



WOLFMAN

CAST

GAYLEN ROSS (as 'ALEXIS DUBIN') as Betsy

TONY FISH as TP

HARRIET BASS as Stacy

SETH JONES as Dave

JAN CLAIRE as Ellie

ALEX MURPHY as Bill

JIMMY STEELE as Richie

CARL FREDERICKS as Max

PAUL EHLERS as Madman Marz

CREW

Director of Photography **JAMES LEMMO** (as 'JAMES MOMEL')

Edited by **DAN LOEWENTHAL**

Music by **STEPHEN HORELICK**

Screenplay by **JOE GIANNONE**

Story by **JOE GIANNONE** and **GARY SALES**

Produced by **GARY SALES**

Directed by **JOE GIANNONE**



A dark silhouette of a person holding an axe against a blue background. The person is shown from the waist up, holding the axe with both hands. The background is a gradient of blue, with some green foliage visible on the right side.

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CAMPFIRE STORIES

TELLING TALES ABOUT MADMAN

by James Oliver

Over the years, the films which comprised the slasher movie cycle of the late 1970s/early 1980s have achieved a sort-of respectability that would have been quite unthinkable in the era when they were actually being churned out. While they were slaughtered by critics of the time, they have since been embraced not just by devoted genre fans but also by high-minded academics; these once reviled films have inspired much serious, heavy duty analysis of a sort their more respectable contemporaries have failed to do.

They are also of historical interest, for they represent the last hurrah of classic exploitation filmmaking before video came along and changed the game. Slasher movies were, after all, every low-budget producer's dream: films that could be made cheaply, usually on a single location with the sort of younger actor happy to work for peanuts, yet could generate some serious returns; maybe not the skipfuls of money taken by *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, those twin progenitors of the form, but quite enough to turn a worthwhile profit.

This was the climate in which *Madman* was conceived. Gary Sales and Joe Giannone – respectively the film's producer and its writer-director – were ambitious wannabe filmmakers who saw an opportunity, and duly headed into upstate New York with a modest budget and a bunch of fresh-faced thespians waiting to be picked off. The script they took with them showed how attentively they had studied the films that had inspired their venture: as with just about every entry in the slasher canon, *Madman* quite proudly wears its influences on its sleeve. At its most obvious, this can be seen in its setting – even the most casual viewer will note that this is not the first such film to take place in a campsite that's the subject of local rumour (Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* [1980] being a prime example of this trend).

A more pertinent influence, though, is *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) – and not simply because *Madman*'s lumbering nutter Madman Marz has a menacing physical presence that recalls Leatherface in Hooper's film (as well as

possessing a similar taste in interior decoration to his crazed cannibal clan). Both films, after all, concern young urbanites stuck out in the sticks; the characters in *Madman* are counting down the hours until they can return to the city and they're certainly too sophisticated to believe in the hokey stories that the older counsellor Max peddles around the campfire about 'Madman Marz'. (And a lot of good it does them...). *Madman* plays on the same principal fear as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*: American city folks' fear that the rural US is a dangerous reactionary place ungoverned by the generally agreed laws of civilisation.

But *Madman* is much less subversive than Hooper's anti-Redneck rant, not least because it was made in less politically polarised times (simmering in the background of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* are the war in Vietnam and the divisions it inspired back home). Its anxieties are, accordingly, more generalised, part of a wider tendency within slasher movies to locate their terrors in incongruous settings, finding the dark side of places traditionally beloved by American myth-makers, like sylvan woodland or apparently idyllic small towns.

This was a trend started by *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), which set its murderer loose in sleepy little Haddonfield, IL. At first glance, *Madman* seems to share little with John Carpenter's masterpiece apart from a synthesised score and a steadily rising body count. But look closer – *Madman* is perhaps the only slasher film to explore what is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *Halloween*, and the way it does so reveals much about the way that the entire sub-genre works.

