

'Promising Young Woman' effectively updates the revenge flick

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 113 minutes

This film will be available to rent on streaming services Jan. 15.

Movies involving characters doling out justice and getting revenge on crooks are fairly common, but the new film *Promising Young Woman* attempts to update and modernize the formula, as well as infuse some dark comedy into the proceedings. Admittedly, it can be a bit on-the-nose in its attempts to deal with the issues at hand, but thanks to this new spin and a phenomenal leading performance, the results are impressive and make a lasting impression.

Cassandra "Cassie" Thomas (Carey Mulligan) is a solitary ex-med student whose life has seemingly been on hold for 10 years. This is all a result of a horrible incident on campus involving a close friend, which caused the protagonist to drop out of school and disappear from view. Now working in a coffee shop, her focus has dramatically changed. She secretly goes into various nightclubs and pretends she is intoxicated, eventually surprising any creep who attempts to take advantage of her.

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When Cassie runs into a graduate from the same medical institute named Dr. Ryan Cooper (Bo Burnham), a relationship develops. However, it also puts the lead back into contact with those responsible for the tragedy. As she seeks retribution and learns more details about what happened, Cassie becomes even more determined in her pursuits.

The movie relies on a unique and grim sense of humor as Cassie pulls schemes on her unsuspecting targets. The movie also earns a couple of chuckles from the lead’s baffled parents (Jennifer Coolidge and Clancy Brown), who don’t recognize the trauma their daughter has experienced and awkwardly try to inspire her to move forward. As one might expect, things take an edgier tone when the lead meets old acquaintances who are still making excuses for the inciting incident years ago. In many cases, Cassie devises similar scenarios for them to make them experience the same fear and terror as the victim of the original crime.

A few of these bits require some suspension of disbelief, but many are clever and effective in their execution.

Managing a tone that addresses disturbing subject matter with a bright, glossy color palette (which also contrasts the actions of the villains) and heavy doses of humor, is incredibly difficult. Mulligan deserves a remarkable amount of credit for selling this challenging role. Yes, this is a character possessing inner fury and contempt who is acting out against a select group of individuals. However, there are far more facets to the role.

Not only must the performer depict the character creating various guises and threats against her pursuers, she must also include a portrayal of how she contends with disapproval from her eccentric parents, as well as a budding romance that begins to melt her exterior coldness. It’s a challenging part that is impressively handled.

Of course, with so many elements at play, there are a few minor issues here and there. The meet-cute between the lead and her love interest involving playful banter occasionally comes across as overly exaggerated (even if the intention may have been to poke fun at rom-coms by adding a decidedly ickier element to their early encounters). And a couple of the nasty guys are so over-the-top in their horribleness it’s hard to relate them to the real world. Additionally, the movie also delivers its message in a very blunt and direct manner.

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Regardless, the lead actress is fantastic and the message is an admirable one ... and it is at times entertaining to see the protagonist take her vengeance out on those responsible for treating a young woman so horribly. As such, *Promising Young Woman* is a largely successful update on the revenge flick and is a film that should linger in the brain a little longer than others of its ilk.

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