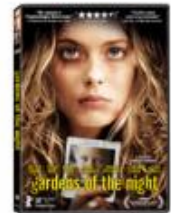


Gardens of the Night

By **Thomas K. Arnold** | Posted: 22 Feb 2009
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Prebook 2/24/09; Street 3/24/09

City Lights

Drama

Box Office \$0.01 million

\$26.98 DVD

Rated 'R' for disturbing content involving sexual exploitation of a child, language, sexual content and some drug use.

Stars Tom Arnold, John Malkovich, Jeremy Sisto, Ryan Simpkins, Evan Ross, Harold Perrineau.

If there's one "take away" from this film, it is that Tom Arnold is a very good actor. Instead of his typical comedic roles, he plays a smooth-talking pedophile who kidnaps an 8-year-old girl, convinces her that her family no longer wants her, and peddles her as a prostitute.

It's difficult to watch, but Arnold's stellar performance is worth the squeamishness some might have about watching a film dealing with such a horrific topic.

That said, the film itself deserves high marks for its overall tone and composition. Writer-director Damian Harris has masterfully avoided the exploitation factor that is often a characteristic of films of this nature and woven together a frank and realistic tale of child abduction and where it can lead.

The opening scenes constitute a great "stranger danger" sequence that all school-age kids should see and take to heart, but 15 minutes into the film it's time to put the kiddies to bed and enjoy the film on your own. "Enjoy" isn't really the right word.

However, the relationship between the young girl and her fellow sex prisoner, a young boy, and how they come to depend on each other and genuinely love each other is one of the finest cinematic love stories I've seen in recent years.

