the act on his cellphone, before succumbing to a slashed throat. Sadly, for the men and women the boss wrongly believes stole the money, Mitchell refuses to cop to the truth, even while he's watching them being tortured. And, really, who can blame him? Once the cellphone is discovered and the true culprit is revealed, Mitchell finds himself on the receiving end of the abuse. Just when it looks to be curtains for the low-life criminal, he manages to escape the warehouse torture chamber, leading the gangsters on a merry chase through the city, killing anyone who crosses his path. Because Mitchell's fate is revealed in the first few minutes of a “A Day of Violence,” we already know the proper degree of sympathy and pity to expend on the protagonist. In fact, Mitchell has one redeeming quality, at least, and it surfaces very near the movie's final credit roll, which, otherwise, would have been anti-climactic. Needless to say, “A Day of Violence” isn't for the faint of heart or viewers looking for a jolly good time. For adventurous fans of gangster movies, though, it should prove sufficiently off-the-beaten-path to justify the investment in a rental. The bonus material includes an entertaining dissection of a key scene, with special attention paid to the special makeup effects and interviews with cult-favorite actor, Giovanni Lombardo Radice.

Despite a sound mix so unbalanced it requires almost constant adjustment via remote-control, “**The Scar Crow**” is the kind of excessively violent indie that grows on you. It begins in 1709, somewhere in the English countryside, where a woman is being executed for practicing the dark arts. Historians have convinced us that the self-righteous zealots who believed they were defending God-fearing Christians from eternal damnation often mistook epilepsy for possession and even mildly overt sexual behavior as a recruitment strategy for Satan's legions. The woman's absence opens the door for her husband to molest her three daughters, whenever he feels like it. After they overpower the lecher and turn him into a human scarecrow, the movie flashes forward 300 years. Apparently, a curse has condemned the Tanner women to eternal life on the same homestead, where they torture and kill men who cross their path. If “The Scar Crow” is often difficult to follow, the ferocious bloodlust of the sisters adequately fills the gaps in logic.

Made on a budget estimated to be \$3,000, “**Zombie A-Hole**” is a movie that's so unrelievedly outrageous that it simply defies description. An abnormally mobile and determined zombie by the name of Pollux is on a mission to kill twin girls – preferably those who are a bit out of shape and naked – for reasons too complicated to mention ... trust me on that. As Pollux's legend grows, he becomes the subject of a manhunt (zombiehunt?) led by a cowboy-inspired gunman, the ghoul's surviving twin and the one-eyed sister of one of the victims. Adding to insanity is a shrunken puppet-man who lives in a box. Apart from some slow-motion effects, the pace is relentless and the gore flows like water. Horror fans, I think, will be impressed with how much action, however ridiculous, Dustin Mills (“The Puppet Monster Massacre”) was able to wring from his micro-budget. He gives aspiring DIY filmmakers everywhere a reason to get out of bed each morning and go back to work. The DVD adds his commentary, a trailer and a deleted scene and character. – *Gary Dretzka*

Breathless

Murderer

The Viral Factor: Blu-ray

Another week, another movie titled “**Breathless**,” this one from the mean streets of Seoul, South Korea. Disguised as a disturbingly violent and unabashedly profane action picture, Yang Ik-june's debut as writer/director delivers the kind of punch that made “City of God” and mid-century domestic dramas from England so powerful. Yang also plays the protagonist, Sang-hoon, who, as a child, was abused physically by his brutal father and carried his sister to the hospital after the old man stuck her with a knife for interceding in a fight with his wife, who also was killed. Not surprisingly, Sang-hoon has grown into a much-feared enforcer for a gang bankrolled by a loan-shark relative. When he isn't kicking the crap out of deadbeats, he's picking fights with strangers and bullying his young nephew. If Sang-hoon is harboring a conscience under his cast-iron shell, it's impossible to discern. That is, until he confronts a hard-bitten teenage girl, Yeon-Hue (Kim Kkobbi), who gives as well as she takes. At first, he's disturbed by the girl's behavior. Soon, however, Sang-hoon sees a kindred spirit in her – she's been abused by her father and brother, as well – and becomes her friend and confidante. “Breathless” is staged in what appears to be Seoul's shantytown district, where violence, debt and alcoholism are as common as fleas. Naturally, it's the gangsters and loudmouths who stand out from the mass of working-class and unemployed residents. Yang describes in telling detail the cycle of violence that holds succeeding generations of poor people hostage, leaving room only for the slimmest rays of hope for the future. “Breathless” is an exceedingly difficult movie to watch, but not because it's been carelessly orchestrated or is exploitative. It's just plain rough. Anyone allergic to the c-word probably would be wise to avoid “Breathless,” as it is used to punctuate nearly every other sentence of dialogue.

