

"MAGIC MAGIC" (Sundance Movie Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Wednesday, 23 January 2013 14:23



The heir to the hysterical, frenzied, toweringly at wit's end, woman-on-the-edge throne is apparent. In *MAGIC MAGIC*, Juno Temple has lost her mind. We are all the more uncomfortable for it.

Every horror film director cites *ROSEMARY'S BABY* and to a larger extent, Polanski in general, as a defining guide in their process. Few have channeled the legendary director's penchant for the truly unnerving, though. While Sebastian Silva and *MAGIC MAGIC* just barely miss that mark, his direction and Temple's performance combine to form a truly uncomfortable, piercing and harsh descent.

The film, one of two pictures of Silva's currently playing the Sundance Film Festival (alongside *CRYSTAL FAIRY*) finds Temple as young American Alicia, leaving the country for the first time to take a break from it all and visit her cousin Sarah (Emily Browning), studying abroad in Chile. The vacation calls for a road trip with Sarah's boyfriend Agustín (Agustín Silva), his sister Barbara (Catalina Sandino Moreno) and their eccentric, ever-sweatered friend Brink (Michael Cera).

From her arrival, Alicia is an obstacle. Visibly unprepared and wary of her surroundings, she manages to hold up the trip, receiving an abrasive welcome from the group. While Sarah is naturally caring, Barbara is almost immediately intolerant; Agustín, dismissive; and Brink, aggressively teasing and flirtatious. As they progress downstate, eventually reaching a seaside home, Alicia's hang-ups, ticks and sheer disagreeable state only descend further.



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While Browning and Agustín Silva provide fine support, Moreno and Cera are the true tormentors. Barbara is forever scowling Alicia's way, never relinquishing a hostile environment. Cera, meanwhile, is off his rocker. Best known as a comedic force, the young actor is not unfunny here, but it is a grotesque humor. His words, actions, eyes and fashion sense leaving even the audience feeling like he's always just too close.

As indicated above, however, this is Juno Temple's show. A stranger in a strange land, accompanied by new acquaintances with little in the way of boundaries and much cause for contempt, Alicia feeling trapped is completely warranted and unsurprising. But as context clues inform, Alicia's stance as a grounded individual has been faltering long before her flight to South America. Her gorgeous, coastal surroundings have little relaxing effect, and soon Alicia is inconsolable, lying in a state that leads to a breathless, frightening and chest-constricting final act.

The term "scream queen" is an undeniably cheap one, thrown to whichever new actress simply faces down a masked villain. It seems though, that in a perfect world, it'd be reserved for the likes of Isabelle Adjani, Mia Farrow, Sheryl Lee, Catherine Deneuve; actresses who've put everything they had into someone with nothing to grasp onto, actresses whose screams mean something. Silva and his film do not always match, but throughout, Temple is irritating, painful, sad and stunning in MAGIC MAGIC. She is the new queen. Long live Juno Temple.

