Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Rating: «« out of «««««
Running Time: 88 minutes

The second of three sequels arriving this week at theaters is *Unfriended: Dark Web*, a follow-up to a 2014 horror picture that honestly, I had forgotten that I had actually seen and reviewed. As one might have guessed, that film didn't make much of an impression on me.

The latest tries to throw in a new wrinkle or two, ultimately playing the series as more like an anthology than a direct follow-up. In the end, it may intrigue kids, but more than likely won't do much for anyone out of their teens.

Like the original, the entire story plays out over a computer monitor. Matias (Colin Woodell) is excited to set up a used laptop that he has acquired. He quickly Skypes with girlfriend Amaya (Stephanie Nogueras), attempting to repair some of the looming issues in their relationship and then contacts friends (Chelsea Alden, Connor Del Rio, Betty Gabriel, Andrew Lees, Rebecca Rittenhouse) for a "game night" to be played online. Suddenly, Matias begins receiving strange messages sent to the previous owner that become more and more threatening over the course of the evening. Soon, all the character's lives are in danger from a strange, pixelated figure.

The filmmakers and cast try admirably to create a sense of tension, but the set up and necessity to keep events on a single computer monitor is just too limited.

Early on, there's a funny gag involving the lead trying to sign in on the computer and a scene

towards the close that allows a character to use their mobile phone and head out of their house.

However, the style and concept is just too sedentary to hold up for the length of a full feature. It's difficult to generate tension and the feeling can't be sustained watching others staring into their monitors.

This format also results in some clumsy attempts at character building. All of the information about the leads is given via online chats and not through their actions. Essentially, the movie has to find a way to make its leads relatable without physical activity.

Matias tries to install a program he thinks will help foster communication with his hearing-impaired girlfriend, and two others reveal that they are having a relationship and preparing to tell family members.

Admittedly, this is really all that can be done to develop the group, but it seems forced and doesn't engage the viewer. Most of the time, they're chatting idly and goofing with one another, making one feel like an unwanted intruder rather than a part of the proceedings.

It's also quite slow moving. The messages come in slowly and only become threatening late in the film. By the time the sinister plot is revealed, the movie is almost two thirds done.

And this is also one of those movies that seems all the more far-fetched and ridiculous when one questions what was going on and how it was accomplished.

It asks that viewers believe the antagonist could predict every action taken by the leads. Again, with a different format this might have been forgiven, but when a movie is already struggling with the confines of its set-up, it is all the more off-putting.

They say motion pictures are all about capturing movement and striking imagery in order to tell a story with power and vitality. *Unfriended: Dark Web* tries to break from that tradition.

I would suggest that the cast are fine and when they are allowed to move around, this movie is slightly more effective than its predecessor.

However, the film can’t overcome its constraints and ultimately proves that it is hard to engage viewers with static characters and a bland visual palette.

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For the Sun