

## Document Citation

Title	<b>...And 'Frenzy' is one of his best films</b>
Author(s)	Howard D. Allen
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Frenzy, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1972

# ... and 'Frenzy' Is

## One of His Best Films

By HOWARD ALLEN

Alfred Hitchcock is back! Not the Hitchcock of "Marnie," "The Birds" and "Torn Curtain," all pallid imitations of the old master's earlier work, but a robust, vigorous Hitchcock, whose "Frenzy," is better by far than anything since "Psycho."

Hitchcock's locale is London, appropriately the scene of some of his greatest triumphs such as "The Lady Vanishes" and "The 39 Steps," for another examination of one of his favorite themes, the innocent victim caught up in a web of circumstances.

The victim this time is Richard Blaney (Jon Finch), a ne'er-do-well bartender whose best friend, Robert Rusk (Barry Foster), a fruit wholesaler, just happens to be a psychotic sex-killer, who strangles girls with his own tie and leaves their nude bodies in assorted delicious places, like sacks of potatoes or the middle of the Thames.

Rusk, unknown to Blaney, is a client of Blaney's ex-wife, Brenda (Barbara Leigh-Hunt), who runs a matrimonial agency. Since Rusk's taste runs mainly to masochists, she is disinterested in his patronage.

Her indifference costs her her life, but Blaney's troubles are just beginning at his ex-wife's end, for Chief Inspector Oxford (Alec McCowen) fashions a web of circumstantial evidence from the testimony of the agency secretary, the pub owner

(Bernard Cribbins) where Blaney was employed, and from the machinations of Rusk, who clinches the case by murdering Blaney's girlfriend, a barmaid (Anna Massey).

Blaney is convicted and sentenced to prison; he escapes and goes lethally in search of Rusk, whom he knows framed him.

Textbooks have been written about Hitchcock's art, his perfect sense of timing, his methods of framing nightmares in ordinary scenes. None of his art is gone consider, for example, how he curbs his camera at attention outside the matrimonial agency while the secretary goes upstairs to discover Mrs. Blaney's body, or how he retreats from Rusk's apartment, leaving the audience certain there is to be another murder.

But "Frenzy" is far too effective a chiller to be considered as art.

Another Hitchcock touch is in Anthony Shaffer's carefully fashioned screenplay, his unique blend of the macabre and the humorous. Consider the opening outside the House of Parliament, a politician is lauding himself concerning future governmental efforts to clean up the polluted Thames —

### FRENZY

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and then the first body comes floating along. A clubman looks at the tie around the body and says in horror: "I say, it's not my club tie, is it?"

Then there is Inspector Oxford, a steak-and-potatoes non-sense English diner, whose wife has fallen under the spell of French cookery. Hitchcock sums up the police investigation amid Inspector Oxford's discomfort at having to deal with fish head soup and other indigestible morsels.

Hitchcock builds his film, like a craftsman it will not

be easy to forget Rusk's harrowing trip aboard a truck full of potato sacks as he seeks to retrieve his stickpin, firmly clutched in the rigor mortis-stiffened hand of his latest victim.

The cast is mostly unfamiliar to English audiences although McCowen (the Inspector) is remembered for his remarkable "Hadrian VII" on Broadway but Hitchcock fashions an exceptionally unified film, in generally understated British fashion, from his talented ensemble.

"Frenzy" is the suspense film of the year and ranks with vintage Hitchcock.