

Leighton Meester Borrows the Soap in ‘The Roommate’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 5, 2011 - 11:21am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The latest “It” girls and guys have been collected for the “Meeting of the Marketed Movie,” the showcase for the latest actor brands. It’s titled “The Roommate,” and Leighton Meester (“Gossip Girl”), Cam Gigandet (“Twilight”) and Minka Kelly (“Friday Night Lights”) lead the way.

The film is obviously being used to display these beautiful and hunky thespians to the next generation of filmgoers, and despite being shoehorned into a dull, redundant psychological “thriller,” the make-up artists and hair stylists have done their job.

Minka Kelly, despite looking like she’s in her mid-twenties, portrays a bright-as-a-penny college freshman named Sara. She is a fashion designer about to be mentored by Professor Roberts (Billy Zane), a perfect combination for the University of Los Angeles. On her first night, she luckily connects with party girl Tracy (Alyson Michalka), and celebrates heartily at a local fraternity, where she also hooks up with hunky drummer Stephen (Cam Gigandet).

Coming home from the party, she meets her new roommate Rebecca (cue ominous chord) and immediately the new girl seeks Sara’s approval and friendship. In fact, she seems a little too interested in Sara’s life and interests. For example, when Tracy comes around for friendship purposes, Rebecca creates a scenario that threatens the party girl so much, that she moves out of the dorm. Game, set, match.



Roomies: Minka Kelly as Sara and Leighton Meester as Rebecca in ‘The Roommate’
Photo credit: Jamie Trueblood for Screen Gems

The oblivious Sara keeps Rebecca close to her, despite all evidence that says "run away!" The closeness becomes more creepy, as Rebecca adopts the same tattoo as Sara has, and ingratiates herself by lavishing bizarre attentiveness towards all of Sara's favorite things. When finally Sara gets the message and alters the situation, *The Roommate* will travel the road to payback time.

There is enough goofiness and intentional/unintentional humor to keep this exercise from complete dreck, but this is an obvious steal of "Single White Female" (1992), just set in college. The pace of the story is slower than a snail, and discards whatever fun that's generated by drearily reasoning itself to a predictable confrontation in the end.

The leads are obviously cast for their looks/marketing opportunities than situational acting value. Leighton Meester brings the same blank, vacant slate she used in the recent "Country Strong" and seems less scary as robotic. Minka Kelly, a stunning Ali McGraw look-alike, is slightly better, but the character is so thinly written, and she doesn't improve upon it. Cam Gigandet was playing Christian Slater from "Pump Up the Volume," complete with squinty eyes and Jack Nicholson infection. A rip-off of a rip-off.

Special consideration must be given to Billy Zane. By playing a fashion design professor from hell, he has come full circle from his cameo in "Zoolander" (2001). Every time he came on screen as the stylish instructor, the temptation to say aloud his famous line from that cameo is almost overwhelming. "It's a walk-off...a walk-off." Yet no one, not the director Christian E. Christiansen nor screenwriter Sonny Mallhi picked up on it.

There was a strange hackery to Christensen's direction. He loved close-ups, close-ups so close as to see the delightfully creme-rinsed pores of the young actresses. And cinematographer students, it's time to practice your PG-13 "can't show naughty bits nudity" camera moves. The two ordered by the director both involved the party girl Tracy. First, she flashes the fraternity (shirt about to go up, cut to back) and then a dizzying spin on the shower scene (camera slowly pans down her back, she turns just as the promised land is to come into view, to reveal a naked...stomach). Possibly this type of camera ballet could get a Special Technical Oscar.



Walk-Off: Leighton Meester and Billy Zane as Professor Roberts in 'The Roommate'

Photo credit: Jamie Trueblood for Screen Gems

This film was not screened for critics, and quite frankly reviewing it is the proverbial shooting of fish in a barrel. This is bland date night material, as essential to the teenage culture as cyber bullying and acne informercials.

If I were to pick a favorite from the actor marketing units on display, I will give kudos to Minka Kelly. She has a presence on-screen, even in extreme pore close-ups. As for the rest, as the great Billy Zane might say, "it's a walk-off...a walk-off."

"The Roommate" opened everywhere on February 4th. Featuring Leighton Meester, Minka Kelly, Cam Gigande, Alyson Michalka and Billy Zane. Screenplay by Sonny Mallhi. Directed by Christian E. Christiansen. Rated "PG-13"



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