

“THE ROOMMATE” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold (and Samuel Zimmerman)
Friday, 04 February 2011 17:03



THE ROOMMATE doesn't come billed as a remake, but as sure as THE RING/THE GRUDGE/THE DEPARTED/QUARANTINE's Roy Lee and Doug Davison are the producers, it is for all intents and purposes an update of the Jennifer Jason Leigh-starrer SINGLE WHITE FEMALE. Only here, the setting is a college campus and...you know, Sam's been acting kind of odd lately. He was all friendly and everything when he started working here, but lately he's been getting kind of obsessive. Hang on, I have to go check something in another room...

You know, derivative as it may be, THE ROOMMATE should be commended for its high degree of authenticity; it's relatable. Who hasn't felt like Leighton Meester's Rebecca at times? I know when she stayed up all night waiting for Sara to get in, it was totally on the nose with my worrying about Mike when he steps out for lunch. I mean, normally he brings a sandwich, what's so different today? We've spoken about how bad KFC is for him. And it's so far from the office, he just leaves here with no regard for anyone else but himself and his Double Down. It gets me double down...



That's strange, it looks like someone's been at my computer... So anyway, perfect-pretty Sara (Minka Kelly) arrives at the University of Los Angeles, which is your typical studio executive's idea of a college, where everyone looks like a model, dresses like they have their own stylists, parties all the time and apparently does little or no studying. Perhaps because she has no such distraction, Sara acquires a couple of hot new BFFs, a job at a trendy coffee shop *and* a cute little adopted stray kitten (uh-oh...) in record time. On the other hand, it takes her roommate Rebecca a few days to show up, whereupon she learns that Sara has been mourning a long-dead sister. Rebecca, who we also soon learn had a troubled growing up at her wealthy home, would like nothing more than to be her roomie's new "sibling," and that's bad news for pretty much anyone else in Sara's life, including her hunky and ever-smilin' new boyfriend Stephen (played with air quotes around every line by Cam Gigandet). Oops, there's a delivery here, hold on a sec...

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On that note, Cam Gigandet makes me want to throw up all over myself. His squinted eyes make every line seem as unnatural as possible, and with only one expression on his face, I ask myself why he manages to pop up in several films a year. I also ask myself why I guiltily want to see every film he's in. It makes me feel exactly like Rebecca when she dug a box cutter into her abdomen and fake cried herself to sleep, secretly enjoying the pain and the coming sympathy from Sara. But there's no sympathy here, just a sick, sick cycle and one I'll seemingly never learn from. Teen thrillers with Cam Gigandet are bad for the soul.

Jeez, that took longer than it should have. Anyway, once the supporting players and situations have been established, THE ROOMMATE dispatches/resolves them exactly the way you expect they will, even if you haven't seen SINGLE WHITE FEMALE. The shame of it is, this could have been a trash classic (hell, they even cast Billy Zane as Sara's lecherous fashion professor, who says things like, "Who created our industry? Eve, when she first handed Adam the fig leaf"). But nobody involved seems to have wanted to push the material into the over-the-top places it's begging to go. First-time screenwriter Sonny Mallhi (a producer on such Lee/Davison reduxes as SHUTTER, POSSESSION and THE LAKE HOUSE) offers little but predictable developments and colorless dialogue, delivered pacelessly by Danish filmmaker Christian E. Christiansen, making his American—and genre—debut: People talk, bad things occasionally happen, they're discussed briefly and then on to the next scene with no tension built. Oh, and that semi-provocative shot above, the moment that's also the punchline of the trailer? Nowhere to be seen in the film itself. Wait, someone's calling me in another office...

I would argue that THE ROOMMATE has serious tension. As I mentioned earlier, I know how obsession feels. I know how sick with concern Rebecca was. It was the longing, paranoia and worry I felt 15 minutes into THE ROOMMATE when I realized I didn't refrigerate the leftover burrito I brought for lunch today...

Hey, what are you doing on my computer? I told you this was my review, Sam—you can take on SCREAM 4 when that comes out. But this one...wait, what's that in your hand? Hey, put that away!...



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{comments on}