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REEL WORLD

For the birds



Nothing new in Netflix's much-hyped horror flick

Netflix has garnered a lot of social-media buzz for its horror/sci-fi original, *Bird Box*, and Sandra Bullock is as good as usual in the starring role, but that isn't enough to make up for a lame script and a bunch of overused horror gimmicks in what is one messy film.

The story follows Malorie (Bullock), a gloomy artist going through the motions and dealing with an unwanted pregnancy. Her sister Jessica (Sarah Paulson) tells her to get out of the dumps, and takes her to the doctor for a checkup shortly after seeing a strange report on TV about people killing themselves in Russia.

by
Bob Grimm
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Bird Box
Starring Sandra
Bullock. Directed by
Susanne Bier. Netflix.
Rated R.

While visiting with the doc (Parminder Nagra), all hell starts to break loose in the hospital and even more so on the streets. It appears as if people are seeing some sort of entity, deciding it's far too much for them to handle, and then killing themselves in creative ways (stepping in front of buses, bashing heads into windows, walking into fire, etc.). Malorie manages to navigate

through the mayhem and winds up trapped in a house with a few others.

Up until this point, the film looks promising. The street-suicides scene is genuinely scary, and flash-forward scenes featuring Malorie trying to find some sort of safe haven with two children—while all wearing blindfolds to avoid the killer visions—are compelling. As much as the latter scenes work OK, they are very similar to last summer's *A Quiet Place*, with characters simply not able to use their eyes rather than being prohibited from making sounds.

But once Malorie goes into that house, the movie

hits a total dead end. It's pretty much the same scenario as that 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, right down to the pregnant women and shopping scenes.

John Malkovich is one of the house survivors, and he's just doing a variation on the usual John Malkovich. Instead of bawling his eyes out after witnessing the death of his wife, he gets angry, yelling at Malorie in that halting Malkovich kind of way ("You ... are the reason ... she ... is dead!"). It made me laugh, and I'm quite sure that wasn't the desired reaction from filmmaker Susanne Bier.

As for the other survivors, there's the young punk, the female cop, the other pregnant woman, the older mom type and the Malorie love interest. When Bullock is trading lines with most of these folks, they are clearly and obviously outmatched, especially in some of the moments that seem more improvised. They shouldn't be in the same room with Bullock, who shines despite the hackneyed script.

The scenes with Malorie and the children on the river, while not all that original, are nonetheless riveting and tense. Much of this is due to Bullock and the excellent child actors, simply named Girl (Vivien Lyra Blair) and Boy (Julian Edwards). The little expressions they make while Malorie lectures them on how one stupid move could kill them are heartbreaking.

I give credit to Netflix for getting in the film game and doing a great job hyping it, as well as to Bullock for acting her ass off. Too bad the material so often drifts into dreck. □



Poor



Fair



Good



Very Good



Excellent

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