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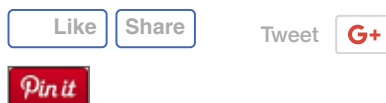


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THE LOOKOUT

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By [Erica Abeel \(Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93\)](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93) Mar 29, 2007



Reviews

The chief allure of *The Lookout*, the directorial debut of screenwriter Scott Frank (*Minority Report*), is the presence of two superb actors, Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*Mysterious Skin*) and Jeff Daniels, working at the top of their form. But this dramatic thriller, which Frank also wrote, suffers from a by-the-numbers screenplay that by Act II runs out of steam and packs few surprises.

The story centers around Chris (Gordon-Levitt), a golden boy and once-promising high-school jock, whose brain comes unmoored after he cracks up the car he's driving, killing two of its four occupants. Four years later, Chris is matched up by a life-skills center with kindly but sardonic blind roommate Lewis (Daniels). Chris works in a bank as a janitor for a sadistic boss who quashes his modest aspirations. His aloof family seems more embarrassed by Chris than supportive.

Chris's chief deficit is an impaired sense of sequence; post-its leading from shower to front door are needed to launch him into his day. In school Chris writes therapeutic stories to help him organize the sequence of events, which leads to Frank's most inspired device: Chris becomes the narrator of his own movie, struggling to find coherence when trouble seeks him out.

This comes in the form of Gary Spargo (Matthew Goode) and his cohorts, lowlife townies majoring in bank robbing, who need a patsy to play lookout. Gary seduces Chris by playing Robin Hood, telling him that banks benefit only the corporate scoundrels, not the farmers; he also lends him his babelicious girlfriend (Isla Fisher). Only blind Lewis smells a rat, warning Chris from the start against a course that ends in a predictable bloodbath.

Until the splatter shatters the spell, the film, set in Kansas to a moody score, fits nicely into the genre of small-town *noir*. Frank has also captured the nuances of small-town social status, contrasting Chris' family mansion with Gary's rundown farmhouse.

Bearish Daniels does a wonderfully convincing blind man, but the film is Gordon-Levitt's vehicle. He's an impeccable young actor in the mold of early Johnny Depp and Leonardo Di Caprio--sexy, intelligent, faintly exotic, with a sweet, devastating smile. Vanishing into his damaged character, he nails the slightly "off" body language and mental fuzziness; above all, he projects a baseline decency that makes you root for him. This film leaves you hoping for a project truly worthy of Gordon-Levitt's gifts.

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