

Sam Landess

Hell or High Water Review

On paper, “Hell or High Water” seems like any other movie set in the western and crime genre. The only movie to really compare it to is “No Country for Old Men.” It’s also hard to live up to a movie like “No Country for Old Men” which went on to win four Academy Awards, but “Hell or High Water” does just that.

Set in West Texas, this movie follows two bank robbing brothers who need money to pay off the reverse mortgage that will forfeit their recently deceased mother’s ranch if not paid off. The brothers are played incredibly well by Chris Pine, who plays the younger brother Toby Howard, and Ben Foster plays Tanner Howard, who has just been released from prison.

Chris Pine finally proves he can act. In a career mostly known for playing Captain James T. Kirk in the Star Trek movies, Pine shows he is more than capable of leading a movie. Ben Foster has always been able to act and shows it once again playing the dysfunctional, ex con older brother to Pine.

Their bank robbing grabs the attention of Texas Ranger Marcus Hamilton played by Academy Award Winner Jeff Bridges. In “True Grit” form, Bridges perfects his role as the old, grumpy and sometimes racist Texas Ranger. The racist part comes from his hazing of fellow deputy and partner Alberto Parker regarding his Indian-Mexican heritage. Bridges nabbed an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor for his excellent performance.

Movies are only as good as its script. Written by Taylor Sheridan (Sicario) who definitely has a script that is very character driven. The interesting thing is there are only a few characters throughout the movie but when you have three mesmerizing characters and a simple plot to follow, it ends up delivering a great movie.

Another intriguing aspect of the film and unlike other films of similar drama is the fact that there are no heroes or villains at first. You would expect the brothers to be the villains right of the bat, but when their reasons for robbing the banks comes out, one might say the banks are the villains. The lines are blurred between heroes and villains.

You also might want to love Bridges character because of his past performances and he plays a “good guy” in this film, but the way he comes off to the other characters makes him seem like a villain as well. The way he speaks derogatorily to his fellow partner makes him the bad guy in a sense.

The film is directed by David Mackenzie, whose biggest movie before this was “Starred Up.” It’s hard to capture true beauty in a West Texas town, but Mackenzie does a great job of shooting beautiful scenes in the plainest environment.

The film doesn’t necessarily keep you on the edge of your seat like “No Country for Old Men” but the film does its job in keeping the audience intrigued. The characters are definitely the main focal point on why this film is so successful. The cast performs in a way were you feel for the brothers when they are resorting to stealing money to pay off mortgages. You understand the pain that Bridges character is going through as he goes on this epic chase.

“Hell or High Water” lives up to the comparison to “No Country for Old Men” but it also holds its own. The film is nominated for four Academy Awards including best Picture and rightfully so. Hell or High Water might be a small movie but it delivers like a big one.