

Does 'The 33' delve deep enough into its characters?

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

Running Time: 125 min.

Most people remember the 2010 Chilean calamity that left miners stranded miles beneath the ground. So it comes a bit of a surprise to see a dramatic recreation of events so soon afterward. *The 33* does its best to do justice to its working class heroes, but doesn't delve deeply enough beneath the surface and ultimately comes up a little short.

As in many disaster movies, the plot introduces the miners all too quickly; in this case, at a social function and the following morning as they start their day and head out for work. We get all too brief snippets of these people and don't learn any more than the basics. There's family man and optimist Mario (Antonio Banderas), his friendly but more pessimistic boss Don (Lou Diamond Phillips), as well as several other characters with a single character trait (the ladies man, the foreigner from Bolivia, the senior with a week left until retirement, and the guy who enjoys doing Elvis impersonations).

Only a few minutes later, the film's big set piece occurs. With the men working underground, disaster strikes and rock from the mountain itself crashes down upon them. It's an elaborate and well shot sequence, but it's over very quickly. At least it leaves characters in a dramatic situation early. The limited resources start to cause panic, but Mario keeps a cool head and does his best to help the group survive as long as possible.

Naturally, there are a lot of men to establish and one can't expect too much background, but

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these gentlemen are drawn so simply in the film that they often border on caricatures. As a result, only Banderas comes across as compelling in his efforts to keep the miners safe and sane. There's some bickering among the workers and minor squabbling, but any incident results in a lengthy speech about believing in others or staying focused on survival. It's a repetitive approach and makes the film feel long.

Additionally, we get little sense of the claustrophobia the miners must have experienced. The wide framing of the area the miners take refuge in often makes it appear more spacious than it should. You really should feel the walls closing in during the ordeal, but viewers never do.

Of course, there's plenty of drama above ground, but it isn't particularly compelling either. This includes a small group (played by Rodrigo Santoro, Gabriel Byrne and James Brolin) working desperately to increase the rate of drilling and free the men below. Unfortunately, it's the spouses and family members who come off the worst. Juliette Binoche gets some opportunity as a family member demanding action, but many others are treated as comic relief. There's even a fight scene played for laughs between the wife of one of the trapped workers and a mistress. The tone of the scenes feels out of place with the story being told.

And honestly, the film struggles to provide more than a simple moral. Over the course of the story, the group find a newfound respect for the importance of family. This, along with the similar motto of their brotherhood sticking together and never giving up are the themes repeated again and again. But for a project that runs at over two hours in length, there just isn't enough meat to the characters.

These incredible men and their fight for survival may have seemed like great material for a narrative feature, but the screenplay only delivers surface level characters, and the filmic techniques don't effectively capture the horror of being trapped in an enclosed space. In the end, *The 33* is an unremarkable and generic adaptation of an incredible true story.