

## Blu-ray Review: Creepy Jolts Compensate for Weak Drama in ‘The Possession’

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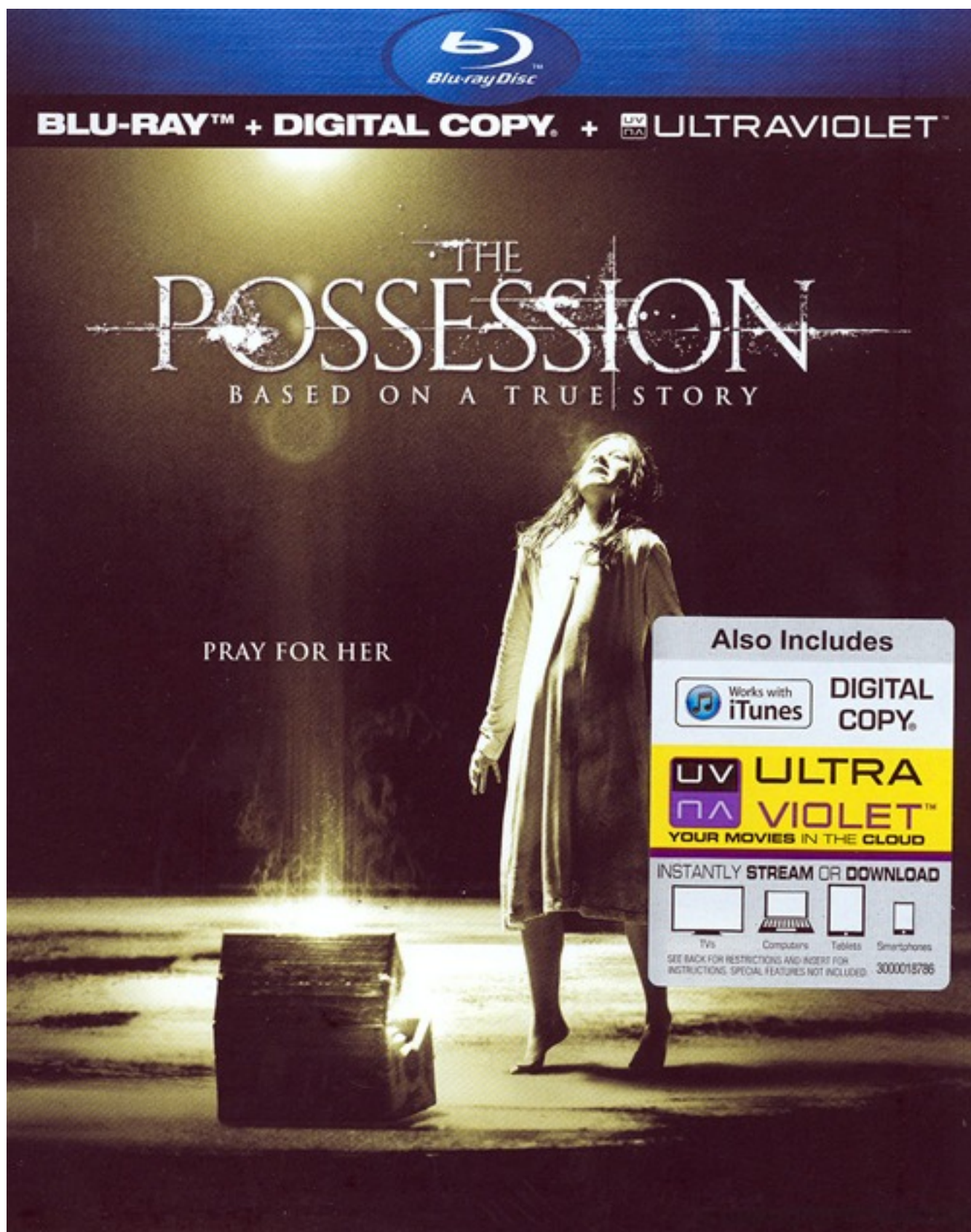
CHICAGO – In the last days of August 2012, three generically titled ghost pictures had the misfortune of opening at more or less the exact same time. None of them were particularly memorable, yet only one managed to produce any semblance of genuine chills. There are enough eerie moments in “The Possession,” the demonic thriller from gifted Danish director Ole Bornedal, that one wishes that it pushed past the boundaries of its tame PG-13 rating.

