"IN FEAR" (Sundance Movie Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman Monday, 21 January 2013 09:16



UK director Jeremy Lovering's feature debut was developed and filmed unconventionally. He kept much of the story—its twists and turns and frights and games— from his two leads, only revealing the entirety to Allen Leech; he who plays the one playing tricks. While the average moviegoer rarely needs such back story, viewing the film with context in this case feels a tad more necessary. Although Lovering's search for verisimilitude was not in vain, it does materialize in both grounded, raw performance *and* a strong sense that no one has any idea of what's going on.

This would be entirely more powerful if IN FEAR expanded on its more surreal aspects. Leech's Max leers from a distance on the rural roads. He's responsible for traffic signs pointing every which way, leading new couple Lucy (Alice Englert) and Tom (Iain De Caestecker) in a never ending circle. The tormentor— with anger stemming from a harmless pub confrontation we never see— makes physical contact in tiny, "Did I feel that?" flourishes. Soon, fear and paranoia are terrifically overwhelming for the twosome and the tension that stems from the intimate "three's a crowd" atmosphere explodes.

As their conflict unfolds, viewer and film are also clashing. Tom and Lucy's plight is a frustrating, maddening affair and Lovering asks his audience to live the ordeal. The director and cinematographer David Katznelson's perspective and photography of rural England are foreboding. It captures, not unlike Ben Wheatley's films, a perpetually overcast, dark, mystical air that adds to the aforementioned unreal, myth-like nature. It's certainly eerie, reinforced by a slew of aspects. Max's actions seem bound to neither logistics, nor sanity. Tom and Lucy drive through the pitch black night, only seeing so far. They are framed tightly, frenzied. The high grass never rustles in the wind, but instead twitches nervously.



Even at its most harrowing however, the backdrop of a cast kept in the dark still shows.

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Whatever IN FEAR gains from its actors' palpable uneasiness, it loses in its disjointed nature. The thriller misses the mark on taut, in turn missing the upside of abrasive and assaulting and giving way to irritating. Its soundtrack similarly stumbles. Loud and ambient, there's much to praise in Roly Porter and Daniel Pembleton's score, but it continues to be undercut by the sharp stings that underline scares.

What's a shame is the sense that the passionate work from Leech, De Caestecker and Englert especially, and even Lovering's strong visuals, are being left out in the cold by something missing. IN FEAR, while certainly harsh, is stylistically admirable. It's just not very enjoyable.

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