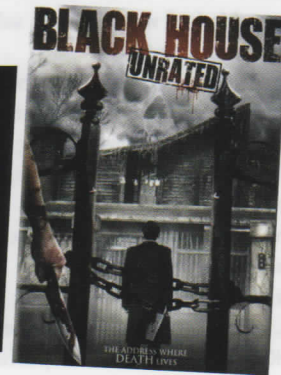




NOBODY'S HOME

"Black House" (CJ Entertainment DVD release)

> Review by Sean Kim



IT doesn't seem you can go too wrong with a title like "Black House." The suggestions are promising: Haunted house? Slaughter house? House that's alive? Think of all the potential.

But this house has absolutely nothing to do with the story. "Black House" clocks in at 103 minutes, though I feel like I've wasted a month of my life.

Jeon Jun-oh (Hwang Jeong-min) is an insurance investigator checking on a claim involving a boy's suicide. He's a good man by most measures. The irony of this is not lost, but this plot device of making the insurance company the moral innocent here is a stretch.

But let's put that aside for now and just accept that Jeon is a good and upright man who is plagued by the memory of his younger brother's suicide. He then gets sucked into an insurance scam by serial-killer Shin Yi-hwa (Yu Seon) who plays off his guilty conscience.

It's a look-in-the-abyss-and-the-abyss-looks-into-you bit about absolute evil and one's struggle to retain his humanity in the face of it. Problem is, good people, especially morally upright people, are boring. Jeon is boring. Hwang, the actor, does nothing to give him any semblance of personality, aside from stumbling around in confusion or pain and occasionally getting huffed up in outrage. You wish that, just once, he'd grow a backbone and knock the killer down. She's a petite cripple who is half-blind at some point and the best he can do is crawl into a metal locker and hide for his life.

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The movie is bad. It's stagnant, hackneyed and over-stretched. And there is an inexcusable line of dialogue that goes like this:

"Ever heard of psychopaths?"

"No."

That last line is Jeon's. I had to pause. How can we believe in a character who says he's never heard of psychopaths? I had to wonder a moment if maybe *he* was a psychopath.

The rest of the movie then hinges on the serial-killer's basement with the hanging chains, pools of blood and decapitated body parts. This apparently is what makes the house so "black."

But the crowning achievement is the end, which lingers and drags and finally leaves a huge, ambiguous mess. It goes for the good twist at the end, building anticipation for the final appearance of the killer. Viewers want something big. We're thinking "Fatal Attraction" when Glenn Close explodes out of the bath-tub with her knife raised high. That scene scared every man in this country.

How does "Black House" do it? She's hiding in the bed, pretending to be Jeon's girlfriend. This is followed by a 10-minute boiler-plate confrontation on the roof of the hospital and then the comic book ending as Jeon espouses what it means to be human while trying to save Yi-hwa's life. Only she won't have it and falls to her death in what has to be the strangest, most overwrought scene in the entire movie.

There's even more to follow, but I'll leave it to curiosity for those who still want to see the movie. I've seen enough. ☹



A PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR FILM THAT EVOKES MORE YAWNS THAN THRILLS.