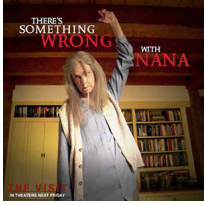


THE VISIT includes plenty of chills and gallows humor

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 11 September 2015 06:42



Rating: <<<< out of 4

Running Time: 94 min.

After watching dozens of found footage films, I've developed something of a pet peeve with the format. So many entries in this horror subgenre feature characters so deeply flawed (or simply obnoxious) that they come across as grating and annoying. And when you don't like the protagonists, it quickly kills the suspense. Frankly, in these types of flicks most of the inevitable demises can't come soon enough. So it's with some relief that *The Visit* bucks the trend. And a large part of it has to do with the young leads. Here's a real shocker for you - they're actually likable.

The crux of the story involves aspiring filmmaker Becca (Olivia DeJonge) and her freestyle-rapping brother Tyler (Ed Oxenbould). Due to a mysterious, long-standing dispute, the pair have never met their grandparents. This all changes when the two are invited on a trip to finally meet up. Becca brings along her camera with the intention of creating a documentary that may improve relations between family members. But not long after their arrival, the pair are taken aback by the increasingly bizarre behavior of their Nana (Deanna Dunagan) and Pop Pop (Peter McRobbie).

This movie is a slow burn with a dark streak of humor running throughout. The polite guests initially chalk everything up to the eccentricity of old people and the movie garners laughs from the kids double takes of what they're seeing. Yet the grandparents become more imposing and threatening and the tone slowly changes.

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The young cast effectively straddles the line between comedy and fear, which is no easy task. The amusingly written dialogue helps. This includes a running gag that features Tyler using the names of female singers in place of expletives (so as not to offend his grandparents). Over the course of the film, he runs through a sizable list.

Still, there are plenty of hair-raising turns. There's a great scene involving a game of hide and seek that takes an unexpectedly weird turn. Director M. Night Shyamalan creates some memorable images of the elder characters, sometimes standing still and at other moments clawing and moving rapidly throughout the house. Another notable sequence includes the most uncomfortable game of Yahtzee ever captured on camera.

As mentioned, many of the odd and eccentric interactions end with a gag to alleviate tension. These moments work surprisingly well and even help build a creeping sense of unease. It all builds nicely as events spiral out of control and leads to the film's surreal highlight - a gross-out sequence during the climax of the film (you'll know it when you see it) that isn't particularly graphic, but is difficult to forget.

The cast really goes to town selling this material, and it appears as though Shyamalan has taken great care to develop the characters. Each individual has a personal issue, and all are dealt with over the course of the movie. As far as the found footage format goes, all of the questions viewers might have about what they're seeing and why they're seeing it are resolved.

Of course, the trope of having persons continue to film while being chased isn't avoided, but everything else is accounted for. It's a nicely contained story (with a red herring or two) that wraps itself up in a clear and concise way.

The Visit is not a horror masterpiece, but it is a fun and effective take on the subgenre that slowly builds an eerie vibe before delivering plenty of spine-tingling chills and gallows humor. It may be the most disturbing family reunion ever captured on tape, but this viewer still found himself leaving the home of Nana and Pop Pop with a grin on his face.