

Blu-ray Review: Derivative 'Dark Skies' Botches Potential with Lame Clichés

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on June 6, 2013 - 10:06am

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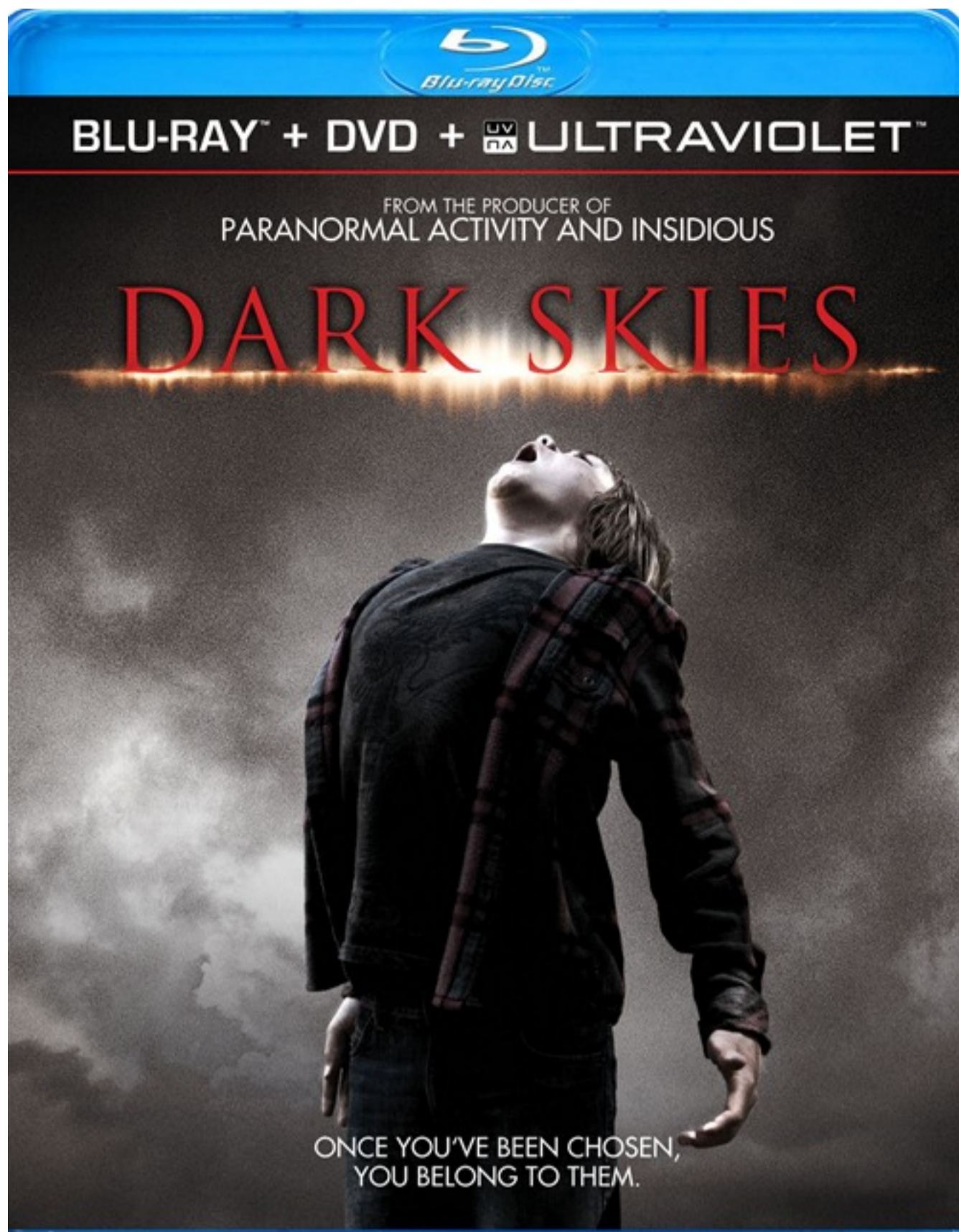
CHICAGO – For a good portion of its running time, Scott Stewart's sci-fi spookfest "Dark Skies" flirts with the possibility of becoming an effective thriller. There are a handful of sequences fraught with palpable tension, yet it becomes apparent around the halfway mark that the filmmakers don't have an original idea in their heads. There's nothing here that hasn't been done better in countless other pictures.

This is essentially "Paranormal Activity" with aliens imported in from M. Night Shyamalan's "Signs." There are also shafts of Spielbergian light courtesy of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," and eerie hallways with wallpaper borrowed from the Overlook Hotel. The extent to which this film plagiarizes familiar hits is flat-out maddening. When the nails in a boarded up window start unscrewing themselves, prompting a petrified father to shout, "Leave us alone!" it's impossible for film buffs to not immediately picture Melinda Dillon screaming the same thing.



Blu-ray Rating: **1.5/5.0**

Whereas Oren Peli's original "Paranormal Activity" found a fresh and innovative way of frightening audiences with subtle details captured in static shots, "Dark Skies" takes the generic horror route, complete with distracting music, loud clangs on the soundtrack and one of those annoying, "Usual Suspects"-type endings that reassembles past footage in a strained effort to blow our minds. Many of the freakiest moments are quickly revealed to be nightmare sequences, of which there are an alarming amount. I kept waiting for the film to end with a character awakening to realize that the entire plot was a dream inspired by too many evenings of horror movie marathons. That would explain the script's shameless cut-and-paste job, as a terrorized couple, Lacy (Keri Russell) and Daniel (Josh Hamilton), install cameras in their house to record the mysterious activity occurring at night. Their two sons, Jesse (Dakota Goyo) and Sam (Kadan Rockett), are both studies in Kubrickian solemnity, while their otherworldly home invaders are observed solely in murky silhouettes so shoddy, William Castle would've heckled them.



Dark Skies was released on Blu-ray and DVD on May 28th, 2013.

Photo credit: Anchor Bay Entertainment

What makes the film's uninspired script all the more depressing is the first-rate work of its overqualified cast. Russell and Hamilton do a fine job of portraying the tension and anxiety of a financially strapped family, while J.K. Simmons is chillingly matter-of-fact as a medium-like alien expert. Even Goyo, the young star of "Real Steel," is quite good as a preteen grappling with first lust, though Rockett appears to have been possessed by the spirit of blank-faced Danny Lloyd. In case you're wondering, Danny is indeed here, Mrs. Torrance.

"Dark Skies" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish subtitles, and is available in a Blu-ray/DVD/UltraViolet combo pack. Special features include 14 minutes of deleted/extended scenes (including an equally underwhelming alternate ending), and a commentary track in which Stewart is accompanied by producer Jason Blum, executive producer Brian Kavanaugh-Jones and editor Peter Gvozdas. According to them, "Dark Skies" was originally pitched as a found footage film, thus making it a complete rip-off of "Paranormal Activity." By switching it to a traditionally lensed narrative, the filmmakers had clearly intended on making a picture closer in spirit to "Insidious," and there are a few jolts that evoke memories of that film. Sadly, they are few and far between.

'Dark Skies' is released by Anchor Bay Entertainment and stars Keri Russell, Josh Hamilton, Dakota Goyo, Kadan Rockett and J.K. Simmons. It was written and directed by Scott Stewart. It was released on May 28th, 2013. It is rated PG-13.



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