

“Sicario”

A violent tale of the drug wars on the US-Mexican border, “Sicario” is one viscerally exciting film. However, a caveat is in order. The body count is high. If that is not your thing then be forewarned.

The film opens with FBI agent Kate Macy (Emily Blunt) leading a SWAT team in a raid on a house where they believe hostages are being held. There are some unpleasant surprises in store for Kate. That is tame, however, compared to what happens after she volunteers for a special drug war task force. The head of the task force, who only identifies himself as Matt (James Brolin), is a shadowy man who may or may not work for the CIA. His associate, Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro), is as quiet as Matt is voluble. Kate will soon discover that Alejandro’s placid demeanor gives no clue as to his character.

Kate gets her first taste of what is in store for her when she accompanies her new found associates and their retinue of special ops troops on a mission to seize a high-value drug dealer from a Mexican prison. Nothing in her FBI training has prepared her for the tactics of her new team. They are a lethal crew and have no interest in turning over their new catch to US prison authorities. They take the word “war” in the “war on drugs” literally. Their new prisoner is quickly spirited away to a secret site where Alejandro “questions” him. With the information Alejandro ultimately extracts an elaborate plan is put into play to bring down the head of a Mexican drug cartel. How that plan plays out is as gripping as anything you are likely to see on screen this year.

There are a number of elements which go into making “Sicario” such a great movie-going experience. The casting is impeccable. Brolin plays Matt as the ultimate cynic who revels in breaching whatever moral boundaries he sees as necessary to the task at hand. Do the ends justify the means? To Matt only the terminally naïve would ever ask such a question. Del Toro’s Alejandro is even more ruthless than Matt and only later in the film do we learn of the demons which drive him. Blunt’s Macy is a straight arrow law enforcement officer who finds herself in a constant struggle to maintain her moral footing as she falls deeper and deeper into a very dark rabbit hole.

The cinematography in “Sicario” is of the first order and creates a singularly authentic reality. These range from aerial shots of the lunar like landscape of the Sonoran desert; to a raid in the desert seen through night vision goggles; to spectacular extended set piece following a convoy of black SUVs, surrounded by outriders of Mexican federal police, speeding through the urban chaos of Ciudad Juarez.

Along with being drenched in atmosphere, “Sicario” contains a number of unexpected (and sometimes startling) twist and turns). While you may question some of the plot points after you leave the theater, the film is so intense and fast-paced that they will be of no import while you are in your seat. In a world of ersatz special-effects “action” films “Sicario” stands out as the real deal. And then there is the final scene shot on a soccer field in Ciudad Juarez. It is an ironic counterpoint to the transient “success” of the war on drugs.

(Amazon Prime)