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IN THE VAULT, POOR CREATIVE CHOICES ADD UP TO A WEAK HORROR FILM

Posted by Christina Tucker | Sep 5, 2017 |

Nightmother, Reviews | | ★★★★★



Overview: A bank robbery quickly goes south due to mysterious, supernatural forces within the bank. FilmRise; 2017; Not Rated; 91 minutes.

“We’re not alone”: In Dan Bush’s *The Vault*, siblings Michael Dillon (Scott Haze), Vee Dillon (Taryn Manning), and Leah Dillon (Francesca

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Eastwood) commit a bank robbery in order to help Michael Dillon pay back an ambiguously unsavory debt. In the process, the truth about the bank come to light and leads to chaos and carnage. Among those held hostage in the bank are assistant manager Ed Mass (James Franco) and head bank teller Susan Cromwell (Q'orianka Kilcher). While the premise of a crime that goes wrong because of supernatural forces is compelling, this film is unable to make its horror psychologically terrifying, due largely to bland characters and a lack of narrative.

First of a long string of baffling creative choices in this film is its casting. Taryn Manning is likely the strongest casting choice, her harshness and desperation the most convincing. On the other side of the bank robbery, Q'orianka Kilcher also gives a solid performance as a sensitive bank teller. The rest of the group's casting is somewhat baffling, particularly James Franco as a nervous assistant manager, Ed Mass. Despite being the largest name in a cast of smaller actors, he has probably the fewest lines of anyone in the main cast. This does, possibly intentionally, lead one to anticipate a turn for his character, one that would allow him to show some acting range, or do more than sit on the ground with his hands bound. This turn never materializes, and although his character's fate is integral to one of the twists of the film, James Franco himself is left to do little. Franco is also, as an aside, very difficult to buy as a mousy, asthmatic assistant manager of a bank.

With slick camera work and some great sound design, *The Vault* is otherwise lacking, with an interesting conceit but no clue how to successfully execute the

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SCORE: 88%

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required work necessary to make it tragic, entertaining, or terrifying.

“I don’t like ghost stories”: *The Vault*, despite its polished presentation and creative premise, is unable to use hallmarks of various horror genres to make its story, one that is light on plot, connect in any way. It taps into, for example, aspects of crime thrillers, gory B-movies, and psychological horror, but does not have the narrative strength or character exploration to make any of these choices effective.

The Vault isn’t concerned with any of its hostages outside of Susan and Ed Mass, nor is it interested in a tense battle of wits between the robbers and the authorities outside the bank’s doors, either of which would have pushed this film over the line into being a stronger crime thriller. It also lacks the exploration of psyches and fears of its leads, hostages, or the authorities that is a necessary condition of a strong psychological thriller. Tension and suspense are sometimes well-crafted, but would have landed far better when the fate of the character’s on screen is of any importance. As a result, a slow-moving second act meant to lead up to an explosive ending is simply uninteresting to watch.

While the fact that the film starts almost immediately with the robbery itself leads to a trim runtime, even a single scene of the Dillon siblings’ preparation would have helped understand character motivations that much more, and may have made any of their fear mean something. Scott Haze’s Michael is the best *The Vault* gives the viewer in terms of a character to root for or sympathize with, although the specifics of his motivations are largely left mysterious. When, in the

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latter half, the film tries to wrench sincerity and sympathy out of the audience, it is largely for characters about which we know nothing.

“What happened back in 1982”: When Susan tells Leah Dillon the story of a bank robbery that took place in 1982, that story, for the brief few minutes it’s told to us, is more compelling than the story of the film itself, more terrifying and more psychologically fascinating. It’s a story that engages with the hostages and their turmoil, and has an antagonist and a narrative arc. Its impact on the present gives the story stakes as well, but despite the gravitas with which it is told to us, it remains unresolved. It becomes apparent that explaining the true nature of what has happened in the bank since the 1982 robbery was never of much interest beyond a surface-level concept; the horrific initial robbery primarily serves as a vehicle for supernatural elements to enter the story.

A bank robbery that goes wrong because of supernatural involvement due to a past tragedy is a potentially interesting concept. But any concept no matter how interesting can succeed or fail based on the strength of its narrative and characters. *The Vault* fails to incorporate these elements in any considerable way, which unfortunately makes for a largely uninteresting experience.

Overall: The nature of the supernatural presence in the bank is never fully explained, the characters are never fully explained, and as a result *The Vault* feels like an urban legend or campfire story stretched to fill 90 minutes.

Rating: C-

Featured Image: FilmRise

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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