

“VANISHING ON 7TH STREET” (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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VANISHING ON 7TH STREET, the latest from the talented if inconsistent Brad Anderson (beginning its theatrical release today from Magnolia Pictures’ Magnet Releasing), will in many reviews and discussions be compared to **THE TWILIGHT ZONE**. Its small cast, confined to one location during an unexplained widespread apocalypse of shadows and disappearances, does immediately recall the classic series, but sadly, beyond its premise, the parallel isn’t sustained.

The opening reel sees almost the entire population of a major city quite literally disappear, with only their clothes left piled on the ground as remnants. It seems their physical selves have been pulled in to join the masses of dark, shadowy figures that creep and slither along the walls and streets, often echoing what was left of nuclear warfare victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Four survivors—a reporter (Hayden Christensen), a distraught mother (Thandie Newton), a projectionist with interests in dark matter and metaphysics (John Leguizamo) and a young boy left alone (Jacob Latimore)—find each other in a pub on the titular 7th Street, where they argue, muse over the reasons for their plight and make attempts to escape.



With location work in Detroit and a tale that calls for endless shadow and hard pools of light, Anderson still finds it difficult to create a palpable, threatening atmosphere here. Sure, the premise is intriguing, but the film can only float along so far on the question of what’s really going on before the lack of empathy and suspense lead to audience disinterest. To be fair, only some of the **VANISHING**’s faults lie in the director’s hands; Anthony Jaswinski’s script simply doesn’t go anywhere. The action never moves beyond philosophizing over the cause or trying to get the hell out of the bar—but since none of the endless theories hold any more water than the rest, the stakes are never raised. There is strength that lies in haunting ambiguity, but when its development is so muddled, there’s nothing stimulating or particularly memorable to ponder

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post-viewing. One gets a sense that Jaswinski himself didn't have much in the way of an answer, and simply tried to coast on his initially striking premise.

Newton and Leguizamo are regularly solid screen presences, but their chops are undercut by grating characters that force the two actors into wide-eyed and eye-rolling dramatics. Christensen, as usual, is wooden and uninteresting, continuing to dumbfound the world as to why anyone thinks he's a leading man. Young co-stars Latimore and Taylor Groothuis (playing a mysterious little girl who pops up intermittently throughout) fare just fine, though.

What's not the film's fault, but won't help either way, is that its final shot is almost an exact clone of an image most genre fans were inundated with in 2010 thanks to another apocalyptic saga. It's an unfortunate coincidence, and when coupled with VANISHING's shoddy and not-so-erie CGI shadow people, just elicits sympathy for Anderson being saddled with such second-rate material. In its final act, VANISHING ON 7TH STREET shoots for one last gasp of significance when some shadows desperately whisper, "I exist." But the existential angle is just another underdeveloped possibility thrown on the pile. It reminds us that THE TWILIGHT ZONE, even when being vague, taught us something about our lives—lessons that carried a sincere layer of thoughtfulness, not just the shadow of one.



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