

‘Don’t Make Me Go’ has too much going on

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 22 July 2022 05:55



Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time: 110 minutes

This feature from Amazon Studios will be available to stream on Prime Video Friday, July 15.

While almost all pictures are made with the best of intentions, sometimes the final product doesn't have the desired effect on viewers. For this reviewer, the new drama "Don't Make Me Go" is one such example. It features a pair of charismatic stars and attempts to deal with themes involving family and mortality, while also addressing coming-of-age concerns. There's a lot here and perhaps this is the reason that the end result is so uneven. The film attempts to address so much that nothing feels properly resolved.

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Max Park (John Cho) is a single dad caring for his teenage daughter Wally (Mia Isaac). The button-down accountant spends most of his time strictly guiding his child’s life, which is beginning to cause a rift in their relationship.

When Max is diagnosed with a potentially fatal brain tumor that could kill him within the year, he quickly makes plans. The dad decides to force Wally to take a road-trip with him across the country. While he insists the reason is to attend a class reunion, what he really wants is to spend more time with his daughter and reunite the teen with her mother (Jen Van Epps) who abandoned them years before. He hopes that perhaps she may be able to take over as Wally’s future guardian. Oblivious to his goals, his daughter bickers with him during the trip and chooses to focus on her personal life.

The concept offers some potential for drama. Cho does manage to make his character affable. Of course, this is already a given due to the prognosis and inner turmoil, but the actor also manages to sell Max’s nonsensical plan to hunt down his ex. And co-star Isaac effectively conveys a sense of loyalty to her pop, despite her small rebellious acts.

There is plenty of opportunity for tension with the two leads stuck in a car on the road, especially considering it involves confronting the person who abandoned them. Alas, Max hides these details from his daughter and for much of the running time, the story avoids dealing with the central issue. Instead, it focuses on Wally’s relationship with a school crush and her attempts to sneak away from dad and attend parties with other teens.

And the two stars aren’t helped by some forced comedy and clunky dialogue. While the odd bits of bickering between the pair is effectively delivered, other attempts at comedy land with a thud. This includes a sequence in which the daughter panics while merging into traffic, as well as Max’s confrontation with an old school chum (Jemaine Clement) who wooed his old flame away from him.

These bits are overplayed. And as the tide turns to deal with heartfelt matters, it’s hard not to wince while Max earnestly attempts to inspire his daughter with lines like, “You have a fire inside you, Wally...” and other motivational gems.

But the biggest problem with the film is its final act. To be blunt, the most important section of

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the movie doesn't work and fails to resonate emotionally with the viewer. Familiar cinematic tropes are employed, including climactic outbursts between the lead characters venting their grievances.

While the performers are dedicated and do their best, they aren't helped by the inappropriate song choices used in the background. The tunes themselves are excellent, but the tempo does not suit the scenes in question. These and other odd choices towards the close distance the viewer from the proceedings and make an even more jarring last-minute twist appear all the more contrived and manipulative.

This tale of a father and daughter trying to squeeze a lifetime of experiences into a single road trip is well-intentioned and benefits to a degree from a likable cast who attempt to carry the film across the finish line. But sadly, the unfocused screenplay has too many problems and the finale is completely fumbled. Alas, those thinking about streaming "Don't Make Me Go" might want to take heed of the title and think twice before investing their time in this flawed drama.

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