



WATCH THE SKIES

The marketing for Chronicle had three technicians launching human-shaped remote controlled helicopters over the skies of NYC.

Found Footage films have been a category under the scope of almost every major production company in Hollywood. With The Blair Witch Project being the phenomenon it was, who's to blame studios for trying to replicate it? They've gotten close with some (Cloverfield) and others were actually more successful (Paranormal Activity). But who is to say Blair Witch perfected the found footage film? It can't be awarded the trophy solely for being one of the first films to accomplish a POV film shot on a handheld. What exactly do found footage films aim to capture that is so different than regularly shot stories? Let's dive in real quick:

We, as a society, capture moments and events on film to share a personal feeling or story with a larger audience. That can be said for filmmakers regardless on the size of their camera. But for the regular people at home, they almost always reach for the camera to show something that can't be believed. Some capture lesser-sized events just for fun. Others actually have to live behind the identity of a camera. The latter being something we haven't seen in found footage films yet. The irony in this method is that it is the most believable reason as to why someone would be carrying around a camera. Yes, documenting footage made a great amount of sense for Blair Witch. Even Cloverfield gets a pass by explaining it was to capture Rob's final moments home with his friends, then to capture the insanity of monster-caused destruction on camera. For almost every found footage since Cloverfield, it has strictly been labeled as "documentation".

So why is it that so many filmmakers take their turn creating their own "found-documentation" on a supernatural event? It's almost as if they're picking up the same apple, yet calling it an orange. Found footage films are beginning to wear out their welcome to most audiences, solely because they are replicating each other, with a simple twist to make things, albeit extremely minor, different. What this genre needs is a fresh face. An artist who has a vision worth watching on screen. A vision that could easily have been written off by any other writer, director or studio. But Josh Trank isn't like most directors. At least, that's what he is attempting to prove with his debut film, Chronicle.

High school loner, Andrew (Dane DeHaan) has had enough of his alcoholic fathers' excessive abuse and has decided to purchase a camera. With this camera, Andrew explains that he just wants to capture everything that happens at home and at school, to show that he really is the outcast he seems to be. When his cousin, and only friend, Matt (Alex Russell) convinces him to come to an abandoned barn party, Andrew decides to break out of his shell. Once he arrives, Andrew is only reminded of why he carries his camera around and leaves. However, he had no idea what he was about to get into. After being recruited by student body frontrunner Steve (Michael B. Jordan), Andrew is reunited with Matt as they discover a gaping hole in the middle of the forest. Concluding a night of nose bleeds and broken camera, the three boys find themselves with incredible power. They can telekinetically move objects with their minds. Using these powers strictly for enjoyment and pranks, the boys have never been happier as they have truly discovered the true friends they were always meant to have. But, as a wise-now-deceased uncle once said: "With great power, comes great responsibility".

I'll just go ahead and leave this here: Chronicle is, hands down, the best found footage film available.

From the surface, it's hard to believe that this would be true. For some reason, we all feel the need to identify each film with mash-ups. Like I Am Number Four meets Blair Witch. Or Cloverfield meets Heroes. And in some fashion, I can see that. Yet, a film like Chronicle isn't deserving of being identified as a mash-up. Chronicle is of its' own identity. These characters, Matt, Steve and Andrew, are all people we know from our lives, high school or not. They aren't strangers to audiences at all. However, the depth and emotion they are given are unlike the majority of other stories. Through Steve finally finding friends who like him without him having to try, Matt being able to connect with



the girl of his dreams and Andrew finally having the chance to be seen for who he is. These powers brought out the real personality traits in each of these boys. The story arch given for Andrew is what truly keeps the film original. Then again, original isn't something Chronicle has to try hard at.

When it comes to these sorts of movies, casting is typically unknown actors, as it keeps the sense of reality alive. Just picking fresh faces isn't the only way to keep things real and entertaining, however. This is something Trank is well aware of. The casting of Steve, Matt and Andrew are spot on. Michael B. Jordan plays Steve with extreme charisma, but doesn't forget that inside, Steve is just as vulnerable as his classmates. Matt is definitely the peacekeeper in the group and is almost like a father to his super-powered friends. Alex Russell defines that role without beating the movie over its' head with his purpose. Then there's Andrew. Andrew is an extremely complex character with simplistic reasoning behind him. He has always been a loner, with even his cousin avoiding him from time to time. His mother is dying and he has no one to turn to, with his father searching the bottom of every bottle for a cure to his wife's illness. Andrew is finally given his freedom when he receives his powers. At last, he can become the man he always wanted to be. This transition isn't easy to capture, but Dane DeHaan grabs hold of Andrew and, with ease, becomes him. Acting on that level is rare and absolutely effective.

Something that has always fascinated me with these handheld camera-shot films is the level of CGI. With such a low budget and limited resources, it's incredible to think of how the teams involved pulled off such incredible moments. There are moments in Chronicle that look better than some of the larger blockbuster films released over the summer. They're not without their own flaws, but to get a project with such dedication to the end result is extremely rewarding. Especially with the flying scenes. Aside from the graphics, just the overall idea of how they fly (the flying sequences will stay with you far after the credits roll) and what they look like is a better depiction than any other form of media has displayed. There are so many unique takes on things that congest some superhero stories, that Trank almost makes it feel as if he invented the idea himself. Then again, that probably has something to do with the writer of Chronicle being Max Landis, son of the famous filmmaker, John Landis.

Most writers and directors would focus too much on the action and the super powers to really give a great story with real moments of human emotion. Lucky for us, Josh Trank and Max Landis are not those people. They put so much detail on every aspect of Chronicle that it feels like an epic, even though the runtime is at a mere 83 minutes. In short, Chronicle is unlike anything you have ever seen before.

Josh Trank has not only proved that he's a strong up-and-coming director, but also that when you stretch every muscle involved the project at hand, you'll get something haunting. Something jaw-dropping. Something that will dig itself down into your gut and stay with you. Filmmakers, take down notes: Chronicle is the one to beat.

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