

It'd be criminal to miss 'Hell or High Water'

Written by By Glenn Kay
Friday, 19 August 2016 03:35



Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 102 min.

Times are tough, and *Hell or High Water* is a crime flick that also manages to astutely encapsulate many financial problems (in particular, foreclosures). This is a small but effective crime film that offers plenty of thematic meat between its impressive character interplay. It's got the vibe of *No Country For Old Men*, with a more straight-forward plot and theme. However the project was conceived, it's hard to imagine the end result turning out any better.

Toby (Chris Pine) and his ex-con brother Tanner (Ben Foster) are robbers plotting a string of heists through little banks in small towns on the back roads of Texas. On their trail are Texas Rangers Hamilton (Jeff Bridges) and Parker (Gil Birmingham).

The siblings' plan is dicey but uniquely thought out; of course, if anything goes off course, the two know it could mean lengthy sentences, or even death. It may sound like a simple plot, but what raises this tale above the norm are the characters and the attention to detail paid by the filmmakers.

It's a stark effort with great performances across the board. These aren't simple good guys and bad guys being portrayed; most are more complex and are painted in shades of grey.

Hamilton would be the hero in most films of this genre, but his sense of humor is crotchety and

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politically incorrect in equal measure. Tanner has a nasty and impulsive streak, yet is consistently loyal and giving to his brother. And while Toby's bank-robbing acts are criminal, his motivation is relatable, building a future for his financially strapped children. This is the only way the central character can provide for them.

Terrible things happen to good people in the film, and these layered characters add extra dimension to the drama.

And because there's already so much strife in this story, it makes the stress and anxiety that much more palpable.

The banks are clearly using the poor economy to their advantage, leading to mixed feelings among the public.

Whenever the brothers interact with locals, we're never sure if these people are going to react with vigilante justice or empathy and encouragement. Some of the robberies result in actions that force the characters to improvise at a moment's notice.

While the big stars all bring their A-game to the project, just about everyone in the film deserves praise, from the leads down to the supporting cast members who include grumpy restaurant owners and waitresses. All feel authentic in their varied behaviors and mannerisms.

The movie is filled with memorable characters who are consistently interesting to watch.

The widescreen photography is also striking. In many respects, it perfectly captures the literal and figurative conditions for its troubled cast. The towns and streets are filled with boarded-up businesses. They're bleakly dirty and dust-ridden, highlighting the hard times on an exterior level, as well as matching the sparseness and stark mindsets of the onscreen characters.

The action and violence that occur over the course of the feature are equally quick, austere, and

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occasionally jarring — adding to the tension.

This is a decidedly low-key movie, but its message is very clear. Big banks are taking advantage of the average citizen, profiting off of their suffering. Desperate times result in desperate people. And when things are at their worst, and the public isn't properly cared for by the system, many begin taking extreme measures to survive.

Hell or High Water is a small, character-driven film that may take a subtle approach in its story, but its methods don't make it any less powerful or effective.

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