

Not Much to Build Upon in Vague ‘Dream House’

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Mixing three actors with great reputations – Daniel Craig, Rachel Weisz and Naomi Watts – with Jim Sheridan, a six time Oscar nominated director, would assume to yield some fruitful results. But with “Dream House,” the artifice is indistinct and ill-defined, ultimately much ado about nothing.

Trying for a psychological horror film, like Stanley Kubrick’s “The Shining,” Sheridan keeps firing the usual arrows toward the target, but they either fail to get there or miss. The cast is game, the elements and atmosphere to tell such a story are in place, but either the connections that make these type of films work are not there, or the screenplay by David Loucka was too inaccessible for Sheridan to complete a decent translation.

Daniel Craig is Will Atenton, a high level publishing executive who is on his last day at the office. He is quitting to write the great American novel, and has purchased a suburban “dream house” to concentrate his efforts. His wife Libby (Rachel Weisz) and two children are waiting for him with open arms, as they all work to restore the vintage house. All seems well, until some unusual “bumps in the night” and bizarre rituals are discovered.



Home & Hearth: Claire Greare as Dee Dee, Daniel Craig as Will, Rachel Weisz as Libby in ‘Dream House’
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Unbeknownst to Will and Libby is that the house was the scene of a brutal murder, where a wife and kids were killed and the husband was the suspect. It seems like the whole town has conspired against telling them this information, including their mysterious neighbor Ann (Naomi Watts). The more Will tries to find out about the situation, the less the dream house seems safe. It’s as if the whole circumstance has

happened to him before.

This is the type of narrative that relies on twists and turns, some of them initially hard to follow. The cast tries to put on their I'm-very-mysterious-so-watch-out-for-me faces, which keeps everyone fairly wooden. There are some possibilities in all this, and the film does maintain a certain level of curiosity, yet once the plot dissolves into solutions, there is not enough intrigue to be satisfying.

As mentioned, Craig, Weisz and Watts all have a certain caché which automatically makes films that they do stand out. They all are okay here, but as performers could have been as confused by the material as the audience. They weren't asked to do much in the range of high drama or horror, Rachel Weisz in particular didn't add anything that uses her talent in a distinct way. Watts is so good in so many films, but here she plays only child-like mystery and fear. Daniel Craig gets the most opportunity to stretch, but his character reactions were bland.

Director Jim Sheridan also has a pretty good track record ("My Left Foot," "In America"), but with "Dream House" either didn't have the material to work with or made some decisions in editing that weren't conducive to achieving the intention. The conclusion is foregone, and uses ingredients that mixes the supernatural with a reality plane with no logical effect. What is even worst, is that the whole film was flat. The production screams that it either was better on paper or there simply wasn't enough to create what could have been more interesting.



The Neighbor: Naomi Watts as Ann in 'Dream House'
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

It was a nice surprise to see the actress Jane Alexander. She has a nice character role in Dream House, and delivers it with her usual underlying competence. Newcomer Marton Csokas, so memorable in "The Debt," is properly menacing in this film, but isn't given enough to chew on. Sound familiar?

Psychological horror, as opposed to spring-up-and-say-boo, is much more subtle and insidious as the overt scare. It lives within each of us, and there is a reason that a film like "The Shining" is perfectly executed and this one is not. That reason is Stanley Kubrick.

"Dream House" opens everywhere on September 30th. Featuring Daniel Craig, Rachel Weisz, Naomi Watts, Marton Csokas and Jane Alexander. Screenplay by David Loucka, directed by Jim Sheridan. Rated "PG-13"



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