





## CAST

**Patty Mullen** as Judy/Kiki LaRue

**Ruth Collins** as Tina

**Kristin Davis** as Jane

**William Hay** as Mike

**Kenny L. Price** as Dennis

**Harrison White** as Darnell

**Dawn Alvan** as Godvia

**Farin** as Rapunzel

**Michael Rogen** as Mitch Hansen/The Coroner

## CREW

Directed by **Richard Friedman**

Produced by **Steve Menkin**

Screenplay by **Rick Marx**

Story by **Richard Friedman, Steve Menkin** and **Rick Marx**

Director of Photography **Larry Revene**

Edited by **Ray Shapiro**

Special Make-up & Effects by **Vincent J. Guastini**

Original Music Composed by **Jonathan Stuart** and **Dave Erlanger**



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# TO THE DENIZENS OF DOOM ASYLUM: A LOVE LETTER

by Amanda Reyes

In *Games of Terror*, Vera Dika frames the slasher film as a genre where its signature two-part structure hinges on a past trauma that resurfaces. This results in a compulsion within the killer to seek out “symbolic victims” during a revenge-fueled rampage. In his/her quest for retribution, the prey will find themselves in “The Terrible Place,” which is another formal element that Carol Clover brings to light in her seminal *Men, Women and Chainsaws*. The combination of these two elements places the audience in both a space of tragedy *and* terror; a lethal combination that are touchstones of the slasher genre. *Doom Asylum* follows this structure to a T, beginning with a car accident that not only results in the death of a young woman, but also culminates in the tragic loss of a love. A moment later, the woman’s boyfriend, who is the devastated survivor of the accident, is seen on an autopsy table. But he is not dead. Still, the quack pathologists have now mutilated his body beyond recognition. These two collective tragedies then force this man into a self-imposed seclusion inside the bowels of the hospital, which is eventually abandoned. The dilapidated and condemned halls now house a still-living ghost mourning for the loss of his one great love. When a group of teens and a rock band trespass on the premises... well, we can all guess where this is going...

Oh, *who am I kidding?* This is *Doom Asylum*, and no amount of psychoanalytic theory will bring any more light to this sometimes confused, but ultimately cheeky horror/comedy cheapie that seeks to turn convention on its ear (that is, if there’s any body left after the killer decimates his victims).

To understand how *Doom Asylum* came to be, it is important to remember the direct to video (DTV) phenomenon of the late 1980s. By the time *Doom Asylum* began rolling in 1987 the market had seen an astonishing uptick in films produced strictly for home video, and many of these projects were inexpensive genre fare, with horror rising to the top. Even industry titan *Variety* took notice of the remarkable popularity of these sorts of flicks, and published a chart indicating the massive increase in production (for both theatrical and DTV), with the good ol’ U.S. of A generating a whopping 105 horror films in 1987 (up from 89 in 1986). Basically, if you could splice pieces of film together, or had a semi-





decent video camera, and a few willing (and probably low paid) actors, distribution could be waiting for you. By all accounts, this was a multimillion-dollar niche marketplace that was craving content.

Enter Irvin Shapiro (1906-1989), a sales agent, distributor and president of Films Around the World. A savvy entrepreneur, Shapiro had already clocked in approximately fifty plus years in the film industry before *Doom Asylum* was even a glimmer in someone's bloodshot eye (he founded Film Classics, Inc. in 1945 and even worked on publicity for the 1925 release of *Potemkin*). Although Shapiro is probably best known for bringing foreign films like Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* to the United States, the shrewd businessman was, first and foremost, a dealmaker who knew how to tap the hottest trends in the market. His subsidiary production company Filmworld was a co-producer of *Doom Asylum* (along with Manhattan Pictures). And, because of Shapiro's connections with MIFED (an Italian acronym for International Market for Cinema and Multimedia), *Doom Asylum* had a theatrical screening in Milan, Italy (!), before it was officially unleashed on home video in early 1988 through Academy Entertainment.

But the story really begins in a June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1987 issue of *Back Stage*. The magazine published a casting call for a non-SAG film titled *Doom Asylum*. The killer, Mitch Hansen is described as a "hotshot palimony attorney," and his girlfriend Judy LaRue as a woman very much in love with him. The filmmakers also wanted a few teenagers, including Kiki (Judy's daughter), the spitting image of her mother (but listed as a different cast member, although the two parts would ultimately be played by one actress), Mike, the "all American type," Darnell the ubiquitous "real cool black guy," Jane, a "sarcastic bitch," and Dennis, a "goofy, baseball card freak." Strangely enough, Tina and the Tots were originally slated to be something all together different than what ended up on screen. The lead singer was to be named "Tiny," and is described as a "mid-20s, 6'7" plus, bald rock singer in skirts!" (Director Richard Friedman had originally envisioned the hulking new wave singer Dean Johnson who was featured in *Mondo New York*, which Friedman edited). Likewise, Tiny's bandmates, Godiva and Rapunzel were to be the "bald back-up players." Principal photography was scheduled to begin on July 13<sup>th</sup>, which gave the actors only a few days to prepare for their roles.

