

'No Man's Land' is well-meaning, but unfocused

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 114 minutes

This feature from IFC Films opens in select theaters, on digital platforms and VOD on Jan. 22.

The new film *No Man's Land* is one of the most earnest features to come around the bend in some time. It's a neo-western dealing with the U.S. immigrant situation that shares the experiences of people from different backgrounds. This title benefits from a committed cast, although it soon becomes clear that the filmmakers are biting off more than they can chew. There are definitely moments that will help viewers feel empathy for all the parties involved, but the story eventually suffers from being pulled in too many different directions.

Jackson Greer (Jake Allyn) is young man hoping to play professional baseball. He returns from school to visit his family's Texas cattle ranch on the Mexican border. While there, his conservative parents (Andie MacDowell and Frank Grillo) and brother Lucas (Alex MacNicoll)

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complain about immigrants passing through their property. One night, while riding into “no man’s land” between the countries to find lost animals, family members cross paths with Gustavo (Jorge A. Jimenez), a kind “shepherd” leading a group across the border.

A fracas ensues in which Jackson shoots and kills a young boy (Alessio Valentini). Jackson’s dad tries to cover for his son’s actions, but Texas Ranger Ramirez (George Lopez) knows that their story doesn’t add up. Guilt-ridden, the young man rides into Mexico as an illegal alien. In the process, he finds himself being targeted by a revenge-seeking Gustavo and his employer Luis (Andrés Delgado), a “coyote” or human smuggler.

As mentioned, the movie is incredibly well-meaning in its attempts to detail the hardships of those making the dangerous journey across the border. Jackson is an innocent who doesn’t grasp the difficulties other experience. That is, until he goes through the process first-hand and is forced to work illegally at a job well below his skill set. The movie is none-too-subtle and the characters state some of the themes explicitly, but at least the cast manages to sell some of these awkward passages.

In particular, Jimenez stands out as a character experiencing a variety of emotions over his loss, including rage and despair.

But despite the solid work onscreen, there are certainly problems with this overly ambitious story. It literally wants to address every possible aspect of its subject and spreads itself too thin. There are so many story threads, it’s difficult to figure out who the protagonist is early on. The movie jumps around from Jackson and his story, to “shepherd” Gustavo and his job, the Greer family and ensuing drama involving brother Lucas, Texas Ranger Ramirez’s attempts to investigate the crime, as well as Gustavo’s and Luis’s hunt for Jackson.

And that isn’t even every story thread. There are so many plotlines here that the movie doesn’t have the time to give them all the proper consideration and examination.

It all becomes difficult to suspend disbelief when Jackson decides to make amends for the shooting and find his way to the home town of the victim. Thanks to some remarkably convenient timing, he and many of the supporting characters all find themselves confronting each other at a funeral. It feels like a stretch and far too speedy a resolution. The movie would

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have benefited from tossing aside some of its subplots, focusing on fewer elements and developing what remained in more detail.

To be fair, one admires the ambition on display, the performances are solid and the movie is commendable in its efforts to help and in its efforts bring its characters together in order to better understand one another. Unfortunately, *No Man's Land* takes on too much in the process and as a result is unfocused, leaving its most intriguing and enlightening elements in need of further development.

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