

## John Carpenter Returns With Mediocre 'The Ward'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 6, 2011 - 10:17pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – John Carpenter's "The Ward" would make for a satisfying episode of the now-canceled "Masters of Horror" and might therefore be an interesting rental someday but it doesn't live up to the pedigree of its once-brilliant director and ultimately disappoints regardless of the name above the title. After a decade away from the big screen, Carpenter proves he still has his legendary skill with tension and the film features a few strong performances but the script is a generic, derivative mess. We've seen everything here before and in a better film. John Carpenter used to be such a leader, it's hard to watch him follow and so far behind the pace.

The title of "The Ward" refers to its primary setting, a female-only psychiatric hospital in the '60s in which Kristen (Amber Heard) finds herself after burning down an abandoned farmhouse. At its core, "The Ward" is a ghost story. Shortly after Kristen arrives at the North Bend Psychiatric Hospital she knows something is not right in this cuckoo's nest. There's a ghost haunting the already-tormented young ladies at North Bend. In fact, Kristen is replacing the now-missing Tammy, who we see attacked in the opening scene and is now missing.



The Ward

Photo credit: Echo Entertainment

While trying to get to the bottom of the mystery of North Bend, Kristen meets her fellow patients – Iris (Lyndsy Fonseca), Sarah (Danielle Panabaker), Emily (Mamie Gummer), and Zoey (Laura Leigh). She is forced into therapy sessions with Dr. Stringer (the great Jared Harris), who even turns to electroshock when traditional methods don't seem to be getting through to our heroine. Eventually, she learns that a woman named Alice Hudson is haunting the ward and possibly even killing its patients. When Kristen's new friends start disappearing, she races to escape before she's next on Alice's list.

Carpenter does his best to stretch the action of "The Ward" to a full-length feature film but it's just not there. Even the 88-minute running time feels padded by unnecessary dialogue scenes and a long opening credit sequence. It's clear that this was a 60-minute idea that has been stretched past its breaking point and there's simply not enough to the story to care. Worst of all, the final act involves a Shyamalan-level twist that you'll either see coming or find so ridiculous as to break the rest of the film apart. It's a goofy script without a single inventive element that relies so heavily on a deeply-flawed twist that it collapses.



The Ward

Photo credit: Echo Entertainment

To that end, it's kind of notable that the film is nowhere near as unbearable as it could have been in the hands of a lesser director. Having not directed a film since "Ghost of Mars," it was certainly possible that "The Ward" would be the work of a director with a few cobwebs on his skill set. To be honest, there is a bit of that Carpenter oddity missing from this work but that's more because of a poor fit with the screenplay than anything else. The film is more straightforward and generic than his best work; more pedestrian in its structure and personality. But it's undeniably well-made – it's just missing that spark that's often there even in Carpenter's failures. He's rarely been this cut and dry and while he delivers as much as possible given the deep flaws of the script it doesn't seem like it ever really played to his strengths. It's too boring to do so.

Carpenter does draw a few strong performances from his cast, most notably the always-interesting Harris and the promising Gummer (daughter of Meryl Streep). As for Heard, the jury is still out on her skills. She's undeniably beautiful and she carries the film well enough without being particularly memorable. Oddly enough, Fonseca (of "How I Met Your Mother") is almost the most memorable just by virtue of delivering the best old-fashioned Carpenter scream. Jamie Lee Curtis would be proud. But a little bored.

*"The Ward" stars Amber Heard, Mamie Gummer, Lyndsy Fonseca, Danielle Panabaker, Laura Leigh, and Jared Harris. It was written by Michael & Shawn Rasmussen and directed by John Carpenter. It will be released in some markets on July 8th, 2011 and is currently available on iTunes.*



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