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‘The Wretched’ Works Best When It Leans More Into Its Horror Elements

Published on May 25, 2020, by [Murjani Rawls](#) - Posted in [Reviews 0](#)



1954’s suspense-thriller *Rear Window* and the 2007 remake, *Disturbia* both taught us to be extra cautious of the neighbor next door. Now add a supernatural witch who seemingly has an endless amount of powers into the mix. *The Wretched*, directed by The Pierce Brothers combines previously touched upon elements of a coming-of-age teen drama with a suspenseful, violent touch of horror. The movie works best when both parts of the plot complement each other. In this specific case, where the character development seems to come up short, the scares and cinematography style is there to elevate it.

The movie follows a teenage boy named Ben (John-Paul Howard) as he goes to visit his father Liam (Jamison Jones) for a while as his parents are going through a divorce. Ben does come off a bit awkward and sometimes lifeless as he navigates trying to fit in within a new setting. From there, he gets a job at his dad’s marina, meets the sharp and sarcastic Mallory (Piper Curda), and takes an interest in the family next door. When we meet Ty (Kevin Bigley), his wife Abbie (Zarah Mahler), and their son Dillon (Blane Crockarell), that’s where the more supernatural elements come in.

During the first act (and some parts of the second), *The Wretched* seems to have a conflict of tone. As you go forward, it does rectify itself later in the film. The characters that get caught in Ben’s orbit, in particular, goes through the summer teen drama ringer. This is complete with bullies, family strife, and a pseudo-romance. The family comprised of Ty and Abbie undergoes a slow rot from within due to the influences of otherworldly powers.

The latter seems stronger than the other. Where plot devices like navigating a divorce and a teenager trying to find himself are there to up the emotional stakes, it’s not enough to get you invested in them. It’s the family we know the least about that comes across the most interesting. When all of these characters paths intersect, that’s where *The Wretched* finds it’s footing. It becomes an intriguing mix of gory horror and psychological thriller.

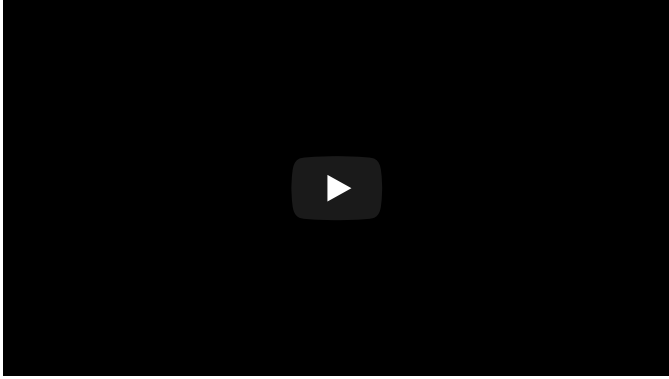
Where *The Wretched* succeeds the most is its atmosphere and ability to create dread. Cinematographer Conor Murphy makes plenty of use of negative space, quick cuts, and darkness to keep the tension rolling. The physical transformations complete with non-verbal cues that the characters go through are genuinely eerie. The score by Devin Burrows provides an orchestral layer that intelligently plays off the building stress these characters go through.

As for the witch, there are elements to her character that make her a very good antagonist. She’s able to control people, make people forget about the existence of people, and physical transformations. These powers are used very well at much of the film to keep you guessing. *The Wretched* goes on and you start to question many of the characters’ motivations. The use of practical effects of the look of the witch coincides well with the visceral evil of her actions.

The audience is provided very little information about the witch’s origins. That serves to work to the movie’s advantage and keeps the witch’s mystique intact. Other than the reoccurring symbol that serves as her calling card, her powers are revealed to you in sequence. Within the second act, there’s a particular scene that occurs where Ben does an internet search on Witchapedia. (Yes, Witchapedia). This choice comes in conflict with the witch’s ability to make people forget things. The world en masse knows more than the audience is shown in the movie and the characters within it. It’s a good thing that *The Wretched* is self-contained in a small town. Despite that, twists happen towards the end of the film that works in its favor. Ben’s world devolves into a mix of paranoia and hysteria and these devices are used well to conceal the reveal.

The Wretched as it exists integrates a lot of teen drama tropes into a Hitchcockian-style slow burn mix of horror. There are times in this movie where the character arcs hinder it from reaching the great potential it seeks. However, there is enough here to complete a satisfying and generally interesting horror film once *The Wretched* decides what it wants to be.

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Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host, and photographer since 2014, Murjani Rawls has been stretching the capabilities of his creativity and passions, Rawls has as a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

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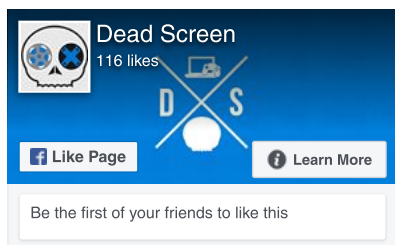
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