

## Review: Hereditary

[Cameron Craig](#) is left disappointed by one of the most hyped horror films of the year

Wednesday 20 June 2018



**5/10**

**Director:** Ari Aster

**Starring:** Toni Collette, Alex Wolff, Gabriel Byrne

**Length:** 2hr 7m

**Rating:** 15

The Horror film genre has seen a resurgence in recent years. Although an endless torrent of uninspired, ghost train flicks continues to litter cinemas, a breed of more thought-provoking horror film has begun to rear its head. Recent works, such as Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, as well as 2014's *The Babadook*, have explored poignant contemporary themes, whilst still doling out the thrills sought by mainstream audiences. Writer-director Ari Aster's debut feature *Hereditary* is surely part of this upward trend, yet, in amongst its ambitions, the film fails to deliver on the chills promised by its intriguing trailer, nor is it able to weave a satisfying plotline.

*Hereditary* follows the outwardly-unremarkable Graham family, headed-up by Annie (Toni Collette), the matriarch of the clan, who whittles away her time crafting ornate dioramas of scenes from her life. Despite Annie's mother having passed away, the family appears completely unperturbed, with Annie wondering aloud whether she should be more upset at her mother's parting. The sole exception is that of daughter Charlie, played by newcomer Milly Shapiro, who holds a special connection with her late grandmother. Soon, further tragedy afflicts the family, bringing with it terrifying nightmares, supernatural

phenomena, and eerie revelations regarding the family's history; all of which threatens to plunge the entire Graham household into a collective state of madness.

To reveal more would do the film a disservice, and yet, barring a few stomach-turning moments, there seems precious little else about the film's plot which could be spoiled. Although writer-director Ari Aster presents us with an intriguing story concerning the sinister history of a quaint family, *Hereditary* has a mere whiff of a plotline. The film's second act comprises of a series of spooky vignettes, which very gradually increase in their intensity, but Aster fails to find a through line in amongst the insanity. As a result, characters trudge through scenes with virtually no outward motivation, ensuring that the film feels every second of its 127-minute runtime. Aster is known for his excellent short films, which is perhaps the seed of the problem; *Hereditary* contains enough material for an effective horror short but lacks the plot needed to fill a feature.

Collette is largely successful as Annie, although one would expect no less from such a seasoned veteran of the screen. However, as the tragedy mounts, her outpouring of grief does become a little excessive in a few instances. Shapiro is similarly effective in her role as Charlie, although more could have been made of her character. The same could be said of father Steve, as portrayed by Gabriel Byrne. Byrne does a fine job portraying the stoic patriarch, desperate to retain a brave face as the world seemingly crumbles around him, but he never comes into his own. Teenage son Peter (Alex Wolff) occupies an increasingly important role within the story, becoming the de facto protagonist by the film's conclusion. Wolff appears suitably overwhelmed by the circumstances surrounding him, morphing from a listless adolescent into a babbling child during the chaotic climax.

Aster handles his script with style. In fact, those late to the screening would be forgiven for believing that they had stumbled into the latest Wes Anderson feature. Aster makes extensive use of symmetrical framing, granting scenes the appearance of a carefully crafted dollhouse. As a result, the characters become as marionettes; completely oblivious to the strings which guide their movements throughout the story world. Indeed, the film begins with a diorama of the Graham household, wherein the characters go about their morning as though they were anthropomorphised figurines. Aster wrings out every ounce of emotion from scenes by locking the camera in close-ups of his actors, holding on their anguished faces for a painful length of time. It is a powerful stylistic choice, the success of which depends entirely upon the patience of the audience members surrounding you in the theatre; there are sure to be smatterings of laughter in such moments from a certain breed of cinema goer (although this a subject worthy of its own discussion).

Although *Hereditary* does provide some evocative imagery, one would be hard-pressed to call the film scary. There are virtually no jump scares, and yet the film holds equally few scenes of genuine tension. Viewers will surely remember one sequence, in particular, the execution of which is well-realised, but it is more gut-wrenchingly tragic than it is terrifying. The lack of plot throughout prevents any sense of mounting tension from being cultivated. As a result, the chaotic climax feels tepid and somewhat out of place within the context of the rest of the film. The revelation as to what exactly is going on feels similarly anomalous and would prove more at home in a Blumhouse picture. The film's oddly-serene final scene was quite effective, although it hardly makes up for that which preceded it. It is a crying shame as his previous work suggests at Aster's potential as a horror movie director (If you want something truly bone-chilling, seek out his first short *The Strange Thing About the Johnsons*; a horrifying, Kafkaesque thriller).

*Hereditary* is another pit-stop in the gradual resurgence of the auteur-driven horror movie. However, although it traffics in some hefty ideas, the film's plot is too ill-considered to retain the viewer's investment. Performances are excellent across the board, but the cast cannot make up for a severe scare deficit. Perhaps, in sculpting his first feature, Aster has flown too close to the sun, creating a film which appears more thought-provoking than it really is. Such an Icarian metaphor is therefore entirely fitting; *Hereditary* is an inspired, yet unfortunate, tragedy.



## One comment

colin blake

20 Jun '18 at 9:45 pm

watched film today a slow plot nothing to scare me.good acting but long plot film dragged badly for me sorry to say

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