

Eric England's 'Contracted' Can't Keep Itself Together

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 28, 2013 - 10:51am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

Eric England's "Contracted" has the potential to turn into a truly disturbing slice of bodily horror a la some of David Cronenberg's best work. The tale of a lesbian woman who literally starts falling apart after a sexual encounter at a party could have been a commentary on sexuality, a riff on our national obsession with looking perfect, a cautionary tale about drinking, or even just a twisted slice of grotesque horror. It ends up all and none of the above thanks to a dull script and style-less direction from England. The filmmaker is lucky that the fearless Najarra Townsend keeps the piece from crumbling entirely.

Townsend stars as Samantha, a girl who seems like she might be on the edge of a mental collapse before the physical one that overtakes her in the film. She's leaving messages for her girlfriend Nikki (Katie Stegeman) that are going unanswered and seems a bit rattled, the perfect target for a scumbag at a party to take advantage of her. The way the unseen gentleman hands her a drink at the party that Samantha claims to not remember having and her protestations in the car certainly imply that this one-night stand could be defined as rape but Samantha seems to blame herself for the interaction (and England never takes thematic advantage of the concept of how often rape victims feel shame, using the secretive encounter as a plot point instead of a character-driven or emotional one.)



Contracted

Photo credit: IFC Midnight

Samantha wakes up the next day feeling colder than she should in the house she shares with her mother (Caroline Williams), a cartoonish creation by England who never comes close to realistic in the way she pushes her increasingly ill daughter away purportedly because she's had drug problems in the past and possibly even because she doesn't like her lesbian lifestyle. Having the chills would be preferable to where Samantha's body goes from here. What starts as a heavy menstrual flow becomes notably worse when Samantha's eyes turn bloody and her

teeth start falling out. See, kids, sex is bad.

There are hints at the movie that "Contracted" could have been if England had a firmer grip on tone. Believe it or not, there's a VERY black comedy buried in here – such as when Samantha's waitressing gig results in a tooth in a customer's food or a very clever use of title cards to indicate the pressing time. But "Contracted" has far too many dull passages of dialogue to link its bodily horror. The scenes between Sam and her mother sound like a cautionary ABC Family movie, the relationship scenes are flat, and the character of Riley (Matt Mercer), the guy who always loved Samantha, is just one of many who doesn't respond in a logical way when Samantha gets sick.



Contracted

Photo credit: IFC Midnight

And there's another film that "Contracted" could have been but isn't – a commentary on how we ignore the ill, weak, and damaged people around us. How else to explain England's supposition that there's any way that Samantha wouldn't be in the ER on day two of this nightmare? She's still going to work with bloody eyes and rotting teeth? She's still talking to her mother like nothing's wrong? None of it feels remotely believable but also isn't broadly defined enough to be satire, falling in that dull gap in the middle.

Ironically, only Townsend comes out of "Contracted" looking good. She has a natural screen presence and is asked to go truly fearless places in England's film. The problems come from everything around her. In a film about a girl left to deal with a horrendous nightmare on her own, the star stands alone as well.

"Contracted" stars Najarra Townsend, Caroline Williams, Alice Macdonald, Katie Stegeman, Matt mercer, Charley Koontz, Simon Barrett, and Ruben Pla. It was written and directed by Eric England. It opens in Chicago at Facets on November 29, 2013.



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