Set in contemporary Hong Kong, “**Murderer**” stars Aaron Kwok as the ambitious 40-year-old Chief Inspector Ling, whose promotion to Superintendent of Police already has been scheduled. If his competency has never been questioned, it's possible that his rise to the top has ruffled some older feathers. The movie opens with a real bang, when his partner lands on the concrete floor of a high-rise apartment building. Ling was the only other person in the vicinity, but can't remember a thing after being ambushed. The attacks are linked to a series of grisly unsolved murders that, upon further examination, all are tentatively linked to Ling. So far, so Hitchcockian. It isn't until nearly three-quarters of the 120-minute movie have passed that something so strange occurs that it takes the suspenseful procedural into David Lynch territory. I won't spoil your fun, but it isn't likely you'd be able to guess what it is, even with 100 chances. The denouement may not be to everyone's taste, but it's certainly different. “Breathless” is co-writer/director Roy Chow Hin Yeung's first feature film after assisting Ang Lee on “Lust, Caution.” (He shares writing credit with Christine To.) I suspect that he has a bright future ahead of him.

There's so much action in Dante Lam's two-hour-long “**The Viral Infection**” you'll likely want to take a nap after watching it. (I took one in the middle, but rallied for the slam-bang ending.) I suspect you'll also lose track of who's fighting whom and which side of the ideological fence they're on. It opens with a firefight in the streets of Jordan, between terrorists and International Security Affairs agents attempting to transport a scientist who specializes in viral diseases out of the country. Because a member of the ISA has conspired with the terrorists to kidnap the man and use his knowledge for profits and power – and everyone seems to be wearing the same color uniform — the confusion over who's who begins early in the picture. When the smoke clears, it becomes clear that a cop, Jon (Jay Chou), has survived the ambush, but with a bullet lodged precariously in his brain. During a visit to his Beijing home to see his mother, quite possibly for the last time, she tells Jon that not only is his father not dead, but he has an older brother. They live in Malaysia, where his father made a living gambling. No sooner does he collect his baggage at the airport than the van in which he's travelling is attacked by a gang of criminals, also looking for the evil scientist, led by his estranged brother. Coincidence? I think not. The young men somehow recognize each other and immediately bond. When the terrorists discover that Yeong (Nicolas Tse) has changed sides, they decide to kidnap his daughter and infect her with the time-release virus. If he wants to save her, Yeong must take sides against his Jon, once again, which he only pretends to do. The chases and gun battles in the final third of the movie involve helicopters – slicing through the skyscrapers of Kuala Lumpur – and a shootout on a container freighter. The sentimental ending, while predictable, fits perfectly within the context of Lam's family-first subplot, and doesn't require more than one miraculous medical cure. If the action scenes and melodramatic throughline feel as western as anything on Cinemax or Starz, the scenes shot in Jordan and Malaysia add interesting backgrounds for Lam's breakneck action. The making-of featurette and interviews are almost as exhausting as the movie, itself, but verbosity and hyperbole are traits all Chinese filmmakers and actors appear to share. In their eyes, it seems, every movie they do is as meaningful as “Battleship Potemkin.” — *Gary Dretzka*