

## “THE COTTAGE” (2012; DVD Review)

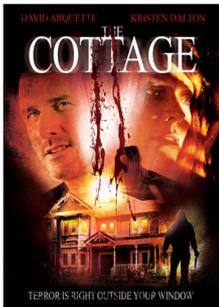
Written by Ken Hanley

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In its cryptic opening scene, *THE COTTAGE* shows the potential to become a creepy, interesting suburban thriller. However, despite moments of surprising effectiveness, *THE COTTAGE* is brought down by several problems that often plague low-budget horror films, most prominently the lackluster story developed out of its cool premise.



In *THE COTTAGE* (on DVD today from Entertainment One, and no relation to the same-titled UK horror/comedy of a few years back), a tense post-divorce couple (Kristen Dalton and Victor Browne) rent out their spare cottage for extra cash, and under a sudden economic strain, they impulsively select a quiet, seemingly normal novelist (David Arquette). Yet once the new tenant settles in, the family experiences strange events, including the sudden disappearances of those close to them. All the while, the newcomer evidently has plans of his own, including frequent rendezvous with three excitable young women whose purpose in the big picture is shrouded in mystery.

The film has plenty of potential, with an inspired premise, several unpredictable twists and a serviceable lead performance by Arquette, who puts his quiet, unassuming charm to villainous use in an uncharacteristically dialed-down performance. Yet the film has serious issues, the biggest of which is that director Chris Jaymes and scripter Nick Antosca choose to focus on the least interesting aspects of its intriguing concept. The family-drama portion of the movie is meant to elicit tension and emotional motivation, yet serves only as running-time filler before the revelatory conclusion. The dialogue often bounces between cliché and outright painful, and aside from Arquette, most of the cast, including Dalton and Browne in the generic, unfocused parental roles, sleepwalk through the film, offering no passion or intricacy to bring the characters to life.

Because the only truly interesting scenes come in the twisty third act, the bulk of the film relies on these actors to carry the story to its payoff, and the movie suffers because of that. Also, the lack of interest in the goings-on from police, neighbors or any inquisitive body at all sticks out

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like a sore thumb, especially following the disappearances of teenagers and teachers. Gorehounds may also be disappointed, as the flick has very few splattery moments, offering only slightly bloody reveals.

THE COTTAGE is at least watchable, despite the multiple misgivings attending the scripting and cast, though the mediocre sound design and poor cinematography may turn off cinephiles, and the solid, unsettling core basis of the movie is downgraded to an offhand, undeveloped twist. And for further disappointment, the bare-bones DVD contains no special features besides one trailer.