Director/co-writer Friedman was certainly up to the task of working with the breakneck shooting schedule (which was somewhere in the ballpark of approximately 8-12 days!), and a miniscule budget (sometimes referenced as \$80,000, sometimes \$90,000, but ultimately as cheap as cheap gets). Friedman had already worked in both indie film and syndicated television, both of which are wrangled with equally trifling resources, and quick and dirty shoots. Most notably, before *Doom Asylum* Friedman directed four episodes of

George Romero's *Tales from the Darkside*. Afterwards, he would helm one of my favorite films, *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (don't judge). And, through it all he's always showed an admirable knack for making the most of what looked like very little, while showcasing a splendid wink to his audience.

Friedman's writing partner Rick Marx was already an old hand at the B-movie game, dabbling in everything from teen sex comedies such as *Preppies* to adult films like *Wanda Whips Wall Street* to the notorious cult classic *Tenement* (which was directed by the equally notorious Roberta Findlay). He churned out several scripts a year, penning a commendable ten screenplays in 1987 alone, including two for his sometimes collaborator, Chuck Vincent (*Slammer Girls* and *Warrior Queens*). It may be because Marx didn't dabble too heavily in horror that *Doom Asylum* takes a more comedic turn, but there's an undeniable energy to the off-kilter characters and dialogue, giving the film a unique bent that is often more funny than not.

The cast was equally game, and, even included a glimpse at the soon-to-be famous Kristen Davis (*Melrose Place*, *Sex and the City*), who plays "sarcastic bitch" Jane. Davis was a recent graduate of the prestigious Rutgers University when she made her auspicious debut here. While the character can grate, the lovely actress makes the most of the material and enjoys one of the goofiest deaths in the film. Davis has said little to nothing about her role in *Doom Asylum*, which is a shame because there have been far worse performances captured on screen.

Ruth Collins, who plays Tina with furious delight was already a seasoned pro, having appeared in several B-movies and the Playboy series *Electric Blue* by the time *Doom Asylum* rolled. The only actress to do nudity in the film, Collins knew how to have fun but also took her career seriously. In an interview promoting *Assault of the Killer Bimbos*, Collins told *People*, "They aren't X-rated films. I've taken off my top, but I'd never take off my bottoms for anything." The actress has managed to survive Hollywood, but now works behind the camera as a producer. She is also, according to her LinkedIn profile, the CEO of a branding agency.

As for most of the remaining cast, *Doom Asylum* inevitably hosts several film debuts that were also swan songs. The "Tots," Godiva (Dawn Alvin) and Rapunzel (Farin) were never to be seen again on film, which is sad, since each brought their own comic sensibility to the screen before their untimely demises (and am I the only one who wanted to see the adorable Rapunzel hook up with Darnell? This is another "don't judge" moment, isn't it?). And both William Hay (Mike) and Kenny L. Price (Dennis) suffered the same fate. Michael Rogan, who plays the murderous Mitch, was able to move into episodic television, but his





last screen credit was in 1993. Yet, despite their novice status, and some admittedly clunky moments, the delivery from each actor is enthusiastic, and always watchable. It looks as though everyone is having a good time, and that translates to the audience.

In the end though, this film is all about witnessing the debut of the enchanting Patty Mullen who was cast as both Judy and Kiki. A *Penthouse* Pet, Mullen's IMDb page is regrettably sparse, with only three credits to her name. The actress was approximately 18 years old when production began, and she already possessed a unique presence, and adept comic timing. Just a couple of years later she would find well-deserved cult film fame in *Frankenhooker* (her only other credit is a gig on the dark 1980s television drama *The Equalizer*).

However, there are two more vital characters that appear throughout *Doom Asylum* that are worth mentioning. The first belongs to classic film actor Tod Slaughter. Several clips featuring Slaughter in various movies were inserted to pad out the film's insufficient running time. There are five Slaughter flicks featured in total: *Maria Marten, or the Murder in the Red Barn* (1935), *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1936), *The Crimes of Stephen Hawke* (1936), *It's Never Too Late to Mend* (1937) and *The Face at the Window* (1939). While Friedman matched scenes from Slaughter's films to parallel what was happening on screen in his film (someone hangs from a high place, a woman is chased, etc.), the black and white classics are also emblematic of Slaughter's transition from good guy roles to those of malicious villain, just like we see with our vengeful lawyer. Yeah sure, it's completely accidental, but it certainly adds to the film's charm.

