



Psycho IV: the Beginning

US TV : 1990 : dir. Mick Garris : MTE / Smart Money : 100 min
 prod: : scr: Joseph Stefano : dir.ph.: Rodney Charters
[Ryan Finnigan](#)
 Anthony Perkins; Henry Thomas; Olivia Hussey; C C H Pounder; Warren Frost;
 Donna Mitchell

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5394	2.5	5	0	1,376	7	7	7	7	7	No	May 2001

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Perkins returns as Norman Bates, more paranoid than ever as he recalls his childhood and his loony, overbearing mother., played as a semi-slut by Hussey. Joseph Stefano, who did the screenplay for Hitchcock's original, wrote this one too - but **enough already**. Made for cable. **Average** "

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Once more into the Bates Motel, dear friends... Scripter Joseph Stefano, who adapted Robert Bloch's novel for Hitchcock's original "PSYCHO", returns with this made-for-cable tale purporting to explain why poor Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) became such a monster. Olivia Hussey makes a nicely demented Mother Bates, and Henry Thomas essays young Norman quite successfully. Rated "R" for sex, nudity and violence. *** "

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"The Norman Bates saga came to an end in this sorry made-for-TV finale. It's a shame because the plot at least offers up an intriguing twist as the now rehabilitated Norman (Anthony Perkins) discusses his fears over a radio phone-in. However, this promising idea is sloppily executed. Edited *[sic]* for some of its violence, and contains swearing and nudity. ** "

"Horror. When a supposedly reformed Norman Bates rings into a late-night radio talk show on the subject of matricide, his recollections start to disturb his personality once again. ** "

" "I've killed before and I'm going to have to do it again!" Back in his most famous role, Anthony Perkins' phone call to a radio talk show kicks off a series of flashbacks in which we meet the young Norman Bates (Henry Thomas) and his mother (Olivia Hussey). If you've ever wondered why he started dressing up in Ma's clothes, and who put that peep hole next to the shower, these and many other questions are answered here."

What's On TV note:

“Horror. A compelling look at Norman Bates’s formative years.”

“Horror. The mad killer (Anthony Perkins) as a rather disturbed child.”

“A compelling look at Norman Bates’ early years.”

Daily Mirror note:

“ **“E.T.”** star Henry Thomas as the young Norman Bates in an ingenious prequel that details the making of a monster. *** ”

The “Norman Bates saga”, as RT terms it, was only put to a decisive end with the premature death of Anthony Perkins, because this sorry mess leaves a yawning opening for further efforts to milk the tired franchise. “**PSYCHO IV**” ends with two of the corniest clichés a horror writer can devise – the burning down of the Bates house itself (a visitor draw on the Universal tour) and a final shot of the **still creaking** armchair in the root cellar as Norman’s thrice-murdered mother howls like a demented thing for further homicidal attention.

On the face of it, this entry in the series ought to be of real interest to the archive, since it’s more prequel than sequel, charting the events which led Bates to murder his mother at the age of 15. Ample potential there for a harrowing domestic thriller, cataloguing the cruelties and degradations which could drive a son to matricide and schizophrenia, and the casting lends piquant interest too, since mother is played by former child actress Olivia Hussey (“**BATTLE FOR THE VILLA FIORITA**”) while the 15-year old Norman is played by no less than Henry Thomas of “**E.T. THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL**”.

The script, however, is leering and moronic, and the director hasn’t the least notion of style or suspense. Despite the fact “child abuse” has become a staple diet of US TV movies, this one bizarrely chooses to downplay the aspect of parental cruelty – about the worst Norman suffers at his mother’s hands is that she impugns his manhood, while comporting herself like a harlot. “Her cruelty would come straight from the heart” Perkins remembers. Ultimately she acquires a live-in lover, who joins in her mockery of the son, and he poisons the pair of them in a hackneyed *are they dead yet? – no not quite* sequence. Mother Hussey earlier has a line intended to be darkly ironic – “Someday I’m gonna wish I’d been firmer on you!”, but the truth of course is that she was, and the film simply dodges it. Instead of a baroque “**MOMMIE DEAREST**” style tale of demented female cruelty, Norman Bates comes out of this merely as a teenager who couldn’t handle his mother’s new attachment. No dark family secrets there.

We see Norman at the age of 6 at the funeral of his father, stung to death by bees. Here he’s played – but only briefly – by Ryan Finnigan. (In “**PSYCHO 2**”, incidentally, the child Norman had been played in a couple of momentary inserts by Perkins’ own son, Osgood.) The main action centres on Thomas, and immediately the project comes unstuck, because Thomas in no wise resembles the young Anthony Perkins, either physically or temperamentally. Perkins was tall, spare, angular, with a nervously ingratiating manner, readily making idle quips with passing strangers who chance by his freeway-circumvented motel. Thomas is brooding and sullen from the outset, with none of the neurotic tics or compulsive habits established for the character in “**PSYCHO**”. Thomas himself was 19, incidentally, as though four years difference in mid-adolescence wouldn’t be apparent to everybody. Similarly no attempt is made to convey the period of these flashbacks, beyond the fact the first local girl to fling herself at Norman needs his assistance to unclasp her bra. We are back in the 1950s, but you wouldn’t know it.

Tying these episodes together is the mature Bates, on the night of his birthday, announcing on live radio that he feels impelled to kill again. The show in question is KCK's "Talk of the Town" phone-in on matricides, and host Fran Ambrose (C.C.H. Pounder) a black female version of Jerry Springer – sensation-seeking, utterly without scruple, crass and manipulative. She teases out gradually that Norman is now happily married to a psychiatrist from his former

clinic, who has conceived a child by him against their express agreement. He is convinced his homicidal inclinations are genetic, and that any child of his cannot be permitted to be born. (Luca Brasi, in the novel of **"THE GODFATHER"**. took much the same view – he waited for the birth of his child and then forced the midwife to carry it straight down to the hotel furnace and incinerate it alive. Now *that's* horror for you.)

I'm quite certain **"PSYCHO IV"** did not set out to convey a misogynist message – it hasn't the wit to contrive at such an idea – yet none of the women portrayed are entirely innocent of blame. Norman's mother, of course, is the architect of his derangement and homicidal rampages, but the phone-in host callously exploits him, the first girl he murders wins little audience sympathy, and even his wife betrays his trust in her by conceiving a child against his wishes. It is the "Woman's Right To Choose" – the film inadvertently suggests – whatever her husband's needs or feelings, and to deceive him into the bargain if she decides having a child would be "good for him". An unintended subtext, but it's palpably there.

Ultimately any film with a sequential number in the title has an exponential probability of being dross, and dross this decidedly is, a wasted opportunity to explore the darker side of parental possessiveness and self-repression. Thomas disappoints, but was clearly miscast, and Hussey simply hasn't the dramatic range her part demanded. If it weren't for Bernard Hermann's original score leaping out at us from the title credits, and the use of the authentic Bates Motel location, one could be forgiven for doubting any relationship between this and the original. **To be avoided.**

See subject index under **CRUELTY / NEGLECT / MALTREATMENT** and **HORROR**.