

DVD Review: 'Contracted' is Sick, But That's a Good Thing

Submitted by [DaveHC](#) [1] on March 31, 2014 - 1:54pm

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CHICAGO – We've all seen the girl at the party. You know the one who catches your eye as she walks by. She's beautiful but alone, looks a little lost, and, sadly, almost always winds up with some other guy. Eric England introduces us to such a girl at the beginning of his film "Contracted" and then spends the rest of the movie's runtime punishing the hell out of her as a mysterious and fast moving STD eats away at all the things that had us looking in the first place.



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The genius of England is he's able to keep us looking as that pretty face disintegrates because the real problem is something else. Sam is subject to a perfect storm of rape culture, personal insecurities and friends and family determined to bring her into line with their own agendas. Where it all ends up is not entirely unpredictable. But it's also ghastly. A sick twist on the concept of empowerment.

SYNOPSIS

Samantha (Najarra Townsend) is a twenty something girl whose love life is on the skids. Her former flame Nikki (Katie Stegeman), has figured out that Sam is just a fly by night lesbian, forcing Sam to move back home with mom (Caroline Williams). It's not a recipe for healing. Mom is controlling, disapproving, and very nervous Sam is going to resume an old drug addiction. She may not be far off. When relentlessly pressured by an obnoxious friend (Alice MacDonald) to drink up at a party Sam gives in making her extra vulnerable to the advances of a faceless stranger who date rapes her. Soon after the symptoms begin.



Image credit: IFC

The problems here are many. First and foremost, Sam's transformation is far too severe not to attract invasive attention early on. It just isn't believable that she would be allowed to walk around, show up for work at her restaurant etc. In fact it's difficult to believe she wouldn't just check herself into a hospital. Performances too are a little uneven. Caroline Williams holds her own with the fabulous Townsend but her mom and the other characters all seem written and acted to type. A subplot involving Sam's work as a horticulture researcher in line for a grant offers a slight bit of character business but little in the way of development and feels like an afterthought. Much more could have been made of it

Yet taken at face value (and England knows his way around a camera, lots of closeups here, lots of attention paid to performance and character) the idea of Sam's slow decay going unnoticed or acted upon is still pretty effective. It give Townsend plenty of time to showcase just how desperate Sam is to hide her problems from the world and provides ample opportunity to show how self-absorbed and uncaring the world is around her. Sam, no matter what anyone around her says or does, simply will not accept any help. She is in fact far more concerned about her own appearance than her health or well being. She is the ultimate product of a culture that values women almost exclusively based on how they look or how well they fit into established stereotypes.

This is strong stuff visually. Characters throw up on camera, there's a lot of blood, etc. but the sexual components of the story are actually

handled with some discretion. The most titillating sight in the film is Sam, fully dressed at the beginning of the party. The film is all about the processes that destroy that beauty.

SPECIAL FEATURES

- ? Audio Commentary with Writer/Director Eric England, Editor Josh Ethier, Cinematographer Mike Testin, and Composer Kevin Riepl
- ? Audio Commentary with Writer/Director Eric England and Cast,
- ? The Making of Contracted
- ? Najarra Townsend Audition
- ? Animated Pitch
- ? Behind The Scenes Promo
- ? Trailer

"Contracted" stars Najarra Townsend, Caroline Williams and Matt Mercer. It was released on DVD on March 18, 2014



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