

Ti West's 'The Innkeepers' is Terrifying Horror Gem

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 2, 2012 - 11:22am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Ti West's "The Innkeepers" is one of the most effective horror movies of the last several years, a true gem of the genre that reminds a scary movie junkie like myself why I fell in love with them in the first place. With his stellar production values and a perfection of the slow burn pace that he employed in the arthouse hit "House of the Devil," West takes a leap to the forefront of directors working in modern horror. Don't miss this one.

"The Innkeepers" requires patience. There are long chunks in which nothing substantial happens and modern horror fans weaned on the "Saw" franchise may long for a Jigsaw Killer or Bloody Mary to spice things up. Trust me. It's worth the patience. And it's not like "House of the Devil" where virtually nothing happens for an hour. There's a sense throughout "The Innkeepers" that something isn't right and there are a few high-caliber scares within the burn like an amazing bed scene and another one with a piano. I can't even talk about the basement without getting the chills. So the burn in "Innkeepers," while slow, is nowhere near the slow simmer of West's previous film. It's more like a build – a fire that grows slowly and then explodes in a fireball in the final reel.



The Innkeepers

Photo credit: Magnolia

Once again, West structures his film around a sweet, somewhat naïve heroine, this time played expertly by Sara Paxton. The film is primarily a two-character piece with a pair of hotel workers – Claire (Paxton) and Luke (Pat Healy) – spending one final weekend in a creepy old hotel that is closing down. The fact that the hotel will soon be unoccupied means that most of the rooms, including the entire third floor, are empty, which allows Claire and Luke a lot of free time to work on his website that claims that the hotel is haunted. They take turns manning the front desk and wandering the old building with their recorder looking for ghostly sounds. Unlike most horror movies, they also have basic human interaction like getting coffee next door and some flirtation at least from one direction. The second night they drink Schlitz and finally get the liquid courage to go into the super-creepy basement.

Claire and Luke are not completely alone. The first night of the final weekend includes a mother (Alison Bartlett) who always seems angry and a psychic (who also happens to be a former actress) named Leanne Reese-Jones (Kelly McGillis, the new queen of indie horror after “Stakeland” and this one). Claire happens to be a big fan of Reese-Jones and her work on TV but the psychic becomes more than just a celebrity when the subject of ghostly activity arises. Maybe she can help Claire and Luke contact the other side. When a final guest (George Riddle) arrives on the final night and demands a room on the abandoned third floor, the creepiness is turned up another notch. It's a modern day minor variation on “The Shining” complete with a terrifying bathroom scene and rooms you don't want to go in.



The Innkeepers

Photo credit: Magnolia

The entire structure of “The Innkeepers” is about slowly turning up the creepiness. Claire watches a creepy video online of one of the hotel room doors closing. She's recording and hears a female voice in the distance. She tries to go to bed and, well, things get real creepy. I felt like “House of the Devil” sometimes stayed on the same plain, moving forward instead of upward. “The Innkeepers” is a constant rise, like a rollercoaster getting closer and closer to the top. So many modern horror directors release the tension with jump scares or loud sounds or other silliness but West has the nerve to keep pushing viewers higher and higher until the final act when it goes over the top. The structural choices make that final act insanely tense and remarkably scary. I see dozens of horror movies a year. I can't remember the last time I felt anything approximating fear while watching one. When Claire is standing at the top of the stairs near the end of “The Innkeepers,” I almost had to look away. I could feel the hair on my arms standing up. It's that good.

It helps that West's technical team are all working at the absolute top of their craft with this film. They'll NEVER get the credit they deserve, but the cinematography by Eliot Rockett and the production design by Jade Healy, who both worked on “House” as well, are spectacular. The movie is beautiful to look at with Rockett's sweeping shots of the creepy halls of the Inn and Healy's perfect design from the old wallpaper to the basement that serves as something of a storage room when it's not a passage to Hell. “The Innkeepers” is technically more impressive than most people will notice, but it adds a sense of realism to a ghost story that is almost subconscious. If the cinematography and design weren't as effective, you might not notice that either but you wouldn't be as scared.

It also helps to have a likable, genuine heroine like Paxton. She's in virtually every shot of the movie and she's simply great. We want to follow Claire. We want her to figure out what's going on. We want her to be happy. And we really, really, really don't want her to go down those stairs.

"The Innkeepers" stars Sara Paxton, Pat Healy, Alison Bartlett, Jake Ryan, Kelly McGillis, and George Riddle. It was written and directed by Ti West. It is On Demand now and opening in Chicago theaters tomorrow on February 3rd, 2012.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]**Source URL (retrieved on Sep 26 2024 - 4:03am):**<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/17309/ti-west-s-the-innkeepers-is-terrifying-horror-gem>**Links:**

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