

Director: Arne Mattsson. Producer: Tommy Iwering. Screenplay: Volodja Semijov. Music: Bjorn Jason Lind. Director of photography: Tomislav Pinter. Editor: Carl Skeppstedt. Costumes: Mago. Art director: Anders Barreus. Assistant art director: Bertha Turen. Production managers: Elisabeth Lee, Louise Turen. Sound mixer: Lasse Lundberg. Sound assistant: Ass Lindgren. Camera operator: Gordon Maceva. Continuity: Stina Klemming. Music editor: Clive Barnett. Dubbing mixer: Aad Wirtz. Makeup: John Kendal. Special effects: Richard Robberts, Martin Whittaker. Stills photographer: Andrew Peterson.

Cast: **Rod Taylor** (Inspector Bob McLane), Valerie Perrine (Marian McLane), Christopher Lee (Chief Superintendent Jonathan Rich), Sam Cook (Inspector Ray), Christine McKenna (Vickie), Frank Brannan (Johannes Krantz), Bill Redvers (police officer), Terrence Hardiman, Cyd Hayman, Mark Harrison, Petrina Derrington, Christopher Guinness, Heinz Hopf, Hjordis Peterson.

Synopsis: In the small, secluded Canadian town of Nelson, a maniac named Johannes Krantz (Frank Brannan) has murdered five women. When police finally locate the killer, he wounds Chief Superintendent Jonathan Rich (Christopher Lee) before being gunned down by Inspector Bob McLane (Rod Taylor). Meanwhile, Bob's marriage is in trouble. His wife, Marian (Valerie Perrine), leaves on a trip, supposedly to Bermuda with her friend, Vickie (Christine McKenna). Bob asks her not to go, but she insinuates that his failure in the bedroom is no incentive to stay. Later that day, Bob discovers that his wife is still in Nelson, staying at Vickie's apartment and having an affair with his friend and partner, Inspector Ray (Sam Cook). That night, a girl is murdered by a masked man using a straight razor, and another is murdered the same way the next evening. Jonathan is furious when the press sensationalizes the murderer as the reincarnation of Krantz. Bob points out to Ray that the copycat killer must be within the police department because the

press did not know before that Krantz wore a mask and used a straight razor. As a result, Ray tells Marian that he is worried that he will be forced to divulge to Jonathan and Bob that he has slept with her the two nights of the murders because she is his only alibi. The killer next murders a woman in her apartment, but he drops his razor when her small son appears. He removes his mask, but neither viewers nor the boy sees his face. Bob tells Ray to search the garbage chute there to see if the killer has dropped his mask in it. Then Bob fetches the boy and returns him to the scene of the crime. Ray greets him excitedly, with mask in hand, found in the garbage. Bob asks him to wear the mask so they can reenact the crime to find clues. Ray believes it is a waste of time but obliges him anyway. Bob then accuses Ray of being the killer. When Ray confesses he was with his wife, Bob retorts that his wife has been in Bermuda and shoots him. As he walks outside, Jonathan arrives, weak but able, with Marian, who has lied that she came home early after reading about the murders in the newspapers. Bob believes he has perpetrated the perfect crime and that Ray will be blamed for the three murders he really committed to help frame him. Nevertheless, Jonathan declares, "Very clever, but they'll get you." Bob just walks away, past Marian without acknowledging her, alone.

Commentary: This is a routine, depressing, and predictable murder mystery that stays afloat because of the solid central performance of **Rod Taylor**. Unfortunately, mystery fans will figure out in no time that Bob is framing his fellow cop for the murders he commits in reprisal for Ray's affair with his wife. The script never adequately "explains" Bob psychologically as a cuckold who would kill three innocent women to achieve his revenge. His wife's comment that implies his sexual failure helps viewers understand up to a point, but after that, the script hands Taylor a *Playboy* magazine to thumb through as evidence of his sexual frustration. Jonathan (Lee) eventually becomes suspicious of him when he happens upon the magazine in Bob's office. Opening it, he finds a knife inside and the centerfold model's neck cut by it. Subtle! (Lee does an admirable job of looking like a

serious police official who is merely performing his duty as he opens the magazine to the centerfold.) Taylor constructs his character with so much conviction that Bob's aberrant behavior almost seems credible.

Lee also provides a good performance, though in a mainly thankless supporting role. His tireless determination to understand and catch the killer, even from his hospital bed, paints him as a completely dedicated Chief Superintendent, one married to his job. Lee's gruff, authoritative tone often is tempered by his character's care and concern for officers. Jonathan cannot hide his sensitivity in spite of himself, which makes his character firm but likable. Still, most of Lee's dialogue is delivered from the bed and provides plot explication, not exactly a challenge for the actor.

The Swedish cast speak in English, and some of them were then dubbed by English-speaking actors. Others, most notably Sam Cook, were not dubbed, and their Swedish accents are detectable. (Maybe everyone involved thought the audience would register the accent as French Canadian!) A double was used for Valerie Perrine during her nude scene with Cook.

One of the film's faults is that the young women who are murdered are largely anonymous victims. The tragedy of their fates is never played out with any human depth or recognition. Viewers see the blood and the bodies but not the grief of family or friends. Even though, granted, the police must emotionally detach themselves to catch the killer, they never express the expected sense of urgency to find the murderer before he strikes again. Definitely a sequence is needed in the police headquarters that portrays the behind-the-scenes desperation to discover the perpetrator, with officers discussing the victims as human beings.

Probably due to *Mask of Murder's* low budget and short shooting schedule, prolific Swedish director Arne Mattsson often uses extremely long takes, during which he pans right and left repeatedly to avoid additional set-ups. In such shots, neither the performers' movements nor their dialogue seems to have any connection with the camera's placement or motion. The results often prove tedious.

Mattsson shot this, and many other movies, in his hometown of Uppsala and on nearby locations, which make a convincing enough stand-in for wintry Canada.

Mask of Murder began shooting on 28 Jan. 1985 and seems to have had theatrical releases in Germany and Sweden. It reached the U.K. on home video in 1988.

In the spring of 1985, Christopher Lee moved back to his homeland, the U.K. At the time, he told journalist David Del Valle, "I've made my point. I don't think the British casting directors, directors, or producers think of me now as they may conceivably have done before" (*Film and Filming*, Sept. 1985). Lee harbored another reason for going home, however. He faced a terrifying, grave situation: "When people talk about hell on earth," the actor said in 1992, "I know exactly what they mean, because each person's private hell is something he goes through while he is still alive. In 1985, I had to have open heart surgery to repair a leaking valve. It'd been getting worse. I got terribly tired just walking, ordinary walking, not climbing. My heart was beginning to enlarge and wasn't pumping properly. I got scared to death. I was 63. That was hell, believe me. I'm not talking about the pain; I'm talking about the fear. I was dead, actually clinically dead, during this operation. They had to stop and freeze my heart to repair the valve." About two months after the surgery, Lee was again working, playing golf, and looking fit.