

Virus thriller disappoints



BY KEN DUSOLD
Assistant Editor

If 1995's "Outbreak" had audiences avoiding Capuchin monkeys and watching for symptoms like bleeding from the eyes, "Contagion" is going to offer viewers a far more prevalent and sometimes uncontrollable fear: any and all human interaction. Director Steven Soderbergh's epidemic thriller is unnerving precisely because it is not an exaggerated tale of a killer virus, but rather an incredibly deadly flu-like virus. Unfortunately, the subject matter is not quite enough to set this picture apart from other films trying to do too much with a big cast and a rough-flowing plot.

"Contagion" begins with a loud cough and Beth Emhoff (Gwyneth Paltrow) answering her cellphone in a crowded Chicago airport bar. Beth looks tired, feverish and a bit clammy. She's headed home to her family in Minneapolis from a job in Hong Kong and a quick tryst in Chicago with what we soon learn is an old flame. Cheating on her husband does not win her points with the audience, so when she turns out to be the first victim after only about 10 minutes of screen time, we're less than horrified.

Thanks to all of Beth's interactions during her last few days on Earth, the virus has spread — as movie viruses tend to do. As people start dropping at exponential rates, the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization step in and the globe is faced with an international crisis unseen since smallpox epidemics in the early 20th century.

The film tries to move carefully during its first half. Like the characters in the movie, we're not entirely sure what the disease is,



Alan Krumwiede (Jude Law) attempts to warn citizens about a deadly virus spreading throughout the United States

only that it has managed to infect tens of thousands in a matter of days and cause all-out paranoia in the mass public. Paranoia actually is what carries the early part of this film and likely could have smoothly delivered the story to its end had all the characters and interconnected storylines not resulted in so tedious an experience during the second hour.

While Beth's husband Mitch (Matt Damon) practically barricades himself and his daughter into their home and glumly watches the world crack around him, Dr. Erin Mears (Kate Winslet) tries to coordinate relief efforts in Minnesota and investigate the trail from Beth back to the source on behalf of the CDC.

In San Francisco, a conspiracy-theorist blogger (Jude Law) uses the Internet as a way to scare people into following him and distrusting government. For being such a smug jerk, his character's sub-story lacks a satisfying conclusion.

The government is not as demonized in "Contagion" as it so often is in similar movies, but bureaucracy is shown to be a muddled mess of red tape, martial law and scared leaders.

We are granted a few scenes in Hong Kong with a WHO representative (Marion Cotillard) also searching for the disease's source. Once she is kidnapped by people looking to use her as ransom in the hopes of acquiring the yet-undeveloped anti-virus, the film seems to all but completely forget about her.

This cluttered story of numerous characters and interests overshadows the early sense of agitation, leaving behind a feeling of indifference. With so many characters, few of the performers are given much information on which to expand. Even when there is more information, Soderbergh glazes over it. An implied connection between Mears and her boss, Dr. Ellis Cheever (Laurence Fishburne) suggests he is her

personal mentor and she is his legacy at the CDC. This connection arguably creates the most believable relationship in the entire film. Unfortunately, the relationship never is allowed the attention it deserves and is cut short.

If the story being too depthless was not enough to derail "Contagion"'s decent start, predictability could do just as good a job. The dialogue sometimes seems directly lifted out of a standardized book about how to write melodrama. Even when we're unsure of the virus' source, we can see the film's outcome — people die, others make careless errors that cost more lives and finally mankind finds a way to beat the enemy and persevere.

"Contagion" is best viewed as an interesting observation about the modern world and our considerable vulnerabilities from still-unknown threats. Its best attribute is the forced realization that there is not much humans can do to prevent the worst of those threats from manifesting themselves at any time and in any form. Let's just hope any future population-crippling diseases end up as boring as the second half of "Contagion."

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True love ought wait

BY ANDREA HEWITT
Editor-in-Chief
index.editor@gmail.com

Everyone needs to slow their roll. Going into my senior year, my mind is flooded with surviving my course load and job at the Index, the uncertainty of finding a job and trying to cope with the reality that in May I'll probably find myself with two familiar roommates: Mom and Dad.

Some of my peers are saddled with a different worry. I was sitting in Pickler Memorial Library last week and overheard two girls discussing, in a terrified manner, the possibility they won't find a husband in college. I scoffed loudly and tried to play it off as a sneeze when their gaze turned my way — good thing it's allergy season. I then realized, this is a fear among more than just those two ladies.

I worked in a camp-type setting at Truman State last summer with four other female counselors and as of a couple of weeks ago, they all are engaged or married.

This is a ridiculous concept to me. Let me clarify — I'm not judging you if you're sporting an engagement ring, but this is college. Most of us are 18 to 22 years old. We should be focused on figuring out a career we'll find rewarding and fun in 30 years. We should be focused on figuring out ourselves and how to be happy. We've had limited life experiences thus far, tying yourself down now limits your future to an incredible degree.

When I enter the real world in eight months, I don't want my options to be limited because there's a rock on my ring finger dragging me one way.

I'm not saying I'm a hermit. I date fairly regularly. I think dating is a healthy way to figure out the qualities you need in a significant other to be happy — or more importantly, the qualities in a partner that will bring you down.

Our brains aren't even fully developed until age 25. I don't think making the decision to spend the rest of your life with someone at 20 is responsible. Let the idea marinate for a few years. Go into the real world and meet a slew of new people with new qualities and revisit the idea of marriage later.

What's the rush? If he/she is the person you're going to spend the rest of your life, then they will still be around.

I know there are exceptions to this rule. My grandparents have been married since a young age and still are going strong, but we have a million opportunities in front of us and shouldn't throw any of those aside for a significant other.

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