

'Greta' takes stalker creepiness to a new level

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

Running Time: 98 minutes

Over the years, I've heard more than a few complaints from friends that moms (and parents in general) can be really suffocating. The new horror/thriller *Greta* uses these feelings and concerns, and then takes them to extreme ends. While many of the dramatic beats are admittedly familiar, it's all done with a dose of grim humor and far more technical flair than other movies of its ilk.

Frances McCullen (Chloë Grace Moretz) is a young woman still reeling from the recent death of her mother. Despite attempts made by roommate Erica (Maika Monroe) to get her out and socializing, Frances still feels lonely and isolated. After finding a forgotten purse on the subway, the protagonist takes it upon herself to return the lost item to its rightful owner.

The appreciative Greta Hideg (Isabelle Huppert) introduces herself as a widow, living alone now that her adult daughter has moved to Paris. The pair immediately form a connection, with Frances still feeling a need for motherly support, and Greta presumably missing the bond formed with her own daughter. If this all sounds like a sweet and gentle little drama, that is decidedly not how events eventually play out.

Yes, the story isn't the most original in the world. As one might guess, someone isn't being truthful about their history or intentions and may even be harboring psychotic tendencies. While the mother-daughter scenario is a slight variation on the formula, we've seen films about disturbed stalkers and/or crazy roommates for decades now.

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However, what sets this picture apart are the note-perfect performances, as well as the unsettling mood and tension. This is all thanks to director Neil Jordan (*The Company of Wolves*,

The Crying Game

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Interview with the Vampire

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In Dreams

,
Byzantium

), who knows his way around suspense and horror pictures. As mentioned, much of the film relies on its two main characters and the performers make the most of the material.

Moretz plays the sweet, earnest, downcast loner hoping to find a surrogate mother quite well, and is likable in the role. However, Huppert really gets to steal the show, revealing more and more layers of... well... insanity as the story progresses. It's both disturbing and darkly amusing to see this woman transform from a quirky and sympathetic eccentric to an unhinged stalker, and finally a deadly and diabolical force. For Greta, no one will defy her unique and terrifying brand of mothering, and Huppert goes to town with the part.

Jordan also uses the camera to excellent effect, first hanging on long shots of Greta appearing and disappearing in the frame, then suddenly standing in the street and staring at Frances. It all helps to generate tension as more is revealed and events spiral out of control. There is also a memorably striking shot of the physical environment closing in on the protagonist, a literal image of how boxed in one can feel under severe supervision.

The last third of the movie features a continually heightened sense of tension. Only a director this skilled can use both sound and image to make a simple shot of a cup spinning in a microwave so darn unsettling.

As readers might guess, the nature of this type of story means that several genre tropes come into play toward the close. However, the excellent cast and the technical skill on display do make up for its more familiar elements. *Greta* is a quirky horror flick that won't appeal to everyone, but will provide plenty of squirmy moments for anyone looking to be given the creeps. If nothing else, it certainly provides ample evidence that at some point, we all must cut the proverbial cord and move forward with our lives on our own terms.

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