

Contemporary Society is Caught Online in 'Disconnect'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 14, 2013 - 11:57am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Disconnect” is a punch in the gut, the backlash of our current technology, and a film that could have happened yesterday. It is a trenchant cautionary tale, warning us about the excesses of every blinking screen and “smart” device that supposedly is making our lives easier, but can just as easily become instruments of destructive. It is about how we live now.

Three intertwining stories about cyber-attacks and online consequences are passionately written and acted. Jason Bateman, for example, takes a break from his smarmy guy character to portray a distant father that learns a harsh lesson about that distance, and creates an empathy that displays surprising dramatic chops. When living within our cyber-selves, the theme of the film becomes about the “disconnect” that is created, in conflict with our real selves. It asks the questions about who we are when hidden behind the digital screens, and what responsibility we actually have to the relationships beyond the screens. And most importantly, what does our identity mean in the age of multiple passwords, anonymous postings and hours spent online?

Rich Boyd (Jason Bateman) is a busy lawyer married to Lydia (Hope Davis), with two children, Ben (Jonah Bobo) and Abby (Haley Ramm). Ben is a withdrawn 15 year old, lost in the angst of his own shyness on the outside, but with an inner passion for music. His geek status riles some school bullies, and they create a fake girl (popularly known as “catfishing”) to try and seduce him. The reserved kid falls for his new “friend” in a big way.



Lydia (Hope Davis) and Rich (Jason Bateman) Are Cyber-Age Parents in 'Disconnect'

Photo credit: LD Entertainment

In the meantime, there is an ambitious TV reporter named Nina (Andrea Riseborough), who is getting too close to a story about chat room pornography, gaining trust from a victim of it named Kyle (Max Thieriot). And a married couple (Alexander Skarsgard and Paula Patton) find their savings wiped out by a cyber thief – and the wife may have exposed them. All three of these stories run concurrently, commonly bonded by how they originated online.

The screenplay by Andrew Stern make these stories work, and the direction by Henry Alex Rubin emphasizes the narrative with a distinct style. There are some interactions between the three scenarios – Rich is the local TV stations' lawyer when the chat room story blows up, and the cyber detective helping the broke couple is the father of the bully who is catfishing Ben – and all the stories culminated at the same time, and director Rubin developed a classic cinematic variation as it all unfolds.

The performances were passionate, especially when it came to the couple and their backstory. It was all about loss, the husband (Alexander Skarsgard) as an Iraq veteran who is uncomfortable back home, the wife (Paula Patton) as a potential mother who suffers a tragic setback and the online pursuits that evolved from these frustrations, because of their failure to communicate. Like substance abuse and overeating, the reliance on the online life is shown to have unexpected consequences, and when the couple bond back together to solve their dilemma, their life together re-emerges.

And like the couple, the family who has a son going through adolescent hell are not communicating, and again come together when the situation is pushed to the limit. The film is saying that it takes extreme conditions to get real truth, and that truth is easily masked behind the use of inventive cyber manipulation. All the personalities – save for the melodramatic chat room TV story – are relatable in these times, and they represent the issues that everyone married to current technology face this very day. It is a cautionary tale, and a vivid one.



Nina Dunham (Andrea Riseborough) is a TV Reporter Caught in the Web in 'Disconnect'

Photo credit: LD Entertainment

Andrea Riseborough, the British actress who recently portrayed Wallis Simpson in "W.E." (directed by Madonna), nicely portrays the vulnerable elements of an ambitious American reporter, but didn't really grasp the fake on-air character of that particular personality. She seemed slightly miscast. And the story she is involved in is very extravagant, not to say it doesn't happen, but there is shadiness and harsh stereotypes that almost makes it like a drug running drama. It is a contrast between the other two simpler stories, which could be the point.

There are consequences, always consequences, to virtually all actions. Within the last twenty years we've been suffering the consequences of a relentless new technology. "Disconnect" presents some of that suffering, as in the thing that makes it cyber-great also has to power to destroy us.

"Disconnect" had a limited release on April 12th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Jason Bateman, Hope Davis, Alexander Skarsgard, Paula Patton, Andrea Riseborough, Jonah Bobo, Frank Grillo and Max Thieriot. Written by Andrew Stern. Directed by Henry Alex Rubin. Rated "R"



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