

'Gossip' leads to disappointing, unconvincing end

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

"Gossip" is a fairly intelligent movie until the last three minutes, when it figures it'd be cool to tack on "The Usual Suspects" ending and make the whole proceeding one big trick.

How clever!
How stupid.

What, exactly, was director Davis Guggenheim intending to accomplish with the ending? I know what particular series of scenes it spawns from, or, at least, I hope I do.

Because there is a stilted monologue right at the beginning from the main character, Jones (Lena Headley), and because the end is so insipid I cannot be sure if this is where the charade begins or if it

begins in its more logical place: after a series of important discoveries are made.

If the whole movie is meant as a sleight of hand, screw it. I couldn't handle the idea that 40 minutes of reasonable suspense was for the sake of tricky fabrication. I'm going to operate on the premise that it did not.

Even so, the ending is a joke, both literally and figuratively, one

that serves no purpose for anyone outside the writer, director and actors. Sorta like reading an author who writes about lying while he or she lies. What's the point, really?

It all starts clear enough, as loft-mates Jones, Derrick (James Marsden) and Travis (Norman Reedus) hatch a plan to start a nasty rumor for research in a class. The rumor involves the chaste Naomi Preston (Kate Hudson) and whether or not she had sex with her beau, Beau (Joshua Jackson, acting like a matinee idol).

Jones begins to balk at the rumor once it gets construed into date rape. But Derrick, a real charmer of a rich boy, wants it to grow without bounds. And grow it will, until Naomi heads off the police to report a crime no one committed.

It's about then that Jones uncovers a connection between Derrick and Naomi that may shed light on why the rumor continues to spread and why it has evolved into rape.

These developments I accept, and the performances have enough to them for "Gossip" to carry some weight. Marsden works the juicy role of a pretty boy capable of talking himself in and out of trouble, while Hudson, the daughter of Goldie Hawn, finally gets a role where her porcelain look can stand for something.

Do not expect to see the mope-headed Headley in any more glamorous roles; she's more Helen Mirren than Helena Bonham Carter with zero sex appeal. Still, her performance gets to the ethical pulp of the story before it turns into an unworthy creation.

REVIEW Gossip

STARS: Lena Headley, James Marsden, Kate Hudson, Norman Reedus
DIRECTOR: Davis Guggenheim
RATING: R (language)
GRADE: C-
FIVE WORDS: Cheap ending to first degree.

The problem is this: "Gossip," or at least its ending, plays upon the assumption that we greatly dislike one character and hold the others up as icons, thereby making the finale a due justice we've all been waiting for, which simply doesn't happen. Even worse, by keeping in doubt what we ought to know (a bedroom confession is handled ridiculously), the movie has essentially undersold its whole game.

Wouldn't it have been better to exact actual consequences? Are the consequences that one character suffers anywhere near what he or she has already suffered?

"Gossip" is constructed to elicit a confession for a crime for which this character has already been punished, at least as much the character ever will be punished. The movie doesn't even have the gumption to enact legal recourse.

Is that why I thought the loser still won? Maybe. For all its moralizing, "Gossip" would rather we take pleasure in a smarmy battle of egos than face a reality that tells us people have been scarred by this action. What a cheap way to discard a serious story line.

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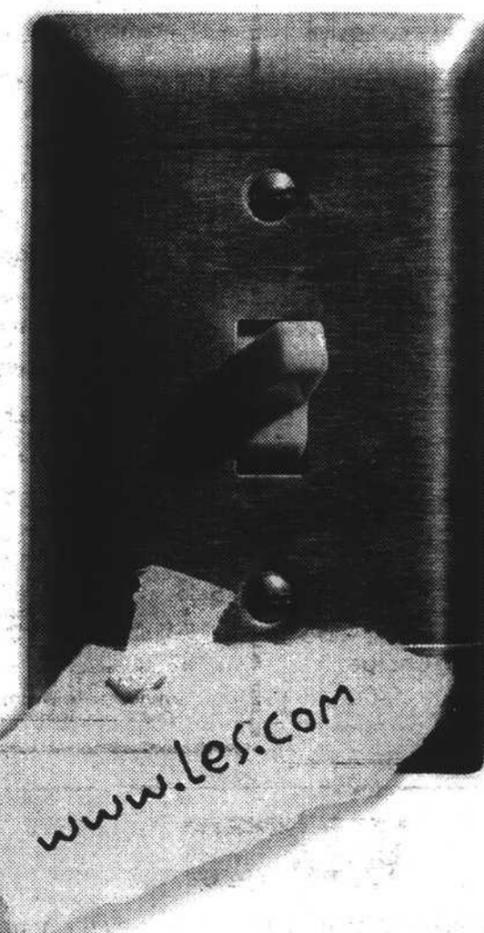


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