The script by Juliet Snowden and Stiles White is a Judaic variation on “The Exorcist,” complete with a hasidic scholar barking out chants just like Max Von Sydow. The success of this formula succeeds or fails largely on the strength of its central performance from the possessed victim, which often takes the form of a young girl. “Exorcist” star Linda Blair set a spectacularly high bar that no imitator has been able to equal, and “The Possession”’s pint-sized leading lady, Natasha Calis, is no exception. But that doesn’t mean she isn’t the creepiest omen child this side of “Looper.”



Blu-ray Rating: **2.5/5.0**

In fact, Calis is a marvelously spine-tingling creep, even though she falls short of being a convincing kid. Like Jack Nicholson in “The Shining,” there seems to be something off about Calis from the get-go. She delivers her lines with an unsettling absence of naturalism, much like Thomas Horn in “Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,” which caused me to brace myself for a most unpleasant dirge. Yet once her character, Emily, encounters a possessed Dibbuk Box at a garage sale, Calis gradually transforms into a cherub-faced monstrosity. Some of the most effective shots show Calis’s face in a state of paralysis, as a mischievous demon (straight out of Yiddish folklore) takes control of her body as if were a mere puppet. Only the tears streaming down Emily’s face suggest the little girl that is trapped within. Her estranged father (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) is the first to sense that there is something seriously wrong with his daughter, though his ex-wife (Kyra Sedgwick) and her new flame (Grant Show, out-smarming Cary Elwes in “Liar Liar”) remain oblivious. In essence, this is the same ultra-predictable formula utilized by “The Santa Clause,” with a malicious spirit taking the place of Kris Kringle. Instead of being terrified by Emily’s atrocious acts, the audience starts rooting for her to take down obnoxious schmucks like Show, and take him down she does—in pleasingly gruesome fashion.



The Possession was released on Blu-ray and DVD on January 15th, 2013.

Photo credit: Lionsgate Entertainment

For much of its running time, Bornedal's picture is diverting if disposable entertainment, but it really falls apart in its final act. Morgan is surprisingly effective at conveying parental anguish, but he doesn't seem nearly scared enough during the film's big climax. Perhaps that's because Bornedal decided to take his cue from Jan De Bont by over-saturating the screen with bombastic effects rather than maintain any sense of tangible dread. He also makes a big mistake in showing the demon, which looks like Gollum's wimpy brother. For all of its hyperactive sound cues and bodily contortions, "The Possession" is bound to inspire few sleepless nights

"The Possession" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish audio tracks and is available in a Blu-ray/digital copy/UltraViolet combo pack. Bornedal's audio commentary track is unintentionally hilarious, as he narrates each scene with the foreboding yet low-toned voice of a smooth jazz DJ ("Every good drama needs silence...not noise...because noise...comforts us"). A second commentary track with Snowden and White details how the story was inspired by Leslie Gornstein's LA Times article, "Jinx in a Box," which explored the alleged string of mischief caused by a dibbuk box. The former and current owner of the box (Kevin Mannis and Jason Haxton, respectively) appear in a 13-minute documentary about the sinister occurrences that took place in their lives after they took the evil portable cabinet back home. A title card assures the viewer that a replica of the actual dibbuk box was used in the documentary—as a safety precaution. Perhaps this little doc will do for Jewish yard sales what "Jaws" did for water.

*'The Possession' is released by Lionsgate Entertainment and stars Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Natasha Calis, Kyra Sedgwick, Madison Davenport, Grant Show and Matisyahu. It was written by Juliet Snowden and Stiles White and directed by Ole Bornedal. It was released on January 15th, 2013. It is rated PG-13.*



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