

'The Rental' is a well-acted if overly-familiar genre pic

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 31 July 2020 03:25



Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 88 minutes

This title from IFC Films will be available for streaming on most platforms July 24.

If you and some friends are thinking about booking a nice vacation property for the weekend, the new film *The Rental* might make you think twice about the idea. Most assuredly not sponsored by Airbnb, the feature attempts a modest twist on the tried formula of taking a group of individuals, putting them in a remote location and allowing them to be picked off by a psycho. It's very well performed and has some tense moments, although the entire concept does feel overly familiar and could have used an extra surprise or two to help it stand apart from others of its ilk.

The story begins with Charlie (Dan Stevens) and co-worker Mina (Sheila Vand) planning a getaway with their significant others at a posh and expensive home on the ocean coast. After a strange booking issue, Charlie eventually nabs the spot. He and his wife Michelle (Alison Brie) drive to the location with his troubled sibling Josh (Jeremy Allen White) and his girlfriend, the aforementioned Mina. The foursome arrives at the gorgeous home and is let in by Taylor (Toby Huss), the creepy and perhaps racist brother of the homeowner.

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After enjoying some recreational drugs, difficulties ensue as co-workers Charlie and Mina begin flirting and cracks in the group's relationships begin to surface. Things get even worse when it becomes clear that they're all being watched by a shadowy figure.

To its benefit, the performers are excellent and a lot of time is spent developing the characters. In fact, beyond a few awkward encounters with Taylor, the first half of the movie is really about their fraying connections. Charlie and Mina seem a little too familiar and close with one another, leading to concerns from Josh and eventually Michelle. As events progress, Michelle becomes frustrated when her plans are pushed aside by the group.

Mina feels anger toward the property owner for having her rental offer rejected, bringing it up with the caretaker. Even the brothers have a testy relationship, with Josh being seen as the black sheep of the family. A lot of attention goes into the personal dynamics. It's good for the characters and when they make bigger mistakes, it creates drama, but it does cause one to wonder if these people are ultimately going to be their own worst enemies.

When the eventual villain does appear in later sections of the movie, the figure is an intimidating and threatening presence with a diabolical and unsettling fetish. Although the lighting feels a bit too dark in certain scenes, the camera does a fine job of creating an eerie atmosphere and effectively placing the stalker in the background. As the danger reaches its peak, there are also a couple of anxious moments and one grimly funny scene as the characters attempt to take care of a problem at the edge of a cliff. These scenes are well-handled and effective.

Still, there are some stumbling blocks with the script. Despite the character focus, genre clichés are still being utilized throughout. The leads do silly things and make bad decisions. They even begin separating themselves from each other while being hunted down by a familiar, *Friday the 13th* -style killer.

There's not a lot to the finale that comes as a surprise or bucks trends in any significant way. As such, while the film ends up feeling like a well-performed and classier take on a slasher film, it still relies on tropes and doesn't truly distinguish itself.

This is a decent enough effort for horror fans that offers talent in front of and behind the camera,

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but one that hits all of the expected beats. Those looking for a capable slasher film will be reasonably entertained by *The Rental*, but may also wonder why the movie didn't attempt to stretch itself and throw in more curves and shocks along the way.

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