Tibor Takacs

The Gate

H orror movies — and other genres too — can be loosely divided into two opposing camps: the mainstream and the extreme. The ex­­gume — Videodrome, The Brood — offers lots and lots of what the filmmaker figures you’re paying your money for: suspense, thrills, terror, gore, never­­before­­seen sights and (much more rarely) never­­before­­thought ideas and glimpses into dark corners a lot of us would rather pretend do not exist. These are the movies that get some people really upset and generate pro­­censorship movements.

The mainstream — The Fly, Dead Zone — offers carefully measured amounts of the above, watered down just enough so as not to turn off any potential ticket buyers. These are the movies that get network sales in prime­­time slots and generate lots of lovely ad revenue, not to mention good notices in the daily papers. You could summarize the split by saying, ‘real horror’ versus ‘horror for people who don’t really like horror’ movies. But that would hardly be fair.

The Gate is mainstream horror all the way. From its cute, suburban, pre­­teen protagonists, through its very conventional camera angles and deliberately softened shock cuts (softened by allowing one or both of the shots involved to run a few frames too long), to its impos­­sibly happy ending, The Gate aims for mainstream mass­­market money all the way.

Okay, let’s cut the flow of bullshit for a moment. The rest of this review is irrelevant, it’s the kind of crap you’ve read a thousand times before and it won’t tell you anything you don’t know, need to know, or can’t figure out for yourself. There is one thing, and one thing only, worth saying about The Gate: it is a vicious, vulgar lie, a corruption and denial of the highest values of art and the core value of fairy tales — the value of truth, truth presented as fable or allegory so that all of us, and especially the kids, can see quite clearly the operations of good and evil, virtue and vice, innocence and experience, strength and weakness — the actions of human beings and their consequences — particularly their consequences.

The Gate is a fairy tale — do I need to explain how horror movies are very often fairy tales? Naw, you already know that. A fairy tale: the cowardly kid finds the courage to use the weapons of love and light to beat back the force of darkness. And it works and it’s fine, but that even though the ghost killed comes back to life again and it’s a slap in the face to any real emotion you might have invested in the characters, but more, far more important, it’s a lie. Dead is dead. People don’t come back like they were before — not
up a CFTA award in 1980 and the others have received domestic and foreign awards and nominations at festival screenings.

Competence is maybe the single most important mainstream quality. We can ignore bad acting, mickmack eyes and glaring technical errors in the extreme movies — we’re too busy being scared to care — but the mainstream audience, wired into Hollywood standards, demands the gloss of the well-made picture. The Gate has it. It is the presentation there’s nothing major-league awful here. At worst, it’s flat and pointless. At best, though, there’s nothing great to give anything but the least expected viewer a rush of real pleasure or thrill.

At best, The Gate is competent. Which is about as mainstream as you can get.

Andrew Dowler


26/3 Boro by the Shore has received domestic and foreign television showings. The Gate has formed itself into a two-hour feature film. If it’s not the best of this year’s extreme movies — we’re too busy being scared to care — but the mainstream audience, wired into Hollywood standards, demands the gloss of the well-made picture. The Gate has it. It is the presentation there’s nothing major-league awful here. At worst, it’s flat and pointless. At best, though, there’s nothing great to give anything but the least expected viewer a rush of real pleasure or thrill.

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