

## ‘The Killer Inside Me’ a Study in Sociopathic Blandness

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 27, 2010 - 10:06am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Michael Winterbottom’s ’50s-era neo-noir “The Killer Inside Me” creeps up on you in the creepiest possible way. Just as I was ready to write it off, I ended up caving in to its charms, or lack thereof. This film often seems as utterly cuckoo as its central antihero, and that’s what makes it so darn mesmerizing. Sure, it’s sort of a mess, but boy is it engrossing, with a strong emphasis on the gross.

Casey Affleck’s role as deputy sherif Lou Ford isn’t a million miles removed from his Oscar-nominated channeling of “the coward Robert Ford,” a role he played to perfection opposite Brad Pitt in Andrew Dominik’s woefully underrated 2007 western. Yet while Robert’s bloody deeds were motivated by relatable human emotions (jealousy being the most prominent), Lou is inspired, or rather controlled, by an inner-voice. The urge to kill washes over him like a dark, oil-drenched wave. He is as frightening a sociopath as Anton Chigurh, but Affleck hardly has to lift an eyebrow in order to convey a sense of palpable menace.

Though Affleck has clearly proven himself to be a more gifted actor than his older brother, it remains difficult to determine whether he possesses any real range. His mumbled line delivery occasionally renders his dialogue unintelligible, while his facial expressions include an odd half-closing of his eyes that makes it look as if he’ll drift off at any moment. It took me a good long while to warm up to his performance in “The Assassination of Jesse James,” and it took me even longer to admire his work in “The Killer Inside Me.” Based on the novel by pulp crime author Jim Thompson, the film opens with Sheriff Ford falling into an animalistic affair with the prostitute that he’s been assigned to evict from his benign west Texas town. While the prostitute (played unconvincingly by Jessica Alba) views him as a viable boyfriend, Ford sees her as an opportunity to settle a few scores. This leads to a scene of shocking brutality that has deservedly garnered the film instant notoriety.



The Killer Inside Me  
Photo credit: IFC Films

Structurally, “Killer” is reminiscent of Hitchcock’s “Psycho,” with Alba cast in the Janet Leigh role, and Affleck evoking Norman Bates’s mask of politeness and sexually arrested maternal demons. It must have been Winterbottom’s sick joke to hire Alba for a role in which her pretty face gets beaten to a bloody pulp. As in “Psycho,” the film’s most extreme act of violence occurs about a half-hour in, and creates an atmosphere of dread that reverberates throughout the rest of the picture. While the scene isn’t quite as appalling and unwatchable as the similar instance of skull-bashing in Gaspar Noe’s “Irreversible,” it still easily ranks as the most viscerally disturbing sequence of Winterbottom’s career. Its protracted length and graphic intensity is reminiscent of the equally controversial sex scenes in “9 Songs.” While that film explored sex lives devoid of feeling or meaning, “Killer” enters the psyche of a man who destroys others purely out of compulsion. In both instances, Winterbottom’s objective lens erases the exploitative nature of the material, with a great assist from longtime cinematographer Marcel Zyskind, who shoots every picture like a fly-on-the-wall documentary.

As the plot progresses, Affleck’s monotone detachment becomes all the more chilling. The film’s breezy tone, reflecting Ford’s unnervingly lighthearted demeanor, is juxtaposed with the horrific plot in a way that is positively Lynchian. When an outsider, county attorney Hendricks (Simon Baker), attempts to interrogate locals who find his probing questions “impolite,” his befuddlement resembles that of Kyle MacLachlan in “Twin Peaks.” There’s also several small touches that may strike movie buffs as possible Lynch homages, such as when Ford listens to Strauss’s “Im Abendrot” (which was used as the main theme for “Wild at Heart”), or during a bizarre cameo by Bill Pullman, who looks as if he entered the picture after taking a wrong turn on a lost highway.



The Killer Inside Me  
Photo credit: IFC Films

The ensemble is filled with good performances, particularly from Kate Hudson as Ford’s equally clueless and inexplicably devoted girlfriend, Elias Koteas as a labor leader who connects dots but keeps the patterns to himself, and Liam Aiken as a boy who learns more than he ever wanted to know about his soft-spoken role model. One of Winterbottom’s many diabolical gags was his choice to mislead audiences right off the bat with a zippy opening title sequence, complete with splashy close-ups of cast members, many of whom are granted precious little screen time. While the film doesn’t deliver the nostalgic fun it initially promises, it does provide the sort of psychological intrigue and jet-black



humor that keeps you pinned to your seat and your eyes wide open, even as the onscreen action tempts you to leave the theater in disgust.

There's a devastating moment when Affleck confesses his crimes to the wide-eyed Aiken, who argues that his victims probably "had it coming." With matter-of-fact bluntness, Affleck replies, "*Nobody has it coming.*" "The Killer Inside Me" functions as both a fascinating portrait of a deranged mind and definitive proof that Winterbottom is one of the most versatile filmmakers in modern cinema.

*'The Killer Inside Me' stars Casey Affleck, Kate Hudson, Jessica Alba, Ned Beatty, Elias Koteas, Tom Bower, Simon Baker, Liam Aiken and Bill Pullman. It was written by John Curran and Michael Winterbottom and directed by Michael Winterbottom. It opened on June 25th at the Music Box. It is rated R.*



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