While most slasher films simply lined up a killer and then supplied some cock-and-bull reason for him/her to go on the rampage, Carpenter – typically – was somewhat smarter. Although the killer in *Halloween* has a name (Michael Myers) and a backstory, Carpenter treats him as something more mythical, almost as an incarnation of childhood fear. The credits list him as 'the Shape' (a wonderfully indistinct description) but they might just as easily have called him 'the bogeyman' (or 'boogeyman', to use the American variant). And, as one of the babysitting heroine's young charges reminds her, "You can't kill the boogeyman".





Madman Marz is cut very much from the same cloth, stripped of a precise motivation (beyond an all-encompassing diagnosis of 'madness') and painted as – essentially – a mythological figure. It's worth noting that *Madman* grew out of an authentic campfire story, that of the 'Cropsey Maniac', a legend that had been scaring the bejesus out of impressionable campers in New Jersey and upstate New York since before the Second World War.

Like Marz, the Cropsey Maniac was said to be fond of decapitating those unfortunates who strayed into his orbit and, again like Marz, his motivations were opaque (one popular variant held that he was a once-respectable man driven insensible by the death of his son and was seeking revenge on those his addled mind thought might have been responsible, although this is contradicted by other accounts). When the makers of *Madman* discovered another contemporaneous slasher film – *The Burning* (Tony Maylam, 1981) – was inspired by the same tale, they were obliged to jettison specific mention of the Cropsey Maniac and created Marz in his stead.

Like the Cropsey Maniac, Marz is an urban (or rather, rural) legend: Max gleefully relates his back story – the cruelty to his family, their murders at his hands and his own subsequent lynching by the proverbial angry mob – as a camp-fire yarn, with all the veracity that implies. And while the nippers are suitably scared, we are not invited to believe this tale is the truth (indeed, if Max actually believed in the story of Madman Marz, he would surely be downright irresponsible to site his camp in woodland shared with a homicidal loon). And yet, as the campers discover, he is sufficiently real enough to kill them off. So – what is Marz?

The film refuses to define the exact nature of the killer, besides confirming – by way of young Richie's investigations – that Max's fanciful story would seem to contain at least a kernel of truth. Is he a human lost to madness, or a paranormal entity? Marz certainly possesses abnormal strength and an ability to appear at inopportune times, bending the boundaries between the real and the supernatural. Quite apart from the added layer of menace it lends the film – monsters with a mythic dimension and primeval motivation are always just that bit more potent than those with just a psychological imperative – maybe it also points to something more, illuminating other features of the slasher film.





Madman certainly isn't the only film of the cycle to hinge on a story of "Something Bad Which Happened Near Here". Many – and maybe even most – flicks from the golden age of slashers have a half-remembered story at their heart, something that happened in the past which is somehow linked to the murders being committed in the present, whether it be a drowning at Crystal Lake (*Friday the 13th*), an unsolved double murder (*The Prowler* [Joseph Zito, 1981]) or an accidental death (*Prom Night* [Paul Lynch, 1980]) to name just three.

What *Madman* does is to put this half-remembered story front-and-centre; in doing so, it makes clear how much the slasher movie owes to an older form of storytelling, the sort that is preserved in camp fire stories and the like, those tales of bogey men and monsters who kill the unwary. Beneath the surface scares, these are fundamentally cautionary tales to keep kids on the straight-and-narrow. What's interesting is that it's not hard to find a similarly unforgiving morality underpinning the slasher film.

All this leads us, with a degree of inevitability, in the direction of sex. Sexual politics are one of the most discussed aspects of the slasher film and one of the aspects most picked over by the academics mentioned above. The most famous commentary on the sub-genre – *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* by Carol J. Clover [Princeton University Press, 1982] – spells them out at great lengths.

Broadly, the original wave of slasher films took a dim view of sexual activity, especially by young women (more recent efforts are more forgiving). Those who go further than 'heavy petting' in these films can expect a visit from the local psycho. The ultimate heroine – who Clover calls 'the final girl' – will be the 'good' girl, the one who remained chaste and is therefore sufficiently morally pure to defeat the bogeyman.

