

‘Only the Brave’: A heartfelt tribute to the Granite Mountain Hotshots

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of ««««

Running Time: 133 min.

Wildfires are a terrifying force of nature and it takes great planning as well as immeasurable skill to bring one under control. The new biopic *Only the Brave* details the story of Prescott, Arizona’s Granite Mountain Hotshots, a team of municipal firefighters that trained and earned the right to join the elite national unit. It is a conventional effort in many storytelling aspects, but is impressively mounted and serves as a noble tribute to its subjects.

The narrative begins with troubled Brian McDonough (Miles Teller) seeking to join the team run by veteran firefighter Eric Marsh (James Brolin). Attempting to better himself and overcome his drinking and drug issues, Brian begs the leader to allow him to join. The youngster and other recruits are put through an exhaustive training program in order to prove themselves. Eventually, Brian is selected, at first raising the ire and then begrudging respect of other firefighters (including James Badge Dale and Taylor Kitsch) as their big certification test looms.

One of the movie’s biggest benefits is the strong cast, who effectively emphasize the sense of camaraderie between the team members and make their characters relatable.

While Brian and the other characters have an adversarial relationship at first, this grows into mutual respect and eventually amusing practical jokes. These are tough guys, but he

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performers do an admirable job of humanizing them within a short period using some good-natured bickering (a babysitting sequence later in the film serves as a comic highlight).

Of course, the team are also faced with personal challenges due to the danger of their work; Amanda Marsh (Jennifer Connelly) is the main outlet for expressing the trials and fears of family members.

This is also a good-looking production that includes impressive visuals. While a CGI fire bear itself (that serves as a metaphor for the blazes) isn't always convincing, the raging wildfires on display are appropriately menacing. They still manage to possess a surreal natural beauty as they move across the landscape.

The character work and impressive effects work do pay off during several of the fire sequences, adding tension to the proceedings.

Additionally, the movie does an excellent job of communicating the intense demands of the job and the techniques used to combat the blazes. Frankly, this reviewer knew little of the practical process and was intrigued to learn about it.

Of course, it isn't all perfect. The movie has been structured in a straight-forward manner with predictable narrative beats. Several of the characters have relationship issues that result in repetitious spats and conflicts with their spouses. At one point a question is raised that suggests a character might be addicted to the thrill and danger of their profession. It's an interesting point and one that should have been explored by the film in more detail.

Instead of further dissection, all of these family problems are all completely resolved just in time for the final act. Ultimately, it comes across in too obvious a manner. When this occurs in the story, one can't help but expect immediate tragedy to follow. The result of this awkward attempt to tie up all personal loose ends lessens the emotional impact later and makes the production itself feel more artificial than it should.

Still, this is a sweet and heartfelt tribute to those who decide to partake in incredibly dangerous

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and life-threatening work. In fact, it will speak to most viewers and leave several drying their eyes by the close. *Only the Brave* may have a few problematic sections, but does an admirable job of paying homage to these firefighters and others like them around the world.

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