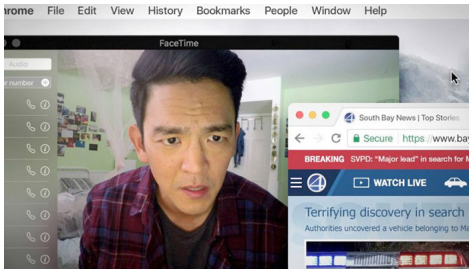


Searching improves on a few computer-screen movie conventions

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 31 August 2018 04:00



Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 102 minutes

Despite the inherent pitfalls and warnings about spending too much time on computers, phones and laptops, it seems we just can't get away from them, even when we go to the movies. The proliferation of cyber-thrillers appears to be gaining momentum, with the release of the sequel *Unfriended: Dark Web* last month and this week's picture.

It certainly isn't without its faults, but *Searching* does improve on the previously mentioned feature and manages to avoid a few of the pitfalls seen in other titles.

Telling its story using nothing but computers, phones, security cameras and television news broadcasts, the plot follows David Kim (John Cho). It begins as David, his wife Pamela (Sara Sohn) and daughter Margot (Michelle La) create their own profiles on a computer. Videos are shown of an idyllic life before tragedy strikes the family.

Moving forward many years, the relationship between David and his daughter has become strained. When the teen suddenly disappears, the panicked father goes through her laptop and social networking sites to find her. He soon discovers surprising details about Margot's life. When David contacts the authorities, Detective Vick (Debra Messing) takes over the investigation, but continues to coach him on how he can help find his daughter.

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One of the big problems this reviewer has noted with this type of films in general is how to deal with a plot that begins and ends with a character sitting in front of a screen.

For a visual medium, it's all very sedentary, not to mention difficult to develop roles when we rarely see more than a cursor move around a monitor and a few conversions via video chat. This movie seems very aware of this problem and does its best to keep things moving. It changes devices and formats frequently as David attempts to solve the mystery. This includes seeking out videos, moving to different locales and following leads while video chatting with Vick and setting up security cameras to watch others. One can even see the camera moving around the computer screen to create a sense of motion.

The techniques employed do help keep things more interesting than they would be otherwise.

Another big plus is star Cho, who does extremely well in conveying the gamut of emotions that include concern, frustration and panic — essentially, everything that a parent would feel under such circumstances. His work also does a lot to draw viewers into the proceedings. In other features like this, we usually don't get to see much more than a joking conversation followed by screams and murder.

Still, there are a few hurdles that the movie can't quite get over.

During the early set-up introducing the family, and during happier times and the immediate tragedy that follows, the filmmakers introduce a big score and montage to try and elicit an emotional response from viewers. It doesn't quite work and feels almost like something you'd see in an advertisement. And considering so much of the movie attempts to show people simply using technology, the intrusion of a swelling composition into events in order to highlight the sadness seems phony and forced.

The climax itself is far too neat, tidy and conventional for its own good. It also employs the same use of music, which again feels inauthentic and clumsy. For a crime-thriller about the disappearance and potential death of a teen, the flick ends up feeling overly warm and fuzzy.

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Regardless, it could have been a whole lot worse.

Searching doesn't quite deliver suspense and chills with perfection, but it is a little more convincing than similar features, thanks to the lead performance and attempts to maintain a sense of motion and forward progress. I certainly can't see it being a film that will date well, but it should provide reasonable entertainment for those who want their movies to emulate what they see on their own phones and computers right now.

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