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

Running Time: 127 minutes

Sometimes it's best to just avoid advance word on a film. *Hereditary* has been getting a great deal of festival press and raves, with many suggesting it's the scariest thing to hit cinema screens in years (of course, all of this really depends on what frightens you on a deep level). So yes, there seems to be a bit of hyperbole developing that no film can possibly live up to. However, this is still an effective and well acted horror picture.

The movie follows the trials of an odd family. Artist/miniature builder Annie (Toni Collette) and her husband Steve (Gabriel Byrne) take their teenaged son Peter (Alex Wolff) and younger daughter Charlie (Milly Shapiro) to a funeral home where the family matriarch is being buried.

It seems clear that none of the adults appeared to like the person being mourned. Other fractures within the family become evident between Annie, Steve and Peter. Over the following days, some members start having strange visions of their elderly relative lurking in the shadows. When another tragedy occurs, things get freakier and Annie becomes obsessed with determining the cause of these seemingly supernatural occurrences.

This is something of a low-key horror picture, taking inspiration from European chillers like the films of Roman Polanski. Or at least, that's the impression one gets as relationships between family members slowly unravel. Most of the characters presented are frosty, but the excellent

performances are strong enough to keep viewers intrigued, even if their behavior isn't always relatable. In some ways, the film is attempting to tie together themes of guilt and grief, as well as how the character's bizarre responses are in some way passed down from their parents. It does offer food for thought, although a few decisions are so eccentric that they seem implausible.

Perhaps the biggest highlight of the movie might be its uniquely impressive cinematography. The film itself and family home look crisp, sharp and icy with the camera often keeping a detached distance from the proceedings. There are plenty of great angles involving Annie's miniatures, even moving up close and into the dioramas that add to the sense of unease. And the lighting is very strong, keeping figures half obscured in the dark corners of the home. These moments provide viewers with the film's best jolts.

The mood and atmosphere is excellent, although there are a few minor problems. Again, a lot of this comes down to what personally resonates with the viewer. With a running time of over two hours, there are certain scenes that come across as repetitive and unnecessary. As all comes to light (or falls into darkness), things also get too literal. The sinister force and inner turmoil on display is much more unsettling when it isn't as clearly defined.

When the truth is finally revealed, it somehow loses its fright value and everything becomes a bit, well, sillier. However, just about everyone around me seemed terrified, which just goes to show that what gets under one person's skin may have little effect on someone else.

While I'm reticent to agree that it is the masterpiece that a few quotes running on TV claim, I certainly don't want it to seem like I'm coming down too hard on *Hereditary*. This is a very strong and effective horror picture. And it is all the more impressive considering that it arrives from a first-time feature filmmaker. In the end, those who enjoy being scared will find themselves taking in an unhealthy (in the best possible way) dose of spine-tingling chills.

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