

'Society of the Snow' doesn't sensationalize a historical plane crash

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

out of «««««

Running Time:
145 minutes

This Spanish feature film will be available to stream on Netflix on Friday, Jan. 5.

The 1972 Uruguayan Flight 571 disaster was one of the most horrifying yet strangely inspirational tragedies of its day. For those unfamiliar with this real event, a rugby team, as well as other passengers and crew, were on a chartered flight from Montevideo, Uruguay to Santiago, Chile when their plane crashed in the Andes mountains. Searchers failed to locate the wreckage and the snowy mountaintop survivors were forced to endure the worst for 72 days.

Their story, and the extremes to which they had to resort to for survival were eventually revealed and several non-fiction books were written about the disaster. In 1976, one of these publications was adapted into the movie *Survive!*, an exploitative feature from Mexico that was met with derision from critics and the public.

The superior 1993 U.S. production *Alive* was based on another book and earned a more

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positive reaction. It included survivor Nando Parrado as the film’s technical advisor and, this reviewer believes, effectively relayed the events from his perspective. Now, the tale is being adapted once again in the Spanish production feature

Society of the Snow

, which uses a later book containing accounts from even more survivors.

This edition is narrated and told from the point of view of fellow plane passenger Numa Turcatti (Enzo Vogrincic Roldán). He is a student and friend of one of the players on the rugby team. When the plane goes down and one horrendous event follows the next, we hear his thoughts about what is occurring around him. Numa also attempts to help others and viewers witness his reluctance to partake in perhaps the toughest element of all, which involves ingesting necessary calories for his survival using the only possible method. The lead also watches the efforts of Nando Parrado (Agustín Pardella) and Roberto Canessa (Agustín Pardella) as they make plans to scale the snowy peaks and get help.

Director J.A. Bayona is no stranger to the disaster genre, having made *The Impossible*, which involved the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The crash itself is presented in an appropriately disturbing manner, as are the many hardships that followed. There’s a tense and claustrophobic avalanche sequence, as well as an extended period with those involved trapped in the plane under snow.

Viewers see numerous moments of suffering as the various passengers go through traumatic events and process them psychologically, as well as deal with their mortality. There are some interesting observations.

The movie is also beautifully shot, with the vista appearing as equally gorgeous and threatening.

It does strive to emphasize the unimaginable conditions endured by those after the crash and is effective in doing so. However, in the process of being accurate, the story shows details that may not be entirely necessary. When the plane crashes, it breaks into a few sections and the story features characters making more than one attempt to reach various parts (and occasionally failing to do so). While this and other scenes emphasize the horrendousness of the conditions, the pacing does suffer.

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Additionally, it is also an odd choice in having Numa Turcatti as the story’s narrator and lead. Later, the tactic feels obvious in its attempts to elicit an emotional response, The sudden shift in focus to Nando’s and Roberto’s trek does come across as awkward.

And as this reviewer has seen numerous movies on the subject, he’s often wondered why none of the films have ever attempted to recreate the final moving tribute of the survivors. The group later returned to the actual site of the crash to pay their respects to the deceased. It would seem like an incredibly powerful way for those in the film to find some closure, but this part of the story has yet to have been depicted.

Regardless of these complaints, *Society of the Snow* is still an effective retelling of the ordeal. The technical elements are strong, as are the performances. The movie isn’t sensationalistic and while it may be an endurance test, it does make viewers understand just what these individuals had to do in order to make it out of the Andes.

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