

In Praise of Guilty Pleasures: "The Glass House," "Hardball," and "Two Can Play That Game"

Written by Mike Schulz

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THE GLASS HOUSE

The domestic thriller *The Glass House* is obvious and over-the-top from the word go, and that's what I liked about it. It takes true chutzpah to pull off a movie with visuals this baroque and plotting this convoluted; it might be the most trashily enjoyable work of its kind since 1997's *The Devil's Advocate*

. Like that Al Pacino craptacular,

The Glass House

has no higher agenda than showing audiences, in horror-flick form, the luridness behind ultra-rich "perfection," and it's so up-front about its limited ambitions, and so earnestly performed by its top-tier cast, that you can easily lean back and enjoy it for the stylish dreck it is. Is it a good movie? Nah. An entertaining one? Hell, yes.

After their parents are killed in an auto wreck, 16-year-old Ruby (Leelee Sobieski) and 11-year-old Rhett (Trevor Morgan) are taken in by their parents' friends, Terry and Erin Glass (Stellan Skarsgard and Diane Lane). The Glasses live in a huge Malibu home constructed primarily of glass – who woulda thunk it? – but when the kids are scuttled off to the tiny bedroom they have to *share*, Ruby begins sensing that something's amiss. Indeed. It turns out that the Glasses' interest in the kids is purely financial, which probably wouldn't be so unforgivable if Terry weren't also a sociopathic lech and Erin weren't a passive-aggressive morphine addict. And once Ruby gets a little too close to the truth about her new foster folks, Terry makes it quite clear that no one's going to mess with the Glasses' privileged lifestyle; he reminds her that he and his wife will still have access to the kids' money with only

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one
living child.

The Glass House is one of those movies that wouldn't exist without the law of contrivances, which states that if you're conducting secretive business on the telephone in the middle of the night, the person from whom you're hiding said information will naturally walk by and eavesdrop on your call. Or if you complain to a social worker about the bedroom you share with your brother and about your dope-shooting foster mom, the day the social worker visits will just *happen*

to be the day you get your own room and New Mom cleans out her medicine cabinet. We're all used to these clichés in thrillers, but

The Glass House

incorporates so many of them that it becomes rather dizzying. Scene by scene, the movie is almost dopey beyond measure, and I haven't even addressed some basic questions of plotting – like, how did the kids' parents ever become friends with these freaks in the first place? – that could drive you crazy if you thought about them at length.

Thankfully, director Daniel Sackheim doesn't give us much time to think. He's too busy enticing us with icy-cool visuals and sharp pacing, and guiding his performers to some surprisingly outstanding work. Leelee Sobieski brings terrific undercurrents of loneliness and resentment to her character – her remembrance of being orphaned lingers in every scene – and Diane Lane is marvelously textured; she's the movie's only real mystery, as we try to determine to what extent Erin is involved in the sinister goings-on. And while some might complain about the casting of Stellan Skarsgard – "No one in their right mind would entrust kids to *Stellan Skarsgard!* He's an oily bastard in every film he's in!" – I thought the choice was perfect. C'mon, it's a genre movie, we *know*

Terry's gonna be a nutcase, and Skarsgard plays the role with such thinly veiled malevolence that's he's a real kick; you don't know whether you want him to get caught or want to continue watching his nasty escapades. Against all logic,

The Glass House

stands as a true guilty pleasure; just

try

to recommend it to friends without a goofy, embarrassed grin on your face.

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