

MOVIE REVIEW

'Impostor'

The sci-fi film based on Philip K. Dick's McCarthy-era story, relies more on intelligence than special effects to tell a tale of government paranoia.

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A sci-fi thriller that relies more on intelligence than spectacular action and special effects, "Impostor" could not be more timely as a parable on the threat to civil liberties in a society endangered by outside forces. Based on a 1953 Philip K. Dick short story written at the height of the McCarthy era, the filmmakers set the time in the not-so-distant future, 2079.

Director Gary Fleder, his writers and crew persuasively project a world in which much of the planet is guarded by electromagnetic force-field domes to protect it from a decade-long attack by aliens, who have already lain waste to many of Earth's cities. Democracy has given way to global rule in stark steel-and-concrete high-tech environments; surveillance has reached the point at which every human being carries an implant in the spine so that virtually all activity is liable to be monitored. Even in so controlled an environment, love thrives, and scientist hero Spencer Olham (Gary Sinise), whose latest work promises to save the planet, and his wife, Maya (Madeleine Stowe), a dedicated doctor caring for victims of alien attacks in environments not yet protected by domes, are sustained by their love for each other. Unfortunately, the day arrives when Spence is targeted by the implacable Major Hathaway (Vincent D'Onofrio) as a robot sent by the aliens, who have managed to pierce the electromagnetic shield with a space capsule. Spence manages to break free of Hathaway's clutches. On the run, he strives to demonstrate his innocence and save the world at the same time.

"Impostor" is not exactly crystal clear or, for that matter, consistently compelling, but it does a good job of making its main point, which is to evoke the suffocating, ever-spiraling paranoia so easily triggered in such an environment. Ultimately, it evokes a pervasive feeling of uncertainty that lies at the heart of the human condition, a feeling that logically will only intensify in a future when it

becomes increasingly difficult, if not downright impossible, to distinguish the real from the artificial, even within one's self.

Sinise and the supporting cast, which includes Mekhi Phifer and Tony Shalhoub, are on target with their focused portrayals. Production designer Nelson Coates and his staff, cinematographer Robert Elswit and visual effects producer Joseph Grossberg have been most resourceful in creating a plausible future world while drawing on such contemporary structures as the Oakley eyewear factory, a Philip K. Dick-inspired building, and science centers in California and Arizona. Mark Isham's score is at once elegant and ominous, a major asset in creating and sustaining a tense atmosphere.

"Impostor" is likely to be best appreciated by dedicated sci-fi fans, admirers of Dick in particular. It hasn't the stupendous razzle-dazzle of a mega-budget picture like "A.I. Artificial Intelligence," and it isn't distinctive or riveting enough to make it as an art film appealing to cineastes who may not be sci-fi buffs. Even though "Impostor" has a middle-of-the-road feel, it does dare to go for an ambiguous open ending.

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MPAA rating: PG-13, for intense sci-fi violence, some sensuality and language. Times guidelines: These elements are standard for the genre, suitable for mature, older children.

'Impostor'

Gary Sinise...Spencer Olham

Madeleine Stowe...Dr. Maya Olham

Vincent D'Onofrio...Major Hathaway

Mekhi Phifer...Cale

A Dimension Films presentation of a Marty Katz production in association with Mojo Films. Director Gary Fleder. Producers Gary Fleder and Gary Sinise. Executive producers Michael Phillips, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein. Screenplay Caroline Case, Ehren Kruger, David Twohy. Adaptation by Scott Rosenberg; based on the short story "The Impostor" by Philip K. Dick. Cinematographer Robert Elswit. Visual effects producer Joseph Grossberg. Editors Armen Minasian, Bob Ducsay. Costumes Abigail Murray. Production designer Nelson Coates. Art director Kevin Jay Cozen. Set designers Colin De Rouin, Harry E. Otto, Fanee Aaron. Set decorator Anne D. McCulley. Running time: 1 hour, 36 minutes.

In general release.

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