

Deadly Friends hardly Psycho

Deadly Friend **
Warner Bros.
Capitol Square

review by Dean Bennett

This film is the victim of some misleading advertising. If you believe the teasers *Deadly Friend* is the story of a malevolent presence masquerading as the girl next door — a being possessing unearthly powers who can smash windows with her mind and generally make life grisly for people she doesn't like.

Actually, it isn't really like that. *Deadly Friend* is sort of a *Frankenstein Meets the Suburbs* with shades of *Psycho* thrown in. Samantha — our heroine — is not so much the villain as she is a pathetic and sympathetic zombie.

The story centers around Paul Conway (Matthew Laborieux). He's a teenage kid not like other teenage kids — he has a genius level IQ and he and his mom Jenie (Anne Twomay) have just moved to Washington D.C. because he has received a scholarship from Poly Tech continue his research on the human brain.

Paul meets next door neighbor Samantha (Kristy Swanson) — the nice teenage girl who unfortunately is abused physically and emotionally by her drunken father.

They're both in love but the relationship comes to an abrupt halt when Sam's dad, in a drunken fit, slaps her down the stairs. She hits her head at the bottom and 72 hours later she is brain dead.

Paul can't handle this. He can't just stand by and watch her die. So he and his friend Tom (Michael Sharrett) steal her corpse from the hospital and implant in it a "brain" Paul had designed for a robot.

The implant works. She can't speak and she walks around like a robot, but it works. Paul keeps her in his garage but not for long. The new Sam has an annoying habit of sneaking around and killing the people who made her previous life miserable.

For fans of the gross-out this film definitely has its moments. Sam punishes her victims in particularly inventive and



Horror engulfs young lovers in *Deadly Friends*

graphic fashion. Not to be missed is Sam's confrontation with Elvira Parker — the old crone from across the street who destroyed Paul's robot with her shotgun and stole his basketball. Sam picks up said basketball and whips it at Elvira's face, exploding her head into red shards of flesh and bone and leaving the headless body twisting and jerking around the tiny living room.

There is some kind of sick message to *Deadly Friend*. Just before her death, Elvira is watching TV and one character is saying to another, "You can work and work (to get the blood out) but there will always be

some left." This is the dilemma facing Paul. His character surprisingly becomes less likable as the film progresses. First off he steals a corpse and takes it home in a laundry cart. Then he begins to cover up the bodies when the corpse starts making corpses of its own. Paul's misguided intention to help his dead girlfriend leads him to breach the ethics of science and later become an accessory to murder. The more Paul tries to cover up the existence of Sam the worse the problem gets.

Interesting enough there are shades of *Psycho* in *Deadly Friend*. Just before her

death, Samantha climbs the large staircase in her house, calling out "Father?" This ironically resembles Norman Bates ascending a similar staircase looking for his "mother." Like Detective Arbogast, Sam reaches the head of the stairs only to be attacked. Both fall down and meet their deaths at the foot of the stairs: Arbogast is stabbed by mother; Sam hits her head on the far wall.

The film is brought down by weak characterizations and an unfulfilling script.

When Sam eventually kills her dad you're more interested in how she's gonna off him than in the poignancy of a daughter literally coming back from the grave to avenge a man betrayed her trust and tortured her soul. This is because little care has been taken to develop the relationship between father and daughter. He doesn't like her and mistreats her but we don't know why. This is but one example.

The script, while not completely shallow, doesn't exactly come equipped with a diving board either. The film does build toward some big finish as Samantha becomes harder to control and Paul's web of deception quickly unravels but the big ending falls flat. Sam, tracked down by the police and surrounded, is finally able to speak just before she is offed. But again you don't really care. The relationship between Paul and Sam and between Paul and his work has not been dramatized effectively. Sam's being able to talk shows Paul's project has made great strides and this juxtaposition of seeing his work flourish and his girlfriend returned from the dead just as a policeman's revolver ends the whole thing should be moving indeed. But it isn't.

This film needs a brain implant.

Dean's Rating System

- ***** *Casablanca*
- **** Take It
- *** Take It or Leave It
- ** Leave It
- * *The Goonies*

Clockwise: Cleese does it in again

Clockwise
Universal Pictures
Cinema 6

review by Roberta Franchuk

John Cleese is a visual comic. Basically, he just looks very funny. He is 6'5 inches of wild eyes, long legs, and stunned expressions, with a voice that can go from utter contempt to frantic insanity without missing a beat. The physical nature of his humor allowed him to create some of his finest characters in his career with *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, in his own series *Fawlty Towers*, and now in his latest movie, *Clockwise*.

In *Clockwise* Cleese plays Brian Stimson, the headmaster of an English comprehensive school which he runs strictly by the clock. Everybody's movements are planned, charted and computerized down to the last second-plus stored in Stimson's remarkable memory. He spots infractions while his back is turned, hands out punishment with steely-eyed precision, yet has the respect and admiration of his students, all of whom know

exactly how far they can go, but still delight in testing his limits.

The film centers on an important moment in his life. He has been elected Chairman of the Headmaster's Conference, the first chairman in history from a common comprehensive school, ie. a public high school. This is a great honor and it proves to him that the key to his success is in the way he uses time. As he tells the music teacher Mr. Jolly, played with irritating vagueness by Stephen Moore, "The first step to knowing who we are is knowing where we are and when we are." This is the keystone to his life.

And needless to say, when his preoccupation with rehearsing his acceptance speech causes him to miss his train and sends his speech speeding off without him, this keystone starts to crumble.

He tries to salvage the situation by enlisting one of his pupils, Laura, played by Sharon Maiden, to drive him to the ceremony. His wife, whom he would not allow to accompany him, spots the two in a gas station and pursues them in a rage of suspicion,

accompanied by the three hilariously vague little old ladies she has been taking along on a drive. This caravan is soon joined by Laura's parents, Mr. Jolly, and several policemen trying to find someone responsible for the trail of damage left in Stimson's wake.

Yet, despite tremendous setbacks involving cows, perverts in Porsches, and coin-eating telephones, Stimson and Laura do reach the Headmaster's Conference. This turns out to be a gathering of stuffy men in stuffy suits boasting about having the same accountants as Mick Jagger. Here, while addressing the assembled headmasters, Cleese as Stimson demonstrates some of his greatest comic mannerisms.

The whole movie is peopled by characters that should be instantly identifiable to any Python fan: little old ladies babbling endlessly, addled housewives, officious policemen, obtuse farmers and pious monks. In fact, the whole movie resembles nothing so much as a protracted Python skit, with one of the same problems — the lack of a coherent ending. But this, which was deliberately

strived for by the Python troupe and allowed the television skits to flow one into the other, means this movie just sort of hangs at the end. One is never sure if Stimson has learned anything from his experience — although he does call the whole exercise a "form of education" — and one suspects that he has still not learned that his refusal to listen to people was one of the causes of his misadventures.

This movie is rather difficult to review simply because it is so very definitely a John Cleese movie and thus highly dependent on visual effect. Cleese's finest moments are in his reactions, conveyed by the tone of his voice or the set of his shoulders. These things just do not translate to paper. Therefore, one's opinion of this film will depend strongly on one's reaction to Cleese. His fans, and fans of Python, will love it — it is a chance to see "Our Lord John Cleese" at his finest. For people unexposed to or unimpressed by the Python type of humor, I cannot predict the reaction. John Cleese, like fine wine, must be experienced to be appreciated.



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