

Cage gives an emotional performance in 'Pig'

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 13 August 2021 06:18



Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time:
92 minutes

This film is currently playing at cinemas and is available to rent or own on digital streaming sites this week.

Nicolas Cage has had a long career filled with critical and commercial hits, as well as an Academy Award for his work in "Leaving Las Vegas." Unfortunately, for the last decade or so the star's dramatic chops haven't been utilized to their fullest. With the exception of the 2013 independent film "Joe," the performer has often been forced to prop up less-than-stellar material with some exaggerated mannerisms. The new film "Pig" is a small, low-key drama that actually allows the actor to shine once again.

Rob (Cage) is a recluse living in the Oregon wilderness with his truffle-hunting pet pig, eking out a very modest existence by selling his finds to Amir (Alex Wolff). He barely speaks to the young

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entrepreneur, who passes the fungi on to high-end restaurants. One evening, Rob's home is invaded by robbers. He is knocked unconscious and his porcine friend is stolen from him.

Furious, the antisocial protagonist leaves his shack and gets ahold of Amir. Rob demands his contact take him to downtown Portland, so he can determine who stole his pig and retrieve his animal. Over the course of several brusque interactions with surprised chefs and restaurant owners, we learn that the lead has a long history in the city's culinary community.

With a plot involving a stolen pig, one might expect an action picture with Cage giving various foes a beatdown as he completes his task. However, that is not at all what the movie is about. There is very little action and it is the hero who takes the brunt of the physical punishment. In fact, Rob spends most of the running time wandering around bruised and bloodied.

It soon becomes clear that this is actually a drama about personal loss and grieving and that the lead's anti-social personality is a recent development over the past decade. He is a broken man suffering from psychological wounds, and hasn't come to terms with tragic events from his past.

Obviously, there's a lot of turmoil going on within the central character and Cage uses the opportunity to his advantage. He barely speaks early on in the film, focusing on pointed stares and gestures used to get his anger and frustration across. Some of these long looks are intentionally amusing. There's a great scene when Rob shows up at a high-end restaurant and glares at the chef in an intimidating manner.

It is funny at first, but the scene progresses in an unexpected direction as the two discuss their lives and the choices that have led them to their current situations. And as Rob ultimately speaks and opens up with Amir and others, it allows the character to finally address his own pain, culminating in an impressive display late in the film.

This is an independent feature with interpretive elements made on a small budget. As such, it does require some suspension of disbelief and includes a few awkward moments. A scene set under an establishment involving something akin to a "fight club" does strain credibility and feels like a dramatic stretch. And while one could argue that Rob's damaged visage serves a metaphorical purpose in the film, many would expect more strangers to be actively getting involved with the protagonist and calling for assistance and/or authorities.

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This is a very unique arthouse movie and one can see how it could have easily come across as preposterous. Thankfully, Cage’s work sells the entire concept and his character is compelling. The actor is exemplary and the part seems perfectly suited to his skill set. If you’re looking for an action-filled revenge picture, this is not going to be up your alley.

But “Pig” does serve as an effective and introspective drama about loss that features an excellent lead performance. It’s a memorable role for Nicolas Cage that will hopefully result in the star being given meatier dramatic roles in the future.

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