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Hostel: A Modern Horror Film

Hostel is about three youths backpacking through Europe, two of which were American and one was Icelandic. The story begins in Amsterdam, where they are distracted with women and drugs. The first night, they miss their curfew at the hostel, and they meet a man who tells them of a secret hostel in Bratislava where the women are beautiful and easy. So they travel there, and find it to be true. Yet while the women are beautiful, this hostel is actually a trap where people are captured and tortured by bored and rich white males. In short, through many gruesome scenes of torture, one of the main characters escapes and the other two do not.

This film is a horror film. There is plenty of gore to disgust us and plenty of naked women. In my opinion, there is too much of both. If there had been half as much interesting dialogue, plot twists, or appealing cinematography as breasts, this film would move from bad to O.K. in my book. But it is a horror film in the classic sense. The ugly grotesque monster in this film is a Dr. Satan-esque (House of a Thousand Corpses) wanna-be surgeon that gets his kicks off torture. The interesting thing is that it's not a single monster, but a group of people that pay good money to dress up and play god. There is plenty of gore to shock and disgust, and plenty of suspense to keep the viewer on the edge of her or his seat.

While I wrote earlier that the story begins in Amsterdam, the movie begins with nondiagenic material. During the opening credits, the audience is taken to a dark, dank

room with clips of blood, mucus, and organs being hosed off the walls and floors. While the pieces of human are being cleaned away, there is a disturbing sound track of a man whistling very loudly and happily. This unusual contrast of picture and sound is the first instance of shock in the film. In the middle of the room being cleaned, there is a solitary empty chair, which is a repeated image throughout the whole movie.

As in most films of this type, the audience tends to either know or suspect much more information than the main characters. This includes the opening scene which is a setup for the tone of the rest of the movie. It also includes many other scenes, that if it weren't for the low, creepy, ominous music, we would think they were normal scenes. When the characters are learning of the secret hostel and when they are unsuspectingly talking to one of their torturers on the train, the soundtrack makes us suspect some malicious intent because the music is ill fitting of the casual conversation. Again, a couple other times in the movie, as the characters are walking down the streets of Bratislava carefree, the camera zooms in on some of the locals who either have a look of pity or one of disturbing hatred. The characters do not see this, but the audience does, which helps to create suspense.

When the characters find out what's going on, it is too late. A neat camera trick that happens in the most intense scenes, is switching to first person perspective. While one of the characters is handcuffed to the infamous chair, awaiting his impending doom with a one-holed bag over his head, the screen shot is as if the camera were inside the character's head. It frantically moves around, seeing it is in the same dark room as the beginning of the movie, and notices many instruments of torture hanging on the walls. This perspective identifies the audience with the situation and makes them feel as if they are in the room as well.

Some of the scenes were exciting, but on the whole, this movie was a dud. I cannot believe that Tarantino put his name on this thing. There were some interesting themes, though. When the main character escapes, he goes back to save some people that he doesn't even know, putting their safety over his own. Also, while they are escaping Bratislava, he has the chance to avenge his two friends death by killing all the people that had set them up. It is interesting to note, that while the earlier murders are dark and grotesque, these murders of justice are light and righteous. The audience sides with these murders at the end and feels they are justified. It didn't work on me though, murder is murder and I found not one attractive character in this film. Waste of time, don't see it.