At first it looks like *Madman* will reject this outrageous puritanism: all of the putative victims are sexually active; even Betsy, the character who is lined up to be the 'final girl', is shown getting it on in with her boyfriend in a hot-tub. After Marz has bumped off her friends, the assumption is that Betsy will get revenge and she duly grabs a shotgun to do just that. But the film frustrates those expectations by having Marz impale her on a spike. The codes of purity and the stern slasher morality are, it seems, more important than audience satisfaction.



Or maybe that's just so much phooey. For all that the slasher movie cycle has attracted the beady eyes of academics, many genre fans resist their advances, preferring to enjoy these films in more uncomplicated ways, savouring the thrills rather than intellectualising them. And certainly, it can feel unfair to train the critical big guns on an unashamed exploitation film like *Madman*. Unlike the makers of the films that inspired them, Giannone and Sale show no great interest in exploring or developing the ideas that underpin their script; it is possibly more rewarding (not to mention kinder) to approach their work in less rigorous ways.

Which is not to say that *Madman* is above criticism: the acting is sometimes questionable, the (regrettably plentiful) songs are awful and the character name 'TP' can only induce hilarity in anyone familiar with *Beavis and Butthead* (look it up if you need to...). But there is much straightforward fun here for the horror enthusiast to enjoy. It is, for a start, a very well-crafted example of low-budget filmmaking. This was Giannone's first film as director and yet he shows a confidence and command of the screen that is rare in exploitation filmmaking and which should have led to better things. He is ably assisted by the tremendous photography of James Lemmo (here credited as 'James Momel'), most especially in the very first scene, in which tales are told around a flickering camp fire.

Unlike many post-*Halloween* movies, *Madman* soft-pedals the gore, presumably because the budget didn't stretch to elaborate evisceration effects. In their place, Giannone emphasises suspense to winning effect, notably in the scenes where Marz stalks Ellie and the finale, when Betsy enters the house of horror. The film's few gore shots are deployed effectively and no film since *Jaws* so effectively used severed heads for shock value.

Best of all, there is *Madman* Marz himself. Wandering around the woods barefoot – doesn't he know how painful it can be to step on a pinecone? – and flexing his talons in the moonlight, he cuts an imposing figure, one certainly deserving of the tales told about him. Had *Madman* spawned a sequel or two, Marz might now be regarded as fondly as Michael Myers or Jason Voorhees. Alas, it was not to be.

Madman isn't one of the pivotal slasher films but it nonetheless illuminates the sub-genre's codes and subtexts more clearly than many more prestigious entries in the cycle. But all that would be for nothing if it didn't also entertain. And those who are partial to slasher movies will agree *Madman* certainly does that.

James Oliver is a writer and filmmaker whose thoughts on films can most often be found at Movieimail.com.







ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Madman is presented in 1.78:1 with mono sound.

Madman was restored and made available for this release by Vinegar Syndrome. All restoration work was carried out at OCN Digital, CT, USA.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K resolution. Kodak Digital Ice was used to remove thousands of instances of negative dirt and debris. Additional restoration was performed using PFClean and Phoenix Finish restoration tools.

Colour grading was performed on the Davinci Resolve by Ryan Emerson and was supervised by the film's producer Gary Sales. The mono soundtrack was transferred from the original 35mm magnetic reels.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Ewan Cant

