

No Escape Is Too Ugly To Entertain

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<< out of 4

Running Time: 103 min.

Here's a movie that will likely never earn the endorsement of the Southeast Asia Tourism Board. *No Escape* depicts a nuclear family unit from America in a foreign land that must fight for survival and endure some of the toughest hardships imaginable. Admittedly, the movie is effective in spots, but the approach taken to the material left this viewer more than a little conflicted.

Jack Dwyer (Owen Wilson) is a down-on-his-luck engineer who has taken a job in Southeast Asia to help build a water purification refinery. Mere hours after arriving with his wife Annie (Lake Bell) and daughters, a violent coup breaks out. With foreigners being executed en masse, the family immediately becomes targets. On the run from armed and machete-clad revolutionaries, Dwyer must lead them to a safe haven.

This all may sound like a thrilling action movie. In actuality, it more closely resembles a survival horror picture. Extras and locals are brutally killed point blank and the camera follows the family as they move from one incredibly nasty scenario to the next trying to evade death. Along the way, the movie attempts to incrementally follow each situation with a more horrible event.

Director John Erick Dowdle (*As Above, So Below*, *Quarantine*) has a background in genre cinema and captures the action in a hand-held style. For the most part, the shakes aren't too hard to follow and there is a menace to the proceedings. Much of it is well edited and some of the sequences are quite tense. As always, Wilson is likable and attempts to interject some

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levity, although it doesn't always seem appropriate. He and Bell both do their best with the material, even when events veer into some over-the-top territory (including a sequence where the father hurls his children from one tall rooftop to another).

If anything, the movie could have used more cartoon-ish events like the one mentioned previously. Although it's undoubtedly well-produced, the grim approach carries some very xenophobic connotations. Frankly, the angry mob are personality-free monsters. They're nothing more than psychotic maniacs out to murder and rape the protagonists... not to mention point guns at children, and in one case, force a child to potentially kill their own family member.

While there is an interesting attempt to explain the motivation of the mob, it is quickly forgotten and ignored. They aren't depicted as people; they're just dehumanized, snarling murderers. It doesn't help that the country is never identified (presumably, it's Cambodia, but this is never elaborated upon). Of course, this is not to say that there isn't corruption and horrible crime in certain parts of the world. However, by not getting into specifics, the film suggests to viewers that the entire region is a dangerous place and one that should be feared.

Additionally, it's odd to see so many supporting characters (including locals), essentially sacrificing themselves for the benefit of the transplanted family. While the actions of these individuals often come across as a noble gesture intended to paint some of the citizens as decent, it feels strange for these persons to act in such a way for visiting strangers. Ultimately, the general tone can't help but not only feel exploitative, but also culturally insensitive.

Perhaps the overriding nasty vibe could have been avoided had the story detailed a local family trying to escape the violence and carnage around them. As it stands, *No Escape* is a well-made horror flick with some tense moments and a decent cast, but one that can't shake off an overwhelming sense of ugliness.