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

Running Time: 116 minutes

It has to be tough to follow up a massive critical and financial success with another film in a similar mold. *Get Out* was a stunning directorial debut for Jordan Peele, combining scares and deeper subtext about racism. The film did it so well that it earned numerous Academy Award nominations and ultimately won an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay. That’s a nearly impossible act to repeat and admittedly, the new film *Us* isn’t quite as strong.

It delivers plenty of tension and scares, but the undertones aren’t quite as sharp as in its predecessor. Still, even with its flaws, the movie is better than most horror flicks out there.

The film begins with a young girl vacationing in Santa Cruz and experiencing a mysterious event involving a doppelganger that results in deep, lasting trauma. Decades later, a grown up and married, but no less tightly-wound Adelaide (Lupita Nyong’o) heads out to a summer home with husband Gabe (Winston Duke) and children Zora (Shahadi Wright Joseph) and Jason (Evan Alex). After visiting the same boardwalk, the heroine begins to feel the same uncomfortable sensations that she previously experienced as a child. Things get even worse when malevolent, scissor-wielding copies of family members show up at the house and go on the offensive.

Events build more slowly in this effort, with much of the first third devoted to the lead characters and the family dynamic. They’re all quite likable people, although there are a few scenes without any obvious conflict that don’t seem entirely necessary. But when the action starts, it doesn’t slow down, with harrowing attack after harrowing attack following for the remainder of the running time. The copies play for keeps and there are numerous sequences featuring each character fighting against being killed and replaced by their attackers. These doppelgangers are chillingly portrayed, each with their own verbal ticks and unusual physical mannerisms that are extremely unsettling.

While the violence itself is incredibly well-handled and one will root for the family members to pull through, this feature follows a series of action beats and doesn’t appear to have as much subtext. From this reviewer’s perspective, there are some brief bits involving a cast member that comments ever-so-briefly on concepts of beauty. Overall, the film might be trying to show a neglected segment of humanity fighting back against the higher ups, or beneath the surface, compare how similar the two warring copies of the same person may be. However, my first impressions were that the emphasis was on the scares themselves, and that the deeper meaning wasn’t quite as sharply tuned this time out.

The final act offers a reasonably effective twist and some explanation for the events, but most viewers will have many unanswered questions about the practical facts and motivations for how this terror came to exist. In the end, the movie actually feels like an extended and very graphic episode of *The Twilight Zone* (which, appropriately enough, writer/director Peele is rebooting in a few weeks). Truthfully, it is unfair to make comparisons between the filmmaker’s previous endeavor and his latest tale. But by the time the credits roll, *Us* offers a little food for thought, but hasn’t made quite as grand or cutting a statement. This movie ends up more concerned with chilling viewers and providing gallows humor along the way. By those standards, it manages to do so effectively.

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