

There's plenty to fret about in 'Don't Worry Darling'

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 30 September 2022 04:42



Olivia Wilde's sophomore effort lacks a palpable feeling of tension

Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time:
123 minutes

This feature from Warner Bros. will be opening exclusively in theaters on Sept. 23.

After impressing with the comedy "Booksmart," director Olivia Wilde has returned with a new movie in a different genre. The thriller "Don't Worry Darling" attempts to chill audiences with a tale of a suburban wife who doesn't trust the picture-perfect world around her. It is certainly ambitious and attempts to pull the rug out from viewers. However, the movie telegraphs its twists and lacks a crucial element needed for an effective suspense picture... a palpable feeling of tension.

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Alice Chambers (Florence Pugh) lives in the isolated but seemingly ideal desert community of Victory. Every day at the exact same time, her husband Jack Chambers (Harry Styles) and other men in town drive off to a mysterious locale to work on an unknown project. Their wives are forbidden from traveling outside the district and instead spend their days attending to household chores.

After Alice sees a local behave oddly and begins having her own odd visions, she questions her role in life. However, best friend Bunny (director Oliva Wilde) tries to dissuade Alice from taking action. When the protagonist witnesses a plane crash and crosses the town boundary to help, friction arises in her marriage, as well as with Victory founder Frank (Chris Pine). Alice becomes convinced that Frank is up to something sinister.

Perhaps the strongest element of this film is the cinematography, production design and costumes. Modeled after 1950s California, the spotless homes and impressive backdrops are striking from beginning to end. Yes, it's a little one-the-nose that this era was chosen given the fact that the film is about a housewife who feels like a servant. And the extremely bright and impeccably designed abodes don't lend a foreboding or anxiety-provoking tone to the feature, but at least the stellar visuals give the viewer something fun to watch as secrets are revealed.

Early on, the cast do add some dark humor to the proceedings, unflappably supporting Frank and their special but strange community. Additionally, Pugh is likable and appealing as the wife who must question the world around her.

But as serious plot elements develop, additional problems arise that don't assist the film in building suspense. The eventual confrontations between Alice and her husband are played in too low-key a manner. There are a couple of gags designed to shock, like when Alice finds her home literally trying to crush her or when she begins muzzling herself with plastic wrap. While the images are well-mounted and the meaning is more than obvious, these brief jolts don't really shock.

The lack of dread or imminent danger may have something to do with the fact that viewers immediately have a general sense of what is occurring. The only surprise comes in waiting for the specific details. And after the long delay, the reveal is underwhelming and only adds more questions to the proceedings.

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One assumes that even the writers may have been aware of the problem. In the final act, they add a preposterous device in order to add more risk and danger to the proceedings. For this reviewer, this bizarre and unexpected stipulation only exists to help the story resolve itself concisely.

This tale starts off interestingly and looks wonderful. It also features a few inventive moments as Alice's world slowly unravels around her. Unfortunately, there have been plenty of effective films that have used the same or a similar conceit in a more dynamic way. The feature leisurely moves down an obvious path and the specific details behind the big twist don't hold up to scrutiny.

In the end, there is plenty to fret about in "Don't Worry Darling," with the primary stumbling block being a screenplay that needed some fine tuning to really hit home.

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