

## **Despite Interesting Protagonist, *Hush* Fails to Tread New Ground**

These days, home invasion films set in remote cottages are a dime a dozen, but Mike Flannigan's 2016 film, *Hush*, promised something different than the typical fare. The protagonist in Flannigan's film is a writer who lost her hearing after a childhood bout of bacterial meningitis.

The film, which boasts less than 15 minutes of dialogue in its 81-minute run time, relies mainly on physical action between the Deaf woman, Maddie, and the masked man who torments her. I was intrigued by a horror film that hails a woman who is hard of hearing as the hero, but unfortunately, the plot leaves much to be desired.

A series of flimsy expositions deliver Maddie's backstory—first in a conversation with her neighbor and later, a similar one with her sister—detailing her latest book and her decision to isolate herself in the woods. Conversely, the audience isn't given any information about the masked man at all, not even his name (in the credits, he's only referred to as 'man'). It's never revealed why he chooses to go on his bloody rampage. Armed only with a knife and crossbow, he appears to just kill for the thrill of it.

After setting his sights on Maddie as his next victim, he quickly discovers she's Deaf by tapping on her window with the point of his knife and receiving no acknowledgment of the sound. Instead of using this discovery to his advantage by breaking in to murder her, he chooses to steal her cell phone. He then announces his presence by sending photos he took of her to her laptop.

Once Maddie is aware that her life is in danger, she and the man play a game of cat and mouse until Maddie, desperate to deescalate the situation, communicates with him by writing on her window that she hasn't seen his face and won't tell anyone what happened. In a move that is undoubtedly meant to shock the audience, the man responds by removing his mask. He clearly plans to kill her since he doesn't care if his identity is revealed. However, the action falls flat, and without the ghoulish white mask, what little fear the man conjured on-screen quickly dissolves. Why he bothered to obscure his identity at all when he seems intent on murdering everyone he comes across is never explained.

The bulk of the movie is taken up with Maddie's fruitless attempts at escape, earning her an arrow in the leg for her effort. Later, she wrestles the crossbow away from the man, though she lacks the physical strength to load an arrow into it herself. Her struggle loading the bow brings a brief moment of realism to the film, though instead of heightening the tension, it only added to my frustration that the man chose a weapon as bulky and awkward as a crossbow to begin with.

The film's highlight occurs toward the end; when bleeding out from her arrow wound, Maddie mentally plays out multiple escape plans and realizes she must instead fight for her life. This decision finally allows her to use her strengths as a Deaf woman to her advantage: she disorients the man with a loud smoke alarm after stabbing him in the leg. While the sound blasts painfully in his ear, she is, of course, unaffected. I'd been hoping to see that type of creativity from the

film all along. However, by the time she fatally wounds him with a corkscrew to the neck in the film's climax, it all feels like too little, too late.

Flannigan had the opportunity to create an inventive film utilizing a protagonist not often seen in horror films. Instead, he delivered an underdeveloped killer and a flimsy plot that was far more predictable than terrifying or innovative.