



January 2020

Scare Me

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Recommended Citation

McDavid, Jodi (2020) "Scare Me," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 24: Iss. 1, Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol24/iss1/12>

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Scare Me* (2020), directed by Josh Ruben.

Keywords

Horror, #Metoo

Author Notes

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Scare Me (2019) dir. Josh Ruben

Josh Ruben is the writer, director and one of the actors in *Scare Me*. He got his chops in CollegeHumor, creating thousands of videos for the website. While reviews were mixed among my unofficial early-reactions-survey of my nearby seatmates, I think this film will resonate well with the generation that CollegeHumor speaks to. CollegeHumor tends to take on complex topics in a flippant way, satirizing them and sometimes sacrificing some aspects of execution, rather preferring to ensure their topic gets into the limelight. The take more of a sketch comedy form rather than creating a cinematic world. Another stylistic influence is 1980s episodic horror shows (such as *Tales from the Crypt*) and comedy horror such as the *Scary Movie* series. One could be critical of the style, however, that doesn't really serve much of a purpose; my thoughts are that this style will ring true for those who are familiar with those forms.

In most ways, *Scare Me* is not scary. But in a very important way, it is. Fred (Josh Ruben) goes to a remote cabin, ostensibly to work on his writing. He meets Fanny (Aya Cash) while he is out for a jog, and discovers that she is a successful writer. Later that night

the power goes out and Fanny shows up at this cabin and suggests they tell scary stories, an exchange that goes back and forth throughout the night. Fanny gives Fred some critical advice, and he seems conflicted about her, somewhat intrigued but also intimidated.

Eventually, Fred confronts Fanny about her notebook and says he wants to give her the best scare. That he will chase her and if he catches her, its implied he will beat her with a fireplace poker. If he can't find her, she will keep the notebook. This is clearly too real for Fanny, and the viewer is also left to wonder, is Fred serious or is he joking? Has he misread the dynamic of the night and does he believe Fanny thinks him to be harmless? Or does he really want to terrify her? We are left wondering.

The director's notes confirm that Ruben wrote this script in response to the #MeToo movement and from hearing stories from his female friends about things they had experienced. While Ruben makes an interesting attempt to bring this idea into the comedy horror genre, there are also some missed opportunities. One story broaches the idea that the two will kiss, which does not create the tension it could. At another point a second man shows up, at which point Fanny is also calm and easy going about the change in balance. As a female watching this film, those were moments of tension for me, and concern for the character of Fanny, which the director didn't develop. As #MeToo is a recurring subject of films, and more films are devoted to the experiences of marginalised people, it is important that authentic voice is used and that these stories are developed from a place of experience and knowledge.