



FILM: **ELLE**

FDG RATING: 4. ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Paul Verhoeven: *director*

Isabelle Huppert: *actress, Michele LeBlanc*

DATE: March 19, 2017

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **ELLE**

The 1 liner description of the film Elle as a rape revenge psycho drama makes it sound like a creepy movie many of us would rather not see. But the exploration into the theme of sexual fantasies portrayed in a somewhat matter-of-fact manner by each of the characters as well as in the video games created by Michele's company, provides the context the film needs to help us understand the rape and her response to it. Isabelle Huppert's award winning (Golden Globes 2016 Best Actress) performance is the solid heart of the film. The brutal sexual assault happens in the opening scene, witnessed by a house cat with unaffected detachment. That sets the tone for our observations of various deviant sexual activity while Elle, unemotionally, methodically tries to learn the identity of the man who raped her. It is Elle's cold, ruthless composure as the successful CEO of a video game company and as a rape victim that dissipates any tendency we may have to feel sorry for her. As one of our resident reviewers observed, she doesn't need our empathy because she is such a strong, woman. What happened to her as a child is the reason she was determined, growing up, to block emotion and now resolutely succeed as a woman of power in her business. She doesn't care that her employees don't like her, which arouses suspicion that any of her male employees could have been the masked attacker.

We agreed the film had a characteristic French laissez-faire attitude toward sexual relationships while an American version would most likely be more voyeuristic. Her overly botoxed, narcissistic mother keeps a string of buffed young male lovers, she is having an affair with the husband of her business partner/best friend and is not in any way troubled by it, she is attracted to the much younger, handsome husband of her neighbor, her son has a very controlling, abusively manipulative girlfriend who convinces the naïve boy that he is the father of her baby although the infant's dark skin is definitely more like the skin color of his best friend, her ex-husband is dating a very young yoga instructor, not to mention the sexual edginess in her video games and in the young people designing them.

While some of us thought the film and especially the twist at the end was believable (acknowledging the world of sexual deviants that most of us have no exposure to), others disagreed and thought the end was contrived and not at all believable. Media critics had a mixed reaction to the film. Richard Brody from the New Yorker, was very negative and said the film was "a macho fantasy adorned with the trappings of liberation." But for us, the film was intriguing with provocative characters. Those that saw Elle, gave it high marks with much of the credit deserving going to Huppert's complex, absorbing performance of a woman dealing with a mysterious sordid past amidst a menagerie of characters jostling for power.

On our scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best) we gave Elle solid 4.



See you at the movies!

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[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer