Amber Heard has definitely made a name for herself in the horror genre, with her latest entry being John Carpenter’s THE WARD, which opened on Friday. Her first fright flick was Jonathan Levine’s ALL THE BOYS LOVE MANDY LANE, which remains, to this day, unreleased in the States. Here’s Michael Gingold’s review.

Not all of them, unfortunately. Which is disappointing, because ALL THE BOYS LOVE MANDY LANE rode a tidal wave of praise after its debut at the Toronto Film Festival several years ago (though it remains commercially unreleased in America). I could give you links to dozens of reviews proclaiming it to be a reinvention of the teen slasher film, one that takes a penetrating look at the social proclivities of the modern high-school student while delivering a series of subversive shocks to the system. But I’ve been to two screenings of ALL THE BOYS, and I just don’t see it.

What debuting director Jonathan Levine (who far more effectively dissected youthful angst in his second feature, THE WACKNESS) and scripter Jacob Forman have delivered here doesn’t so much undercut youth-stalker tropes as dress them up in the Emperor’s New Clothes of modern cinematic “style”: flash frames, jump cuts, varying film stocks, lens flares and ironic use of vintage pop songs. Underneath it all is a very familiar tale of a group of teenagers who travel out to an isolated location, where sex and drugs are discussed and indulged in before a sadistic killer begins laying waste to them with assorted weapons.

In the midst of it all is Mandy Lane herself (Amber Heard), a blonde beauty introduced as the center of considerable male attention at her Texas school. But this good-hearted gal remains unaffected by the leering and propositions, preferring the male company of platonic friend Emmet (Michael Welch). In an early pool-party sequence, the drunken young host, tacitly encouraged by Emmet, tries to impress Mandy by jumping from his house’s roof into the swimming pool. Unfortunately, he doesn’t quite make it, resulting in an offscreen date with the concrete accompanied by one of the more unpleasant sound FX to be heard in recent features. This is certainly an attention-grabbing opening; too bad it has little to do with the action that follows.

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