

CINEMA

Poltergeist II: The Boring Side'



The original "Poltergeist" was a dream project. Spielberg and Hooper created a nightmare in the most comfortable setting mankind has known — suburbia. Suddenly, those creature comforts we all grew up with took on menacing properties, and we knew that the haunted house genre had made it into the eighties.

"Poltergeist II: The Other Side" tosses everything that made the original film unique out the window and, like most all sequels, begins revising and rewriting to tell "what really happened." Yawn...

The Freeling family has now moved in with Diane's mother, Gramma Jess (Geraldine Fitzgerald), who learns that young Carol Anne (Heather O'Rourke) has psychic powers. Meanwhile, the diminutive medium Tangina (Zelda Rubenstein) is exploring the remains of the Freeling house and discovers something she never expected under the vacant lot.

Zelda sends Taylor (Will Sampson), a native American with spiritual powers, to watch over the Freeling family who may once again be in danger. Yet the menace has already found them, in the form of Reverend Henry Kane (Julian Beck), a figure who resembles the walking dead and tries to split the unity of the family.

Initial issues of serious financial troubles (the Freelings are broke) and the emotional crisis that may develop are soon dismissed as the story turns to cliché and the horror quickly disintegrates into manipulative shock sequences.

Writers/producers Michael Grais and Mark Victor (who co-wrote the original with Spielberg) have taken one of the themes from the original, the "love conquers all" adapted to the nuclear family, and made it into the hackneyed focus of this film. Taylor and Zelda spend far too long pontificating on the

necessity of family love and togetherness to defeat the evil menace and pretty soon the story looks more like "Father Knows Best Enters The Twilight Zone."

For his part, director Brian Gibson has the subtlety of a sledgehammer. Whereas Tobe Hooper created a mood of menace in the original using composition, lighting and gesture to suggest what evil may lurk out their in the dark just out of frame, Gibson spells out his menace in big, bold letters, relying on soundtrack cues to get the audience worrying and then uses shock cuts to throw the menace right into their laps.

"Poltergeist II" just isn't very much fun. The humor that ran rampant in the original is suggested in the opening scenes (my favorite line: "No, we can't get a TV.") but dropped as the story becomes maudlin and "serious."

The philosophy of life is spoonfed to us through the shaman stereotype Taylor (movie producers are convinced that all native Americans converse with the spirit world and battle evil to save cute, white middle-class families) and later re-inforced through some of the most unsubtle dialogue and family groupings this side of "The Brady Bunch."

To top it off, the ballyhooed "other side" just doesn't live up to expectations. Even the slimy creatures designed by "Alien" conceptual artist H.R. Giger are pedestrian. The only real emanations of evil come from Julian Beckcre, whose Rev Kane really feels like evil incarnate.

Beck can't pull the movie off himself, unfortunately, and "Poltergeist II" comes off as a disappointment. Whatever anyone says about Spielberg, he does know what makes middle America tick.

By Sean Axmaker

Staff

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