The other major character is the asylum where the film was shot. Located in New Jersey, The Essex Mountain Sanatorium was established in the late 1800s, first as a home for boys and then eventually an infirmary to aid the thousands suffering from tuberculosis. During its heyday it was considered a state of the art facility, and its size allowed the neighboring Overbrook Asylum to ease their overcrowded population of patients by funneling some of them to Essex. But because T.B. had been mostly eradicated by the 1970s, the facility was abandoned by the early 1980s, leaving it ripe for a horror film shoot that would haunt the decrepit site just a few years later. *Doom Asylum* makes the most of its setting and the spray-painted halls and corroded chambers were, for the most part, exactly how they looked when the filmmakers laid down their first cords to begin filming. Other projects shot at the Essex Mountain Sanatorium include the movie *Copland*, episodes of *The Sopranos* and even Sonic Youth shot their music video *Candle* in the foreboding structure. Sadly, the last of the remaining buildings were demolished in 2002.

In interviews, Mullen has recalled the sanatorium as a creepy dwelling that she was glad she didn't have to be in after dark. Indeed, *Doom Asylum* is bathed in light. Aside from the opening flashback, the film takes places over one day, with the action quickly kicking into gear, and with most of the cast annihilated way before sunset. While the decision to shoot during the day was likely more of a cost-effective choice, it does underline the film's desire to balk at convention. *Doom Asylum* resides inside the well-worn slasher blueprint, with the typical young-people-making-bad-decisions, killers-with-one-liners and the like, but at the same time it crumples that design into a tiny hard ball and throws it into the trash... OK, it missed the can, but it is forgiven because it ultimately understands the holiest tenet of glorious '80s B-movie cinema: If you can't make it scary, keep it gory. So, while *Doom Asylum* offers much more in the way of chortles over terror (the tagline on the VHS box proclaims "it'll send shivers up your funny bone!"), it still provides gore galore. The special effects, courtesy of Vincent J. Guastini, are marvelously over the top, and surprisingly effective. There's certainly more than one "How'd they do that?" moment to be had.

And that brings us full circle and back to the world of the direct-to-video fare of the late 1980s. Because of that unsatiated appetite for content, the DTV market in particular was wide and varied and booming. By the end of the '80s, late entry slashers like *Night Screams* were sharing space on overcrowded video store shelves with micro-budgeted flicks such as *Splatter Farm*, which was made by teenage brothers Mark and John Polonia. There were also hard-to-categorize releases like the black comedy *Psychos in Love* and the inventive supernatural genre flick *Mindkiller*. *Doom Asylum* sits comfortably alongside this motely mixture, because, frankly, anything and everything was up for grabs. And, to be honest, *Doom Asylum* is simply an amalgamation of what was happening in the world of home video. Movies that were fun, goopy, and lowbrow, but somewhat inventive and self-aware were quite often the norm in this late '80s milieu. In hindsight, *Doom Asylum* probably made for a decent double bill with some of the more interesting home video releases of that era, such as the imaginative and suspenseful *Scarecrows*, and Stuart Gordon's sly and underrated *Dolls*.

Believe it or not, the sometimes stuffy trade giant *Variety* adored *Doom Asylum* and saw it standing out from the pack. Citing it as a film that "transcends genre limitations," it certainly all depends on your personal mileage for these types of ludicrous horror flicks. But, this killer quickie obviously only wants to have a good time, and it's damn near impossible not to get caught up in the hijinks, hilarity and hell-raising!

*Amanda Reyes is an author, archivist, historian and film lover. She recently edited and co-wrote Are You in the House Alone? A TV Movie Compendium: 1964-1999 (Headpress, 2017) which celebrates the made for television film, and expands upon her TV movie-centric blog, Made for TV Mayhem and its companion podcast.*









# ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Doom Asylum* is presented in both the 1.85:1 and 1.37:1 aspect ratio with mono audio.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution, graded and restored at OCN Labs. The original video masters were sourced for the video inserts. The grade was supervised and this restoration was approved by director of photography Larry Revene.

The soundtrack was sourced from a set of original 3/4" tape masters. The audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the soundtrack was recorded partly in post-production.

All original materials used in this restoration were accessed from Films Around the World.

Restoration supervised by **James White, Arrow Films**

OCN Labs: **Joe Rubin**

Additional work on video inserts by **Michael Felsher, Red Shirt Pictures**

Films Around the World: **Kristen M. Alicea**

Special thanks to **Larry Revene**



## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**  
Blu-ray Mastering **David Mackenzie**  
Artist **Justin Osbourn**  
Design **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Kristen M. Alicea, Ruth Collins, Michael Felsher, Richard Friedman,  
Vincent J. Guastini, Carol Kogan, Rick Marx, Larry Revene, Joe Rubin and Bill Tasgal.

**This release is dedicated to the memory of Alexander W. Kogan, Jr.**







FCD1771/AV154