

Movie Review: "Disturbia"™

by David_Elliott

If you're going to remake (or salute) a Hitchcock classic, it's fine to start off like "Disturbia." It is not fine to end up like "Disturbia."

Probably the title, and the way D.J. Caruso directed a grim road crash at the start, tell us that crafty homage to the Old Master is not quite what the movie has most in mind. We can guess its target demographic, and it's hard to blame Caruso for some shock morbidity, since Hitch was roundly criticized for just that with "Psycho" in 1960.

Caruso and the writers are bouncing off Hitchcock's 1954 marvel "Rear Window." Instead of James Stewart strapped into a cast and wheelchair, we now have Shia LaBeouf as Kale. After socking a teacher, the teen for three months must wear a leg collar that signals the cops if he leaves his home.

Stewart was a photographer, voyeurizing a huge, deadly, gray-haired hulk (Raymond Burr) across the courtyard of his apartment complex. Bored Kale voyeurizes a huge, deadly, gray-haired hulk (David Morse) who lives next door. Rather than a sullen wife-disposer like Burr, he is a serial killer of women and likes to coyly wink at his viciousness.

Instead of Grace Kelly dropping by as Stewart's vampy vision, helping him stake out Burr, we get Sarah Roemer as a coltish dish. She is herself heavily voyeurized. Roemer is flirty and fun with LaBeouf, one of the most appealing young actors ever since kid time on TV.

But sly analogies degrade, and generic sludge rises: buddy comic relief by perky Aaron Yoo; a shocker juxtaposed with a smooch; Kale's nice mom lured into neighboring hell; Morse, unlike barely talking Burr, purring sub-Lecter comments like, "The world is in a heightened state of paranoia."

Instead of Burr's big, suspicious trunk we get the Home Depot Horror Ensemble: hidden doors, cellars of death, an oozing pit, heads rotting into skulls. Instead of Stewart wittily popping off flash bulbs to hold off Burr, LaBeouf is armed with all the hip current gadgets, like cell phones and video cameras and playback devices full of "Blair Witch Project" grain (often teasing, or just befuddling).

The old Hitch witchery is in watching pieces fall into place like pegs, inlaid expertly. Here the pieces are mostly body parts, and old floorboards creak and nothing rivals Stewart's superbly predatory camera. What began as a Hitch party turns to gore, with a closing nod to YouTube.

RATINGS4 STARS - Excellent.3 STARS - Worthy.2 STARS - Mixed.1 STAR - Poor.0 - Forget It (a dog) A DreamWorks SKG release. Director: D.J. Caruso. Writers: Christopher B. Landon, Carl Ellsworth. Cast: Shia LaBeouf, Sarah Roemer, David Morse, Aaron Yoo, Matt Craven. Running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Rated PG-13. 2 stars.

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