

THE LOOKOUT __ 9/10

Supremely crafted psychological drama

Written and directed by Scott Frank

Joseph Gordon-Levitt ...	Chris Pratt
Jeff Daniels ...	Lewis
Matthew Goode ...	Gary Spargo
Isla Fisher ...	Luvlee
Carla Gugino ...	Janet
Bruce McGill ...	Robert Pratt

What a first-class effort: completely engaging from start to finish. I had read on IMDb one reviewer's comments that's it's just nice to watch a movie that's extremely well made, you know, as if it all works together seamlessly to convey a meaningful story.

The actors are in top form as well, especially the young lead Joseph Gordon-Levitt who you'll probably recognize as some child actor that you just know you've seen a million times. He came of age recently in an interesting film noir effort *Brick* (2005), a story about a bizarre killing in a dysfunctional high-school environment.

Levitt plays a boy named Chris Pratt, who becomes a star high school athlete in a fictional Kansas farming town south of Kansas City. He's fooling around one night on a double date in his convertible Mustang GT, which leads to a major accident. The couple in the back are killed, while he and his girlfriend suffer disabling injuries.

He winds up as janitor at the town bank and receives some public assistance both for his psychological damage—he has a hard time with things like remembering sequences of events and quantities; he's bottled up his feelings—and for his physical restrictions, mainly pain and mobility related. He has troubles with normal development of relationships with girls, illustrated by his hitting on his therapist Janet (Carla Gugino). (Of course, who *wouldn't* hit on Carla Gugino.)

The assistance program has set him up as a roommate with another handicapped person, Lewis (Jeff Daniels in another brilliant performance), who was blinded years ago from unventilated manufacture of methamphetamines. He's a free spirit in general and looks after the younger Chris like a big brother.

We get more psychological background on Chris and Lewis when they visit Chris's well-to-do, straight-laced family for Thanksgiving.

Chris is easy prey for a local ne-er-do-well who knows and admires Chris from high school (Chris was a star hockey player). Gary Spargo, a budding criminal mind played astonishingly well by Matthew Goode, is three years older and a smooth operator. He runs into Chris in a local pub and impresses Chris with his easy access to money and babes.

Lurking underneath Gary though is a low-life desire to hit the big time with other people's money. His rationalizations for stealing sound almost high-minded enough to work on me, much moreso on Chris's guilt-fueled inferiority complex. Gary's classic line is "the money is the power." On top of that, Gary sets Chris up with former stripper Luvlee Lemons (!) (Isla Fisher)—she pretends to be the girl of his dreams. Thus, Chris agrees to be the lookout for the heist.

But his heart isn't into it, and he knows from his healthy relationships, primarily with Lewis, that what Gary wants to do is wrong. And that's where I'll leave you in terms of the story.

This movie has several finely drawn characters with exquisitely composed scenes of interactions among them. The director/writer Scott Frank comes from a screenwriting background (*Flight of the Phoenix* (2004), *Minority Report*, *Out of Sight*, *Get Shorty*) and it shows. He has a writer's respect for quality and true entertainment; he frosts the cake with many incidents of heartwarming natural humor.

By the way, on the setting, I can truly identify with the place and the people, having grown up in a suburban area of Kansas City. The director gets the bleak, wintry Kansas landscape exactly right. Reminds one of *Fargo*.