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

Running Time: 130 minutes

As we all know, murder-mystery films have been something of a staple since the beginning of cinema. As a result, it can be difficult to get all that excited about another one making the rounds. Yet while whodunits are nothing new, *Knives Out* manages to spin these familiar tropes in entertaining new ways and uses crafty dialogue and an exemplary cast to really amuse and charm viewers. It’s a heck of a lot of fun.

The story revolves around the members of a wealthy and eccentric American family headed by crime novelist Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer). When a tragedy occurs in the household, a trio of men is sent to investigate, including a pair of police detectives (Lakeith Stanfield and Noah Segan), and an odd private detective with a southern drawl named Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig). Blanc admits soon after his arrival that he doesn’t even know who has hired him. But together, the group conducts interviews with Harlan’s nurse Marta (Ana de Armas), and various members of the family (including Jamie Lee Curtis, Chris Evans, Michael Shannon, Don Johnson and Toni Collette), trying to get to the bottom of what happened.

It’s difficult to discuss the details of the feature without giving too much away, so I’ll try to keep things general. All of the suspects have something to gain financially from the death, and there

are a great many complications that arise when the film cuts between characters being interviewed, as they often give hazy or differing accounts while being asked identical questions. The film comes out of the gate racing and provides plenty of chuckles with the defensive, suspicious, and ultimately greedy behavior on display.

The screenplay by director Rian Johnson (*Brick, Looper*) does a great job of both paying homage to familiar murder mystery concepts and poking fun at them. Many family members are at odds for one reason or another, leading to plenty of biting verbal jabs as the group bickers. Even the investigators are not immune to some snarky barbs from this wealthy and affluent family. The characters have some entertaining ticks as well, including the nurse’s propensity for feeling nauseous whenever she has to lie.

And private detective Blanc’s accent is pretty outrageous, but actor Craig manages to somehow play it just right and avoid straight out parody. Instead, his mannerisms add a layer to the role, as viewers try to get a handle on whether he truly is clever or if it’s just an act.

This movie also benefits from spinning some old ideas in different directions (including an unusual take on a chase). And while the feature is a sprightly, energetic, and amusing mystery on its own, it earns extra points by taking on some of the conservative views of this aristocratic clan and their hypocritical behavior (as well as by proxy, anyone who supports the far right). It might ruffle the feathers of a few sensitive viewers, but there is some sharp and biting commentary beneath the surface.

Truthfully, perhaps the only minor criticism this reviewer can raise about the picture is that for all of the red herrings, the final explanation and reveal isn’t quite as complicated as anticipated. Of course, this may have more to do with having seen more murder-mysteries in a lifetime than I can remember and already knowing all of the tricks of the trade.

Still, one can’t deny that this picture works better than most and will provide whodunit fans with a great night of entertainment. Thanks to the great cast and cutting, sharply written screenplay with more on its mind than simply murder, *Knives Out* is a hoot that should keep audiences enraptured for the entirety of its running time.

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