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[STIFF Film Review – The Caretaker](#)

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Tom Conyers's [The Caretaker](#) (2012), an independent horror film from

Australia, does something not enough horror films do right: makes us understand and even sympathize with its monster. Sure, there are good movies where the monster is a brainless killing machine whose sole purpose is to cause mayhem, and I like those just fine. But when I can understand the reasons behind their actions, they really leave a lasting impression on me. Conyers's film knows this, and thus doesn't just settle for the simple jump scares and scenes of gore (although there's plenty of that going on). Instead, it focuses more on character and the relationships people have with one another, and how those bonds are tested in extreme times of stress. The fact that it also has blood, guts, and action as well is just an added bonus.

The set-up of the movie is not unlike anything we have seen before. A group of people, trapped in a house in the middle of nowhere, fighting against an outside danger is a tried and true horror premise. This time around, the danger is in the form of blood-hungry vampires. I must point out that the depiction of the vampires here is not like the sexy, attractive kind of recent memory (and that's a good thing). Instead, they are more along the lines of werewolves—wild, savage, crawling on all fours like beasts instead of people. After a slow opening act, we are introduced to the people who will have to face these creatures: Ron (Lee Mason), a tough, bearded pub dweller, Guy (Clint Dowdell) and Annie (Anna Burgess), a couple whose relationship is on the brink of ending, and Lester (Colin MacPherson), an elderly gentleman who just wants to survive and take care of his ill mother.

They are all types, certainly, and each fits into their role accordingly. What Conyers does well, though, is throw a wrench into the system that changes all of their motivations. This is done in the form of a fifth member, Dr. Ford Grainger (Mark White). Dr. Grainger is a calm, intelligent man, who has come to Lester's home to see about his mother. The only problem is that Dr. Grainger is a powerful vampire as well. He strikes up a deal with the group: if they will protect him from the living during the day, he will in turn protect them from the undead during the night. And this is where things start to get interesting. I found myself fascinated to see how this dynamic would play out. Surely, this is a situation that cannot last forever, and to see how some members either accept or do not accept their dire position makes for some of the film's more suspenseful moments.



Conyers presents his story in a film that doesn't rush through the steps of a horror movie. He allows the film to sit back, breathe, and develop in a natural, steady pace. That is one of the film's strongest aspects—the ability for Conyers to slow the pacing to concentrate on mood and atmosphere. Even though not much may be happening in a certain scene, we get a feeling that something is not right, and that is due to solidly crafted direction. The editing and cinematography work very well here. Though the first few scenes of the film felt a bit chopped up and for awhile I wasn't quite sure what was happening, once viewed within the entire context of the film, I realized it was done so for us to experience the confusion that the characters were going through when they first learned of the “outbreak” happening around them. When the kill scenes and action do happen, they are done efficiently enough to be convincing. I've seen plenty of horror movie deaths in the past, and none here are really all that original; it's the concentration on mood and character that makes this film effective.



I did have a few issues with the movie, but they are all fairly minor. One of them deals with the soundtrack. The music of the film, made up of mostly slow, moody piano and deep trembling sound cues, is appropriate to the style, but felt overly present. The music was so loud and abundant that I found myself noticing it a bit too often. I believe the storytelling was strong enough that the soundtrack could have been pushed more into the background instead of forcing itself to the front. The other small issue I had was with the relationship between Guy and Annie. One of the bigger story arcs is seeing whether or not they would be able to survive this ordeal together, and while we're given just enough development for them, I would have liked to have seen their bond fleshed out just a bit more for us to really cling on to and root for them as the film moved toward its ending passages.

Overall, *The Caretaker* is a horror film that I would recommend not only to horror fans, but also to movie fans in general. The film looks good, the acting is solid all around, and the fact that Conyers took a familiar premise and attempted to do something different with it makes it all the more worthy of note. It's one of those movies where you can sit back and enjoy the scenes of quiet character development just as much as you can enjoy the scenes with suspense-filled terror. When you have a story where you can understand where each person is coming from and why he or she decide to do the things they do—whether they are good or bad—you know someone's doing something right.

Final Grade: B+