

Movie Review: 'Fracture'

by David_Elliott

When an actor becomes so imperial in evil authority as Anthony Hopkins in "The Silence of the Lambs," that can distort his career. Charles Laughton never quite shook off Capt. Bligh, and Peter Lorre was chased through his American movies by the chill Germanic shadow of "M."

'FRACTURE' - Ryan Gosling and Anthony Hopkins star in the suspense thriller 'Fracture.' CNS Photo courtesy of Sam Emerson. Hopkins' wonderfully decent work post-"Silence" in films like "The Human Stain," "Shadowlands," "Hearts of Atlantis" and "The World's Fastest Indian" was widely ignored. In "Fracture," Hopkins does a new variant on grisly Hannibal Lecter as Ted Crawford, a rich aeronautics genius who loves his trophy wife so much that he calmly plots to murder her (for infidelity) and beat the rap.

As the wife, gifted Embeth Davidtz is a hot body made cold. And Rosamund Pike is more plot fodder as the other key woman, a sort of trophy lawyer who makes her move on the young hunk who will try to convict Crawford, the L.A. prosecutor Willy Beachum (Ryan Gosling).

Even before he has made the upward jump to her big private firm, they've had sex and are sharing a family Thanksgiving dinner. Such filler can be almost a joke without hurting much. What wounds the film is that old pro Hopkins and up-and-comer Gosling never have enough good, building scenes to make their duel of wills grip and fold us in.

After he's put the wife into a coma and neatly hidden the pistol that did it, the mad genius gives the young attorney his most baleful Lecter stare. Gosling, with a sprinkle of country accent to make him seem foxy, almost visibly wilts, but he has the inside advantage. Modern lawyer movies, geared to box office, favor the cocky stud over the old bull.

Of course, the "kid" must first be taken down a few pegs by the evil one. That way he will grow into quick wisdom, even if this means such sadly cheese-sliced scenes as Beachum hanging around the comatose wife, full of sympathy. Meanwhile, Crawford returns to admiring the metal gravity machines he builds, toys that represent his frigid soul.

Gregory Hoblit directed with adroit, empty skill. It is typical of the film's bland facility that Beachum attends the elegant Disney Hall but ignores the beautiful music on stage, and that his bedroom has Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk posters but we never see him savoring jazz.

Gosling is a smart young actor, yet he seems too much a preening puppy to handle a grizzled dominator like Hopkins. And the plot twist, by which the freshly humanized Beachum finally gains an edge, is too dumbly clever. Crawford, a chess master of immorality, would have seen it coming.

Movies like this, side ventures of the John Grisham franchise, are meant to entertain with "substance" that never risks actual depth. Watching in mild suspense, we might as well be the balls rolling down tracks in Crawford's toys.

RATINGS 4 STARS - Excellent. 3 STARS - Worthy. 2 STARS - Mixed. 1 STAR - Poor. 0 - Forget It (a dog)

A New Line Cinema release. Director: Gregory Hoblit. Writers: Daniel Pyne, Glenn Gers. Cast: Anthony Hopkins, Ryan Gosling, David Strathairn, Embeth Davidtz, Rosamund Pike, Joe Spano. Running time: 1 hour, 42 minutes. Rated R. 2 stars.

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