

Screenplay Review

The Devil's Playground

Written by Matt O'Reilly

SYNOPSIS

The grim consequences that unfold after Paul Sprolin is sent to a maximum security State Penitentiary instead of a minimum security Work Camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico, November 1979.

REVIEW

Who needs Horror Films when you've got Real Life? A chilling, suspenseful, read. And even though it is BASED on a true story, I didn't doubt for a minute its authenticity.

The problem with this kind of material; *Attica* through to Hector Babenko's Masterpiece of the genre, *Carandiru*, is that they all portray the same themes – Internecine Gang warfare, Rape, institutional brutality and corruption – and eventually the same carnage. It doesn't matter how explicit the violence, audiences who watch this kind of film, have pretty much seen it all. However, Paul's predicament does carry you through the story from an original perspective which along with the best of its kind does place the horror in social context.

I was struck when reading Iris Chang's book '*The Rape of Nanking*' how she struggled to find an answer as to 'why' human beings can descend to such low depths of depravity and senseless violence. She talks about the phenomenon of "the transfer of oppression" and "...those with the least power are often the most sadistic if given the power over life and death over people even lower on the pecking order..." (p.217). The scale of events during the winter of 1937 in Nanking and those graphically described in '*The Devils' Playground*' were vastly different but the underlying possible explanations, strikingly similar. When people are dehumanized stripped of all dignity, treated no better than animals, we should not be too surprised when they act like animals.

The crude methods of 'divide and rule' at the New Mexico State Penitentiary during the late 1970's appears to have had some serious consequences. The script I think therefore deserves serious consideration and attention. You don't have to look very far in today's world to ask why.