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Shifty

(Cert 15)



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Friends disunited ... Daniel Mays and Riz Ahmed in Shifty

The British urban movie may still be in its infancy, or rather its ungainly adolescence, with more pose and front than actual script and performance. However, first-time director Eran Creevy kicks things up a notch with this shrewd and engaging drama, achieved on the smallest of budgets. Bullet Boy and the Kidulthood films had their points, certainly, but it seems to me that Shifty is better: more relaxed, less macho (though very male) and not so lazily reliant on the usual tragi-grandiloquent violent ending.

Shifty

Production year:

2008

Country: UK

Cert (UK): 15

Runtime: 86 mins

Riz Ahmed and Daniel Mays give excellent performances as two mates uneasily reunited after a long time apart. Mays plays Chris, a young guy who is on the career and property ladder in Manchester with a job in recruitment. He returns to his old

Directors: Eran Creevy
Cast: Daniel Mays, Jason Flemyng, Nitin Ganatra, Riz Ahmed
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London neighbourhood for the first time in years, intending to stay with his childhood best friend Shifty (Riz Ahmed), who is living in his brother's house. This is Rez (Nitin Ganatra), an observant Muslim who knows nothing of Shifty's main business in life, but which is all too obvious to Chris the moment he clocks the pricey audio and computer equipment in his bedroom. Shifty is making a lot of money selling hard drugs.

While Chris has been making his way in respectable corporate life, Shifty has been drifting further into a very dangerous world: but it appears from the excruciating atmosphere over breakfast that it is Chris who is the bad guy. He caused bad feelings when he mysteriously left his old stamping grounds without saying goodbye, and it's also clear that he is not entirely free of connections with drug-dealing either. Making the best of a difficult situation, Chris agrees to accompany his friend on his daily supply rounds, and the tensions become plain: Shifty must deal with a supplier, the sinister Glen (Jason Flemyng) and below him on the drug food chain is a wretched labourer called Trevor (Jay Simpson), a whining addict to whom Shifty has sold merchandise and perhaps even tried to sub-contract a coke-dealing business on building sites, a plan that has gone horribly wrong.

Chemistry between actors is a difficult thing to conjure up, but Ahmed and Mays, without trying very hard - and really without very much in the way of dialogue - are instantly persuasive as twentysomething guys who are sentimentally loyal to their earlier friendship and their childhood selves, but wary of the way their fledgling adult lives could be destroyed by hanging on to the past. Chris's own motives are hard to read: does he want to save Shifty? To apologise to him, man to man? Or to reach back into the past, and reclaim the intimacy they had as boys? The ending of this movie is a little contrived, but it ties things up satisfactorily. This is smart work from Creevy, who is a film-maker to watch.



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