Executive Producer: Francesco Simeoni

Production Assistants: Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje

Technical Producer: James White

QC and Proofing: Ewan Cant, Liane Cunje

Subtitling: day for night*

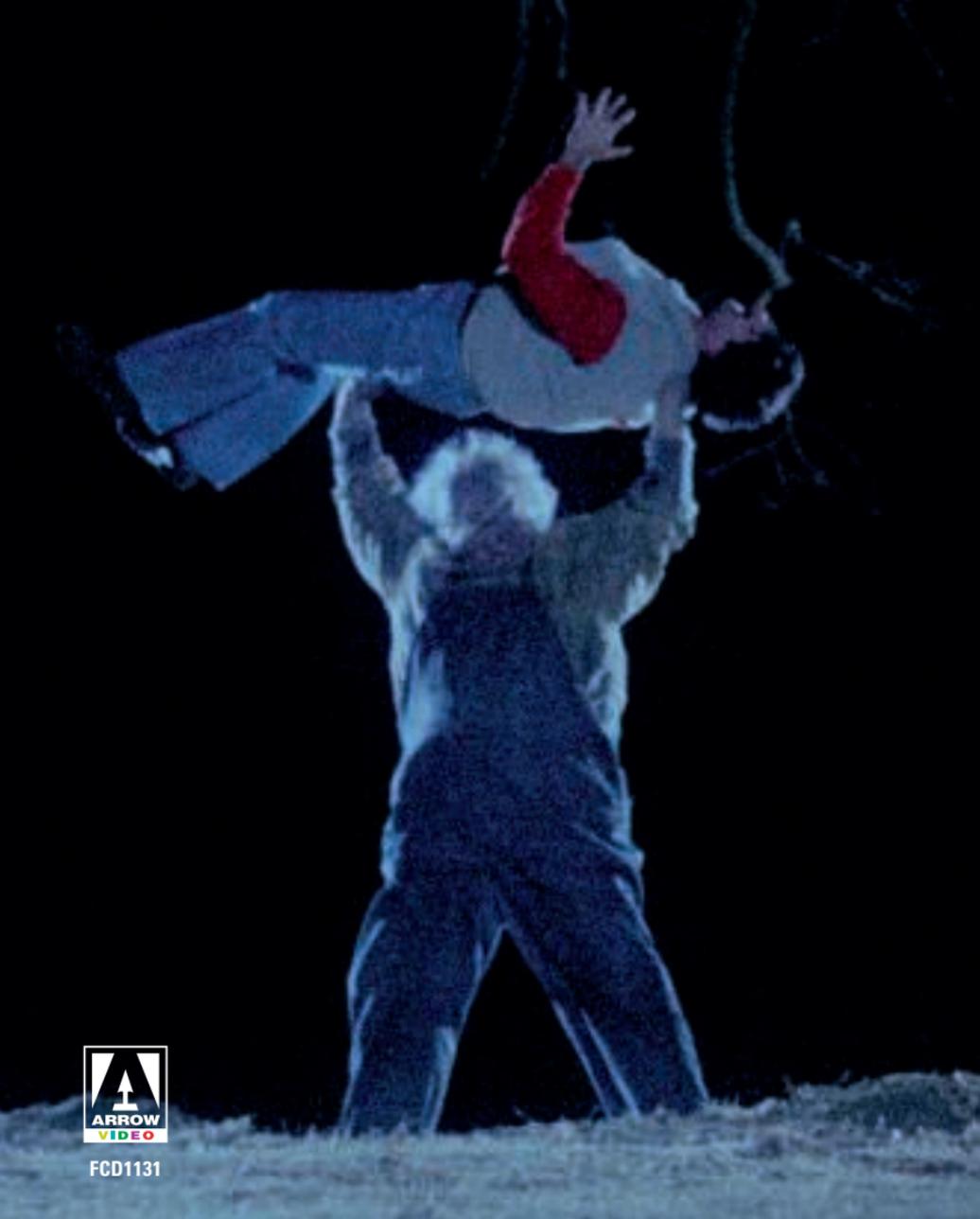
Authoring: David Mackenzie

Artist: Matthew Griffin

Design: Emily Fordham

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Paul Ehlers, Ryan Emerson/Vinegar Syndrome,
Joe Rubin/Vinegar Syndrome and Gary Sales.



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