

Title: 维多利亚壹号 (Dream Home)

Cast: 何超仪 (Josie Ho), 陈奕迅 (Eason Chan)

Director: 彭浩翔 (Pang Ho Cheung)

Language: Mandarin

Based on a true story, *Dream Home* is a 97-minute Hong Kong slasher-flick that details the psychological deterioration of a seemingly mild-mannered junior executive as an unsuccessful bid to own her dream luxury seaside apartment turns into an unconscionable deadly obsession. It is 2004. Cheng Li-Sheung is a discontented bank credit-line officer who desperately desires to break away from the downtrodden conditions of working class. Fuelled by a life-long envy of the corrupt and powerful rich who bully the poor in their homes, the death of her parents, and an unfruitful relationship with a married man, Li-Sheung works doubly hard to meet her target, launching a psychopathic campaign to kill residents and a security guard in a grotesque, cold-blooded way.

2 *Dream Home* is said to be a satire of Hong Kong's obsessions with materialism and class status conveyed through a thriller-horror form. After a series of bloody and macabre killings, Li-Sheung hears news of an impending global economic downturn triggered by a sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US to suggest that her dream may soon be elusive again. However, in questioning "to what lengths one would go" to keep up with a "crazy city" like Hong Kong, beat the odds and fulfill one's dreams, this film gets carried away with exploitative and gratuitous scenes, indulging in visual orgies of frontal nudity, pornographic sexual intercourse, lesbianism, drug abuse and most of all, sadistic violence.

3 The bulk of the film contains an array of prolonged and excessive violent sequences with detailed depictions of various levels of terror and cruel killing methods. These include vicious bashings, gruesome repeated stabbings, sadistic suffocation and strangulation, gory disembowelment, dismemberment of penis and fingers, and cold-blooded pistol brain-blasting. All murder sequences entail brutal executions using a combination of methods, most of them carried with pre-meditation. A range of ordinary home tools such as screwdrivers, kitchen knives, plastic cords, plastic bags, and vacuum cleaners are deployed as murder weapons, as well as some less common 'household weapons' such as the sharp edges of wooden planks ripped from a bed-frame, the jagged-edge of a glass smoking-bong, and hard-edges of tables and porcelain toilet bowls.

4 Among her hapless victims, the long-drawn torture and slow suffocation of a heavily pregnant woman is one of the most impactful. A disturbing element of the film lies in the way her victims are shown sequence after sequence, writhing in excruciating pain with profuse bleeding and raw bloody wounds. From the word go, such intense and prolonged violence is vividly thrown at the viewer with no build-up typical of many other slasher films. The film also revels in the grotesque as it repeats strong images such as the grossly disemboweled man who tries to get a smoke, while deliriously stuffing his innards back into his ripped torso.

5 With concern for the impact of such depictions of violence on the community, the Board of Film Censors (BFC) referred this film to its Films Consultative Panel (FCP) made up of a cross section of the community. The FCP members were generally of a view that the film goes beyond classification guidelines and should not be allowed. Regarding violence, one FCP member called it “nauseating”, “masochistic” and “pornographic”, as he felt the filmmaker reveled in suffering, torture and gore. Another member noted “that the instructive killing methods are too detailed and gratuitous with explicit gore and violence”.

6 Members who recommended that the film be disallowed were generally of the view that this is a ‘revolting’ film which contains disturbing and explicit violent sequences. They opined that the killing methods are instructive, intense and excruciating, and would cause much discomfort in viewers, especially the sequence where a pregnant woman suffers a slow and painful death after being stabbed and then suffocated with a plastic bag whose air is slowly sucked out. The producer returns to this scene several times so the audience witnesses her slow and painful death.

7 Many scenes also come across as gratuitous, graphic and prolonged, such as the scene of the killer stabbing a man resulting in his intestines spilling out, and ending with the killer punching his intestines and forcing a pistol into his mouth before firing a shot. Another scene, at the beginning of the film, shows a security guard being strangled to death with a plastic cord and who fatally cuts a blood vessel in his neck in a desperate attempt to free himself. The close-ups of the strangling and the infliction of pain are played out in real-time.

8 The FCP Chairman, Mr Vijay Chandran, felt that the film has a compelling plot. However, he noted that the film stands apart from films of the slasher genre in that the filmmaker dwells interminably on the horrific suffering of each victim as the serial killer protagonist takes perverse pleasure in watching the victims die. There is an absence of psychological horror in the film and this is replaced instead by graphic violence. Mr Chandran was in favour of disallowing the film given that “it far exceeds the acceptable level of violence even under R21 guidelines”. Most members concurred that the violence is gratuitous and exploitative and were of the opinion that there are too many scenes requiring editing to bring it to what would be considered an acceptable level.

9 The BFC has taken into account the concerns expressed by the FCP. It has also considered the film’s graphic and prolonged violence, and its focus on detailed, gratuitous and instructional methods of killing. The BFC agrees with the FCP’s recommendation and has decided that the film is not allowed for all ratings (NAR).