

REVIEW: *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*

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I must confess that I only watched the most recent *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* because the director, David Blue Garcia, is a friend of a friend. His earlier work, *Tejano*, was a genuinely enjoyable film in its own right. The same cannot be said of this one. It is absolutely terrible and I loved it.

Dante (Jacob Latimore) and his culinary business partner Melody (Sarah Yarthkin) have effectively purchased the small town of Harlow, TX, that everyone outside the region thinks is abandoned. Along for the ride in a Tesla are Dante's fiancé, Ruth (Nell Hudson), and Melody's younger sister, Lila (Elsie Fisher). Lila is a survivor of a mass shooting and, like most teens, has no desire whatsoever to live in a small town in the middle of nowhere.

The first serious engagement is when Dante attempts to remove a tattered Confederate battle flag from the front of an orphanage. When he does so, he discovers that the town is not entirely abandoned. Mrs. Mc (Alice Krige) still lives there with the last orphan, whom she calls her son (Mark Burnham). Mrs. Mc insists she still owns the building and that the "misunderstanding" was cleared up with the bank. The dispute between her and Dante ends in her death through heart failure and the killing begins with the Sheriff (William Hope) and his deputy (Jolyon Coy). Ruth soon follows. But it is not any of their faces that Leatherface dons. It is, instead, that of his mother, the first in a series of actions that brings to mind Norman Bates' relationship

with his mother in *Psycho*. Before she dies, however, Ruth manages to radio for help to a local convenience store owner (Sam Douglas) who in turn calls for help from the last survivor of the original massacre, Sally Hardesty (Olwen Fouéré).

Dante and the others are unaware of any of these events and he welcomes to town his investors. They play little part other than as cannon, or chainsaw, fodder as they are trapped in a bus, streaming their collective demise. Aside from being a living but soon dead comment on today's social media culture, they play no serious role in the film. Commenters can be seen expressing opinions that what they are seeing is fake or asking how they can join the fun. Reaction emojis on the victims' phone screens fly almost as thickly as the gore.

And that is what this film and others of the genre are about: Gore. Reviewers elsewhere have been, I think, unkind in expressing disappointment that this film was not some sort of cinematic masterpiece of psychological horror that was always an undertone in earlier films. While a touch of subtlety would be nice, that lack seems to be the point. We do not live in an age of the subtle, whether cinematic or real. Further, the refusal to believe what was happening in front of streaming viewers' eyes, or dismissing it as if it were a joke, presents yet another aspect of our culture's serious problems. This film is terrible precisely because it utilizes the terrible of the real.

Gentrification. Instant gratification.
Fraudulent foreclosures. Rural health crisis.
All the worst parts of social media culture.

At the end, as Lila manages to escape in a pre-programmed Tesla on autopilot, we are reminded of how the powers that be want us to think that we have little power, as individuals, to alter the course of history. And yet, one cannot forget Sally's warning that Leatherface will haunt her until she does something about him. This is true of all our worst waking nightmares.

Reference

Garcia, David Blue, dir. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Los Gatos, CA: Netflix, 2022. Streaming.