

***Rating: «««* out of 4 stars**

Running Time: 89 min.

Director Fede Alvarez made his cinematic debut three years ago with the better-than-expected remake of *The Evil Dead*. His follow-up is an original tale of a heist gone wrong. While the plot may suggest it’s a thriller or sorts, make no mistake... it is a graphic and distressing horror picture all the way... just not one that features any kind of supernatural scares.
Don’t Breathe
is definitely gross and at times a little trashy, but it effectively accomplishes its simple goal — to make you feel uncomfortable and unnerved.

The story follows Rocky (Jane Levy), her boyfriend Money (Daniel Zovatto) and friend Alex (Dylan Minnette). They’re a trio of break-in artists, looking for a big score to help them escape Detroit and their poverty-stricken lives. They think they’ve found it when they learn about a blind, ex-military man (Stephen Lang) who has just come into a massive cash settlement following the death of his daughter in a car crash. He lives alone in a dilapidated old house in a derelict district, making the trio believe that this heist is the one they’ve been waiting for. But soon after arriving, the group comes to the disquieting realization that there are just as many locks on the inside as on the outside.

This movie is fully populated with ethically and morally gray characters. These kids aren’t the nicest lot and are initially difficult to relate to, but a scene or two that shows just how miserable their lives are helps somewhat. And of course, The Blind Man is even more unstable and threatening, leading to a painful game of cat and mouse between the participants. All do their best to succeed, but are consistently stymied. While brutal and ugly throughout, there are just enough winks and a sense of demented joy to the proceedings to keep one curious — since all

of these people are deeply flawed, it makes the resolution a little more up-in-the-air than many other films of its genre.

What really helps the film stand out is the skilled visual storytelling. For a little scare picture, there’s some impressive camerawork to behold. Despite the majority of events taking place in a single location, the movie is filled with inspired moves. This includes a lengthy shot early on that explores the home with the characters as they break in. Not only does it heighten tension as it follows the robbers from room to room, but it also establishes the geography for future events in the story. There are unusual and creative angles throughout that really amplify the suspense.

It also helps that so much anxiety is derived from the characters being in such close proximity to the vision-impaired homeowner. They’re often inches away, with the camera holding on the still, fearful characters for lengthy periods of time. A standout sequence involves the power going out, stranding everyone in the dark. Viewers will get to witness a particularly gripping moment as one of the team members fumbles around, very slowly approaching their pursuer in the blackness, without even realizing it.

And special mention must be made about the sound design. This is a movie filled with extended silences, individual floor creaks, characters accidentally making noise, and of course, the very sound of their breathing. Every tiny noise is audible and amplified, suggesting that every little reverberation will give away their position. The movie also features a metallic, clattering score that emphasizes the onscreen squeaks.

Many horror films have at least one big gross-out and this title is no exception. It has a few twists up its sleeve, and a big revelation results in a sequence that is so darn icky it veers dangerously close to tastelessness. Yet one has to concede that it is a completely unique and ultimately memorable horrific moment. As a genre fan, you don’t want a movie’s journey to be predictable. You expect these films to push boundaries, and this effort delivers a disturbing and unsettling shock near the end of its second act.

Don’t Breathe is undeniably pulpy and raw. In the end, there are a couple of things that are a little difficult to buy, and it may be hard to side with the participants, but the technical skills on display are more than apparent. Once the second act begins, the movie delivers about 70 straight minutes of increasingly tense and nutty madness that had me feeling uncomfortable on several occasions. On that basis, mission accomplished. If you’re a horror aficionado, this one delivers solid thrills and chills in equal measure.

By Glenn Kay
For the Sun