

Touch of Evil.

Report for video (laserdisc) classification.

Synopsis.

Passed 'A' with cuts in 1958, this classic Orson Welles thriller tells a complex story of police corruption and drug trading. The story opens with a car exploding, killing Lineker, a construction magnate. It emerges that dynamite was put in the car in the US, but it exploded just over the border into Mexico. This leaves it open for Mexican policeman Vargas (Charlton Heston) and US policeman Quinlan (Orson Welles) to jointly investigate the crime. Meanwhile, the Grandi gang threaten Mrs. Vargas in an attempt to keep Vargas off their case, as they are drug dealers. Vargas soon discovers that Quinlan has placed evidence in a suspect's (Sanchez, the boyfriend of Lineker's daughter) flat. Quinlan shakes off the accusation, but, in conjunction with Grandi, sets out to discredit the Vargas's. Mrs. Vargas is staying in a motel which is owned by the Grandi family. The Grandi thugs group rape her, and take her back to town, where Grandi forces drugs upon her to make her appear to be an addict. Asleep on the bed, she does not see Quinlan come into the room and murder Grandi, thereby framing her with murder. Vargas, who knows his wife cannot be guilty, sets out to bring Quinlan to justice. With the aid of Menzies, a good cop and friend of Quinlan's, he succeeds in getting taped evidence of Quinlan's corruption. However, when Quinlan realises what is going on, he shoots Menzies, and is about to shoot Vargas, having framed him, when the dying Menzies shoots Quinlan.

Issues.

This was a surprisingly powerful film that draws you into a world of corruption and greed. Part of its power lies in the extremely clever camera work and lighting, which mean that virtually the whole film is shot in semi-shadowed darkness, or with lights that inexplicably go on and off. This adds a sinister and dark edge to the whole film, which also contained some strong references and moments. In particular, there are several drugs references, an implied group rape and a moment of pure horror.

The drugs references are littered throughout the whole film, the strongest reference being a Grandi gang member saying to Mrs. Vargas "You know what marijuana is? You know what a mainliner is? It's when you take it in the vein" (2nd tape, 8 mins). The film is not condoning of drug use, but it features drugs a lot.

The implied group rape (2nd tape, 16 and 18 mins) occurs in the Grandi's motel. It starts when Mrs. Vargas opens a shutter, to reveal a man outside her window. Men begin to file into her room, and we see a number of c/u's of her frightened face as they surround her. Three women come in, one commenting "Let me stay, I want to watch" as the men pick Mrs. Vargas off the bed and hold her horizontally. She screams and one of the men kicks the door closed as the scene ends. This certainly wasn't a exploitative or graphic scene, but the mens' intention and Mrs. Vargas's fear are made apparent by the camera work and c/u's.

Finally, the moment of horror occurs when Mrs. Vargas wakes up and sees Grandi's corpse (2nd tape, 32 mins). We see two quick e/c/u's of Grandi's face, his eyes bulging out of their sockets.

Touch of Evil. Cont'd. David Cotson.

This is immediately preceded by Grandi's murder, which is done against a background of shadow and flashing light, and includes a shot of his dangling feet kicking against the bed frame as he is strangled by Quinlan, and dies with a gurgling sound.

Upon reflection, I think that it is the overall intensity of the film, with the combination of drugs, rape and c/u death shots that led me to the restrictive '12' rating. It's a powerful film, and although 'good' triumphs in the end, it's a long and dark journey, with very adult themes. In addition, whilst I know this is not an entirely legitimate justification, I imagine that a '12' rating is not going to impact on the films likely audience, and it provides some protection against a potentially dark and disturbing experience for younger children.

Pass '12' uncut ('PG' requested).