

I watched most of *Pretenders*, but I couldn't finish it. After Erik pulled out a knife and Anna said that they had just been pretending to be in love, I couldn't handle it anymore and bailed. It was so mind-numbingly boring for the first hour and twenty minutes, then suddenly murderous? The only character I liked at all (or even could tolerate) was Juhan, just because his perpetual expression, halfway between annoyed and depressed, more or less reflected my own mood. I understand that it was a movie about conflict-averse people who can't make decisions, but my god, why did no one do *anything* during the first hour? The lack of action meant that all I had to focus on was the abject failure of any character to make normal conversation. Some valiant attempts at small talk were made, but all floundered quickly on the reef of inexplicable sex revelations, career mishaps, and intense intimate questions. I started laughing during the scene with Anna and Erik along the beach, where she casually mentions that she and Juhan don't constrain each other's sexuality, or whatever odd phrase she said. That's not a normal thing to say to someone you just met! It's just horribly awkward. It's true that sharing a house unexpectedly might make for some weird interactions, but this seemed extreme. If it had seemed intentionally awkward, I would have been able to handle it, but it seemed as if the filmmakers considered this to be as serious as Bergman's *Persona*. Another thing: *there were no jokes*. At one point, a joke occurred off screen and we see the characters laughing, but apparently the writers were not brave enough to attempt any humor in the script itself. It is true that a film can be good without being funny, but I firmly believe that no bad movie has the right to go without a joke.

That said, there was the alcoholic lawn-mower. I wish the movie had been about her and her lawn-mowing adventures rather than two couples who have never had a normal, human interaction. That scene where she says "Push, dammit" and rides off wobbling on her bicycle was gold. I also appreciated the meta-joke that Anna and Juhan are living in a literal glass house, and should probably not be throwing stones at the other couple. I have the horrible suspicion that was meant to be taken as a grand metaphor, though, and not a piece of satire.

In conclusion: why was this movie made, and why oh why was it an hour and forty-five minutes long?