

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

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 31 July 2020 03:26



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.

'Radioactive' features a strong lead, but the results are inconclusive

By Glenn Kay
For the Sun

Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 110 minutes

This title will be available for streaming on Amazon Prime July 24.

One of history's greatest scientific pioneers was physicist/chemist Marie Curie. In the early 20th century, this woman not only broke barriers for women, but for the research field in general. In fact, the life of you or someone you know has likely been changed in one way or another as a result of her tireless work. As one might guess, spending the majority of one's time devoting oneself to research can lead to all sorts of advances, as well as complications and tragedies.

Radioactive tries to put some perspective on the woman's life and her remarkable discoveries.

Believe it or not, there have already been a few movies over the years devoted to the figure, including a 1943 Hollywood adaptation and a French/Polish/German production in 2016. Each has its charms, but it's fairly safe to say that none have quite done the subject justice. In fact, it may be that this person's story isn't particularly well suited to cinema. Whatever the reason may be, the latest attempt does correct a few problems present in earlier adaptations and certainly has some plusses.

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Yet, once again, it still doesn't manage to overcome all of the issues in order to tell Curie's story in a dynamic way.

The movie picks up with the stubborn Maria Skłodowska (Rosamund Pike) working at the University of Paris, struggling to maintain funding for her lab research on uranium. Professor Pierre Curie (Sam Riley) takes an interest in her experiments, befriending the researcher. He eventually convinces her that the two should collaborate and finds space for her in his lab. Their work leads to the discovery of radioactivity using polonium and radium.

The two also form a close bond that results in marriage. However, it isn't all wine and roses. Over the course of her life, Marie Curie struggles with prejudices in her profession and also butts heads with family members, including her daughter (Anya Taylor-Joy). And of course, the lead is forced to grapple with the unintended health effects caused by radioactivity.

Pike has an enormously difficult challenge in depicting a character who can be both heroic and remarkably difficult (particularly early on), even to the point of lashing out at others. The performer does an able job at making the character layered and complex. This movie also uses an unusual storytelling technique to try to keep things fresh, jumping ahead in time to various events in history that have occurred in part because of Curie's research years earlier. No doubt this approach has been used to emphasize how her efforts were advanced over generations and led to both medical advancements and horrific disasters.

There are also a few intriguing bits of exposition with microscopic visual enhancements that detail some of her theories.

It's interesting and the cast does well under the circumstances. But there is still something dramatically lacking about the enterprise. Truthfully, I'm not entirely certain that the story of this famous figure really suits a cinematic narrative. We see a woman's life and the various personal and professional struggles she endured to make specific advancements. Yet at times, it just feels like a Cliff's Notes version of her life, and the quick jumps between various emotional highs and lows are choppy.

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Certainly, Curie could be blunt and nasty at times, but the quick behavioral shifts and the need to race the plot along toward the next tragedy makes it all feel too condensed.

The mystic finale has been created to add drama and provide an emotional finish. It integrates Curie into different time periods in order to come to a conclusion about where her work led. It also attempts to illuminate how her decisions affected the world over the following century. The conceit is curious, but ultimately comes across as a bit of a simplification and doesn't result in as teary-eyed a resolution as was hoped for.

Radioactive features a committed lead performance. This reviewer also gives the picture good marks for trying to condense an enigmatic person's life and create an inspiring narrative out of their story. There are some good elements and a few interesting experiments, but as a whole the study is inconclusive and doesn't deliver an entirely satisfying end result.

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