

The Gift: A Creepy Mood Piece

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<<< *out of 4*

Running Time: 108 min.

While horror flicks and thriller pics from Blumhouse Productions often follow supernatural tales along the lines of *Insidious*, *Ouija* and *The Gallows*, it appears that every now and then, the company does attempt some variations on their low-budget genre formula. *The Gift* certainly falls into this category. There aren't any vengeful apparitions or undead axe murderers chopping teenagers to pieces. Instead, this is a mood piece, focusing entirely on its characters and attempting to create a general sense of unease.

Co-star Joel Edgerton also serves as writer and director of this effort, and it's clear that as a performer, he's far more interested in the characters and their deep-seated motivations than typical suspense film conventions. The plot follows married couple Simon (Jason Bateman) and Robyn (Rebecca Hall). Simon is a software security salesman striving to make his way up the corporate ladder. After taking a position in the husband's home town in the hopes of starting a family, the pair run into his old schoolmate, Gordo (Edgerton).

Gordo is genial, but it isn't long before he begins arriving at the house unannounced and leaving multiple wrapped welcome gifts at the front door. Simon jokingly begins relaying information about Gordo to Robyn, explaining that he was an odd kid who earned the nickname of "Weirdo" during their school days. As Simon politely (and then more explicitly) suggests to Gordo that his attempts at friendship aren't going to be reciprocated, the acquaintance begins living up to his childhood moniker.

While most films of this ilk would immediately cut to some kind of overt and violent

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assault/kidnapping scenario, this movie is a slow burn. There's nothing truly explicit in the film; it merely hints at the possibility of multiple characters becoming violent or acting out, creating a different kind of tension. The photography emphasizes the unease with Gordo's sudden appearances, using focal length effectively to suggest a moving shape in various background environments.

The three stars also have a lot of good character material to work with. Simon's attempts at a big promotion and more aggressive techniques towards Gordo raise stress levels and cause a marital rift between husband and wife. The hero role changes dramatically as the story progresses and it's interesting to see Bateman take on a more complex character with less emphasis on comedy.

Additionally, Robyn begins to suffer from anxiety while home alone, and eventually paranoia as she learns more about her secretive husband's past. Naturally, there's plenty going on in Gordo's head as well, leaving viewers to wonder what the stimulus for his behavior might be. And lest it all seem too solemn, there are even a few moments of subtle black humor. This is highlighted in Simon's eccentric dislike of monkeys as well as a scene involving a pair of posturing police detectives.

The only problem with a genre film taking a slow approach to the material is that it does lag in a few sections and there are some unavoidable genre tropes that pop up here and there. It also allows viewers time to process what is happening, and many will have figured out the final twist long before the reveal. Yet even so, the cast are fun to watch and the sting is depicted in a thoughtful and unsettling manner. In many respects, the movie presents a more believable and disturbing scenario than its more explicit chiller counterparts.

The Gift is a small and subtle character-based genre flick suggesting that one's past will always eventually catch up with them. Its simple goal is to be unsettling and the movie generally succeeds. This is not a fast-paced horror show, but it is a well-acted and creepy character piece that should appeal to patient suspense fans in the mood for something just a little different.