



FILM: **THE MENU**

FDG RATING: 3.6 ☺☺☺☺○

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

Mark Mylod: *director* Seth Reiss, Will Tracy: *writers*
Ralph Fiennes: *actor, Chef Julian Slowik*
Ann Taylor-Joy: *actress, Margot*

DATE: December 18, 2022

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE MENU**

The 2022 film, *The Menu*, stars the popular, highly respected Ralph Fiennes, so we were eager to indulge in the biting satire about the pretentious side of ultra-fine dining and the wealthy people who, in this movie, pay \$1250 for the elite dining experience, not because they are culinary aficionados, but rather, because this is what wealthy people do.

The opening scenes are clever, amusing parodies as we glimpse the list of symbolic courses on *The Menu* and watch the assortment of guests arrive. Each has received a personalized invitation. Among them is an arrogant food critic, an older couple who are somewhat regulars, a fading movie star actor, three rowdy, newly-rich cryptocurrency techies, and a young man, Tyler, who prides himself as a foodie. The egotistic, ruthless chef, Julian Slowik, is visibly startled because Tyler is accompanied by a female who was not the intended guest. We learn that his girlfriend couldn't come so Tyler brought Margot, a call girl, who quickly recognizes the uncomfortable pretentiousness and challenges the godly chef by criticizing what is being served. The tables are being turned so to speak or at least slightly tilted, but the dining performance continues. And, as each course is served, with purposeful symbolism, we see the belittling insults imbued in each item, such as the tortillas that are personally made for each guest with images imprinted on them that reveal their scathing secrets.

What could have been a very satisfying dark satire, is jolted into a savage horror movie when the sous chef, correlating to the Menu item "The Mess", states that he has forsaken everything to try to achieve the same status as Chef Julian, but he never will; he has made a mess of his life, so he shoots himself in the head. At this point, some of our discussion participants decided to stop watching the film. Many more grisly episodes follow. Those who stuck it out, had mixed opinions.

One discussion participant was completely enthralled with the dark black humor and thought it was a brutally, brilliant film. Another commented that the concept was very interesting, the sarcastic jabs were clever, and the over-the-top portrayal of a self-absorbed chef, who seems god-like in his creation of exotic foods "using materials from life", was well done. But the messages the film wanted to convey get lost as the excessive gore takes over. Still, others commented that it was fascinating, and admitted that they almost jumped each time the Chef loudly clapped his hands to snap his servers into attention. A few discussion participants, said the gruesome events became so distasteful, they lost interest in the film. But if expectations are recalibrated, since *The Menu* is categorized as comedy-thriller-satire-horror, in those terms, it succeeds magnificently, delivering brutal, grisly horror smothered in condescending arrogance.

It's the dynamic interchange between the people at each table that is really intriguing, noted another discussion participant. A smorgasbord of "entitled" truisms are revealed about each character such as the restaurant critic whose reviews have catapulted or imploded restaurants and their chefs. Or the older couple who could not remember a single delicacy they had tasted although they had eaten at Chef Julian's many times.

It was a satisfying ending, since Margot is allowed to escape because Chef Julian early on recognized that she was of a different genre than his targeted victim-guests. He saw her as a kindred spirit being part of the service industry, whose principle goal is to satisfy the customer.

Just before the macabre dessert of blazing s'mores, a la chef Julian, is ignited, Margot tells the chef that the food he served wasn't made with love. His one purpose is to serve people food they will like. And he failed her and bored her and he left her hungry. She had previously seen, in a back store room, a news clip of him smiling as a young quick order cook flipping burgers. When he asks what he can do to satisfy her, she asked for a simple cheese burger "to go" with fries, which he cooks for her for the small cost of \$10 and she goes on her way.

Some viewers expected the menu to be cannibalistic, but although not that repugnant, they lost their appetite and stopped watching after 10-15 minutes. Those who stuck it out, had more positive reactions, relishing the unsavory dark satire, garnishing *The Menu* with a tangy score of 3.6.



See you at the movies!
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