

'The Night' is an atmospheric chiller

Written by gallupsun
Thursday, 28 January 2021 19:25

By Glenn Kay

For the Sun

Rating: 3 out of 4 stars

Running Time: 104 minutes

This title from IFC Midnight will be released in select theaters and on digital & cable VOD Jan. 29.

Horror films are typically low-budget affairs. Sometimes this means that production levels aren't quite on par with bigger Hollywood features, but these efforts also carry a lower financial risk that can occasionally result in more creative freedom and new approaches. *The Night* is a psychological horror picture that resembles many other haunted house tales. But while the story is familiar, this project depicts an immigrant Iranian family and much of the dialogue is spoken in the Farsi language.

Additionally, the characters' issues are also unique and specific enough to add something fresh to the mix. So much so that this debut title from writer/director Kourosh Ahari is the first U.S.-based production in decades to be approved for a theatrical release in Iran (which should occur shortly).

The story begins with Babak Naderi (Shahab Hosseini), his wife Neda (Niousha Noor) and their one-year-old infant Shabnam (Leah Oganyan) at a gathering with friends in Los Angeles. While they appear happy, there is some friction between the couple that may be related to

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spending time apart (Babak immigrated to the U.S. some time before his spouse's arrival). On their way home, Neda becomes concerned about her husband driving while intoxicated. After losing their way, the stubborn and exhausted Babak stops at a nearby hotel.

After being checked in by a receptionist (George Maguire), the pair retreat to their room. However, they don't end up getting much rest. Each begins hearing strange sounds and experiencing bizarre visions. It becomes clear that there is something sinister and even supernatural occurring, which intensifies after the family members realize they are trapped inside the hotel.

As mentioned, the idea of characters isolated in a threatening and seemingly empty hotel environment isn't original. It has been used for a backdrop most famously in *The Shining*, as well as flicks like

1408

,
Vacancy

and

Identity

. One can certainly see the influence of the earlier famous titles clearly here. The odd receptionist even appears at the end of a hallway and gives a sinister smile at one point in the story in a way that can't help but remind one of

The Shining

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A work of art in the lobby receives a prominent callback later in the tale, also harkening back to the Stanley Kubrick ghost story.

Despite the familiar elements, once the ominous threat is introduced, the cast efficiently draws viewers in and makes what would otherwise be a preposterous scenario convincing. It soon becomes clear that these strange events have something to do with personal secrets that the husband and wife have been hiding from each other during their time apart. Again, while not radical in execution, lead performers Hosseini (*The Salesman*, *A Separation*) and Noor do manage to convey a relatable frustration, fear (in particular, for the safety of their infant) and remorse as the story progresses.

The movie is also helped by the sure hands of the director, who effectively uses sound design

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involving creaks and noises coming from outside the room. On rare occasions when the frightened family comes into contact with the receptionist or another stranger within the hotel, the interactions are tense and filled with unease. It's always difficult to get a handle on the motivation of those who show up and whether they have appeared to help or harm the protagonists. The movie also makes great use of long takes, particularly during the atmospheric climax, which features one of the leads venturing through the depths of the hotel and beyond.

So, while the story may not offer anything revolutionary, in an understated way it does detail some of the unexpected trials and interior struggles that each character endured during the long immigration process. And the performances, along with the lighting, editing, and camerawork, do create an increasingly creepy and dread-filled atmosphere. In the end, *The Night* presents enough new wrinkles on an old formula to give horror fans a sufficient chill.

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