

“[REC] 2” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
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If you've seen Jaime Balagueró and Paco Plaza's [REC], you no doubt remember “the Medeiros girl.” (And if you haven't seen it, stop reading, run out and get a copy of the movie and watch it, preferably with a strong sound system and all the lights out.)

OK...if you've seen [REC], Balagueró and Plaza *know* you remember “the Medeiros girl,” and they play on that knowledge like virtuosos in the sequel (available on demand via various platforms from Magnolia Pictures' Magnet Releasing beginning this weekend, though if at all possible, you really should hold out to see it on a big screen when it begins limited theatrical release July 9). Just as before, we view the action via video-camera lens—several of them this time, attached to helmets—and all it takes is for their wearers to mention that they're seeking “the Medeiros girl” for returning viewers to start squirming in their seats. Especially when we're carried along with the characters back up to that goddamn freaky penthouse apartment...



Coming in the midst of a miniboom in subjective-camera genre films, [REC] found uniquely scary ways to employ the format and emerged as possibly the most terrifying film of the 2000s' first decade. You'd think that jumping right back into the same setting, using the same style ([REC] 2's action begins minutes after its predecessor ended), would result only in redundancy, but Balagueró and Plaza manage to make the sequel as nerve-frying and sweat-inducing as the original, and an early leader for this year's most frightening feature; only the lack of novelty puts it just a notch below the first [REC].

This time, it's a SWAT team that heads into the apartment building where a mysterious affliction

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led the residents to become slaving, blood-crazed ghouls. The assumption is that these heavily armed dudes will be more than a match for any threat they encounter inside, but (unlike Balagueró and Plaza, clearly) these boys haven't seen ALIENS... They're accompanied by a medical official who wants to investigate that top-floor dwelling, and uncover the secrets of its contents and “the Medeiros girl” (*shudder...*). That's really all that should be specifically said about Balagueró, Plaza and co-scripter Manu Díez's storyline, which has a number of twists and surprises in store to go with the sudden, startling and bloody-mess-making appearances of the homicidal infected tenants.

Having multiple cameras-within-the-movie this time allows the directors and encoring editor David Gallart to juggle the different points of view to build tension, though they know when to stay with just one for a time, the better to pay off the long take with a visceral shock. Even more possibilities are opened up when a second group with their own camera wind up sneaking into the building; the introduction of this gang at first feels contrived, but Balagueró and Plaza soon prove able to use it to their narrative advantage, to give the audience a literal fresh angle on certain key events. Besides, it also allows for a higher body count, as everyone discovers it's a lot easier to get into this multistory house of horrors than it is to get out.

Sequels to fright films as specific in the way they elicit their terror as [REC] are dauntingly tough to pull off, but [REC] 2, like the thematically similar but far less contained 28 WEEKS LATER, is one of the rare, welcome exceptions. That said, the recent announcement that Plaza will helm the prequel [REC]: GENESIS and Balagueró will direct the further sequel [REC]: APOCALYPSE seems like a case of jumping the shark: Between them, the first two movies tell us everything we need to know about the origin of the horrors, and taking them outside the apartment house (as APOCALYPSE promises to do) will refute the claustrophobia that makes the pair so distinctive. But that's to worry about later; for now, put [REC] 2 at the top of your summer viewing list, hang on to something and enjoy.



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