

shown above. The first two-thirds of the relatively short film are hard to watch, even though there really aren't many sympathetic characters.

Keeping that in mind, the last third is a grand old shoot-em-up with lots of collateral damage that everyone can enjoy who likes these kinds of action things. Perhaps a bit more bloody than a *Die Hard* film, but it matches the firearms.

If you're taking anything I'm saying about the film as a negative review, that is not how I mean it. Darren Ward does a great job of directing in Guy Ritchie territory (without the humor). The camera angles are sharp, as is the editing, and the color saturation is of earth tones, highlighting the oppressive and colorless lives and to play up the "claret" as the blood is described more than once.

The story tries to justify Mitchell's stealing of the cash, hence the "redemption" in the catch phrase, but that does not reason out his brutal killing of Hopper. For me it was one of the flaws of a very strong, yet simple story at its core. There are no grand twists, no unexpected duplicities, including the multiple double-crosses, just a grand meat and 'taters tale. Nuthin' wrong with that.

The extras are plentiful. The Making Of documentary is as long as the film, broken up into four segments. About half it is fascinating, the other half you may want to zoom through here and there. But let me digress here for a second. Much of the added footage is about Radice, who essential has an extended cameo. Yes, I know he is a "legend," but he gets first name credit, and so much of the footage in the extras is about him; setting up for his kill, showing how they made the fake neck for it, and quite frankly boring interviews with him (mixed with some interesting comments by him). It seems a bit obsessive to me. Yeah, I love those old Giallo films too, but c'mon. Okay, back on track: other shorts include some extended scenes which are mostly good and enjoyable, but rightfully taken out, especially the car ride with the big boss and the schmuck underling.

I'm not sure if this is a commentary about modern British society, or the government (as *The Cook* was back when), but even if it isn't deeper than the *Platte River*, it gets the job done, with little budget that looks much larger on the screen. If you can take realistic violence (as opposed to "cartoon" aggression of a Steven Segal type), odds are this will be worth your while, even with the sometimes incredibly thick British accents, mate.



Slice (original Thai title: Cheun)

Directed by Kongkiat Khomsiri

Casino Crush / Five Star Productions

99 minutes, 2009 / 2012

www.MVDvisual.com

Tai is an assassin for an underworld boss. He gets set up and sent to prison for 10 years for wounding a cop, and while in the joint, he's told who to kill in there. However, after a few high-profile and bizarre serial slayings that angers a politician, he's taken out of prison and sent to find the possible killer, who may have been a childhood friend.

The killings, which we get to see in full detail, are carried out in quick, brutal fashion by a figure in a full and flowing red cape and hood, carrying a large red rolling suitcase that will eventually house the cut-up bodies (which we also get to see; the corpses, that is). The victims seem random, though they are all despicable, including child molesters (a big industry in Thailand, and I'm sure this is a commentary on that subject) and spoiled, oversexed political scions. Though you would think someone walking in a flowing bright red full-body cape and hood with matching luggage would be easy to spot... I'm just saying...

Now, Tai is no magical Jet Li / Bruce Willis character, he is more human with deep emotions and a girl friend who wants him to get out of the business. He is promised if he find the killer in 15 days, a deadline demanded by the angry politico, he will have his record cleaned and become a police officer, working with his dyed white (you can see the roots) and wild-haired police acquaintance.

We follow through with Tai's investigation of his friend / suspect back in the village in which he grew up. We also follow the progression of his friendship with a fey neighbor, who is constantly being picked on and called variations of the "fag" word. For a while Tai joins in with the taunting, but a bonding occurs. It is a brutal childhood for both, but especially for Nut, who becomes his only friend.

Some of the characters of the film, such as the Don King-wannabe copper, are a bit, well, perhaps not stereotypical, but definitely over the top. Tai seems pretty standardized as a person, though more Jack Nicolson in *Chinatown* than Van Damme in everything. There are no martial arts, not an excessive amount of shootings in the street, nothing blown up, and yet the story remains riveting.

For parts of the film, there's a level of expectation, which is rewarded. However, I did not see the reveal coming, and kudos for that. Many times I'd watch a cop show and within the first five minutes know who was the baddie, but not this time.

While the killings are disturbing, we've seen it all before as limbs get blown off, heads explode, and knives plunge. In a "realistic" film setting rather than the cartoonish *Saw* or *Hostel* franchises, the grittiness gives the violence a certain further edge, even with some ridiculous characters (e.g., the white-haired cop). What disturbed me more, however, were the convincing looks of the bodies after, and the extreme level of gay bashing that runs throughout.

This is an incredibly well-made film, and beautifully shot, and yet exquisitely painful to watch, as are many Asian films of this genre. The horror is in the everydayness of the brutality. Sometimes the viewer doesn't know whether to look or turn away, not because of fear of the "boo!", but rather the transcendence of what violence truly looks like. I'm willing to bet the ones who would have the most trouble viewing this would be those who work in hospitals, ambulance drivers and the police, because it is so accurate to that humanist side of rage. That is a complement to this film.

Posted by Robert Barry Francos at 11:19 PM

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