

Plot lines compete against each other in 'Suburbicon'

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 104 min.

Manicured, planned communities aren't all they're cracked up to be. The facade of these neighborhoods being a happy and contented place fall apart in *Suburbicon*. In this film, it's pretty clear from the onset that beneath the glossy surface are desperate, opportunistic, and even racist individuals.

It's an intriguing starting point and there are plenty of important issues raised in the feature, but it doesn't all fit together as effectively as one might hope.

Perhaps some of these issues may have to do with the screenplay itself. The film is based on material written in the mid 80s by Joel and Ethan Cohen (who at the time had just finished *Blood Simple* and were about to start work on *Raising Arizona*).

However, the final draft has been heavily rewritten by the film's director George Clooney and Grant Heslov. In several respects, the final product ends up having a schizophrenic tone which may have something to do with the different voices taking a stab at the script.

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Set in the late 1950s, much of the plot is told through the eyes of Nicky (Noah Jupe), a young boy living in the town of Suburbicon with his dad Gardner (Matt Damon), mother Rose and aunt Margaret (both played by Julianne Moore).

A home invasion that ends in tragedy leaves the family in shock. But even stranger and more sinister motives come to light as the child begins to put the pieces together. While all of this is happening, there's a second story occurring on a neighboring property involving new arrivals.

The Meyers (Karimah Westbrook and Leith M. Burke) and their son Andy (Tony Espinosa) are a black family harassed by locals that aren't happy with new integration policies.

The movie is lovely to look at and there are exceptional scenes. The arrival of an insurance claims adjuster named Roger (Oscar Isaac) introduces tension and laughs as he pesters characters with what might have actually happened during the violent assault.

There's also a well-shot and suspenseful scene as Nicky is forced to hide under a bed during a confrontation. The violent encounter plays out in a long take, but the camera never moves from under the bed, leaving viewers to try and figure out who is doing what to whom and adding a surprise or two when all is revealed. It's an impressively captured sequence.

However, there appear to be two different films fighting for our attention. The main thread is darkly comic, as we watch an elaborate plan slowly unravel and dissolve into complete chaos. By complete contrast, the other material involving the Meyers family is heavy and dramatic. In cutting back and forth, it quickly becomes clear that the two stories don't merge particularly well.

The Meyers are treated horribly by citizens and the movie continually breaks away to deal with their plight. These moments of discrimination and cruelty are sharply different in tone from sequences that involve an adult character awkwardly attempting to hide a body and make an escape using a child's bicycle. Young Nicky and Andy are really the only connection between the two stories and the few conversations they share about dealing with adversity don't end up paying off in a satisfying manner.

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Suburbicon is always interesting and has individual moments that are memorable and eye-catching, but the two tonally disparate plotlines work against each other in regards to building character, as well as generating suspense and tension. The attempt to critique the suburban sprawl is admirable, but this effort is hit-and-miss in execution.

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