

'Let Him Go' has fine performances, but few surprises

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

Running Time: 114 minutes

This film from Focus Features opens Nov. 6 at drive-ins and cinemas.

In-laws can be a pain, but few are as much trouble as those featured in the new period drama, *Let Him Go*

. The plot of this feature has a great deal of potential, pitting two families against each other over the welfare of a young infant. Yet, like its lead characters the movie too often follows the straight and narrow. While the performances are strong and the finale is admittedly effective, early sections end up coming across in many respects like a predictable revenge potboiler.

Rancher/ex-sheriff George Blackledge (Kevin Costner) and his opinionated wife Margaret (Diane Lane) suffer tragedy when their adult son falls off a horse and passes away, leaving widow Lorna ([Kayli Carter](#)) behind along with their new baby. The strong-willed Margaret tries to help Lorna with the infant, but the two butt heads over the baby's care. Things get worse when Lorna remarries Donnie Weboy (Will Brittain) and leaves the family home. A prying Margaret discovers that the new husband is abusive, but before she can confront the couple, they disappear.

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Driven to find and protect her grandson, the grandmother demands that she and the reticent George track down the missing couple. As it turns out, the road leads to the Weboy family, a thuggish group led by the controlling matriarch, Blanche (Lesley Manville).

Despite being a thriller, the movie feels more like a western. Its biggest asset is its cast, who all bring a gravitas to the pulpy material. George is a reluctant hero who knows that no good can come of squaring off against a well-known clan of wrongdoers and Lane is effective as a determined parent who won't let anything stop her from collecting her grandchild. The villains of the piece are generally one-note, but the talented actors certainly exude menace.

Most of the intimidation comes from Bill (Jeffrey Donovan), an initially polite, but threatening cousin of Donnie who appears mildly amused by the seniors trying to take back the baby. Even cast members in smaller roles, like that of cast-out Peter Dragswolf (Booboo Stewart), are solid and make an impression.

Still, early on there's something that just feels a little too familiar about the story. It takes a long while for the leads to find out what happened to their family member and when the families do meet, good and bad are clearly drawn in explicit terms. Given that the two central figures are both determined family matriarchs, it might have been more exciting to see certain elements handled differently. The protagonist's all-American qualities (like Margaret's propensity to bake) could actually have played as eerie too, if more similarities between the seniors and their foes had been exposed amidst the escalating situation.

Instead, the Weboys are vicious villains who must be stopped from the get-go and George and Margaret are never less than earnestly heroic, with the ex-sheriff ultimately stepping in taking on a more prominent role later in the film.

When the two families do come to blows, it is effective and well edited. The movie peppers in more violence during the climax than one would expect in order to add tension to the proceedings. Beyond the bloodshed, it's always clear where things are headed and how the central conflict will be resolved. I certainly admired the work of the cast in *Let Him Go*, but sections of the script do feel musty.

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The basic concept really had the potential to jab at old-fashioned family values and iconography, yet besides the protagonists being older, the film ends up following the same beats we've all seen before. It is well shot and performed and the finale is compelling to a degree, but the movie itself doesn't add anything unique or overly memorable to the traditional revenge/thriller formula.

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