

Ryan Reynolds Gets Beneath it in Tense Thriller ‘Buried’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 24, 2010 - 7:21am

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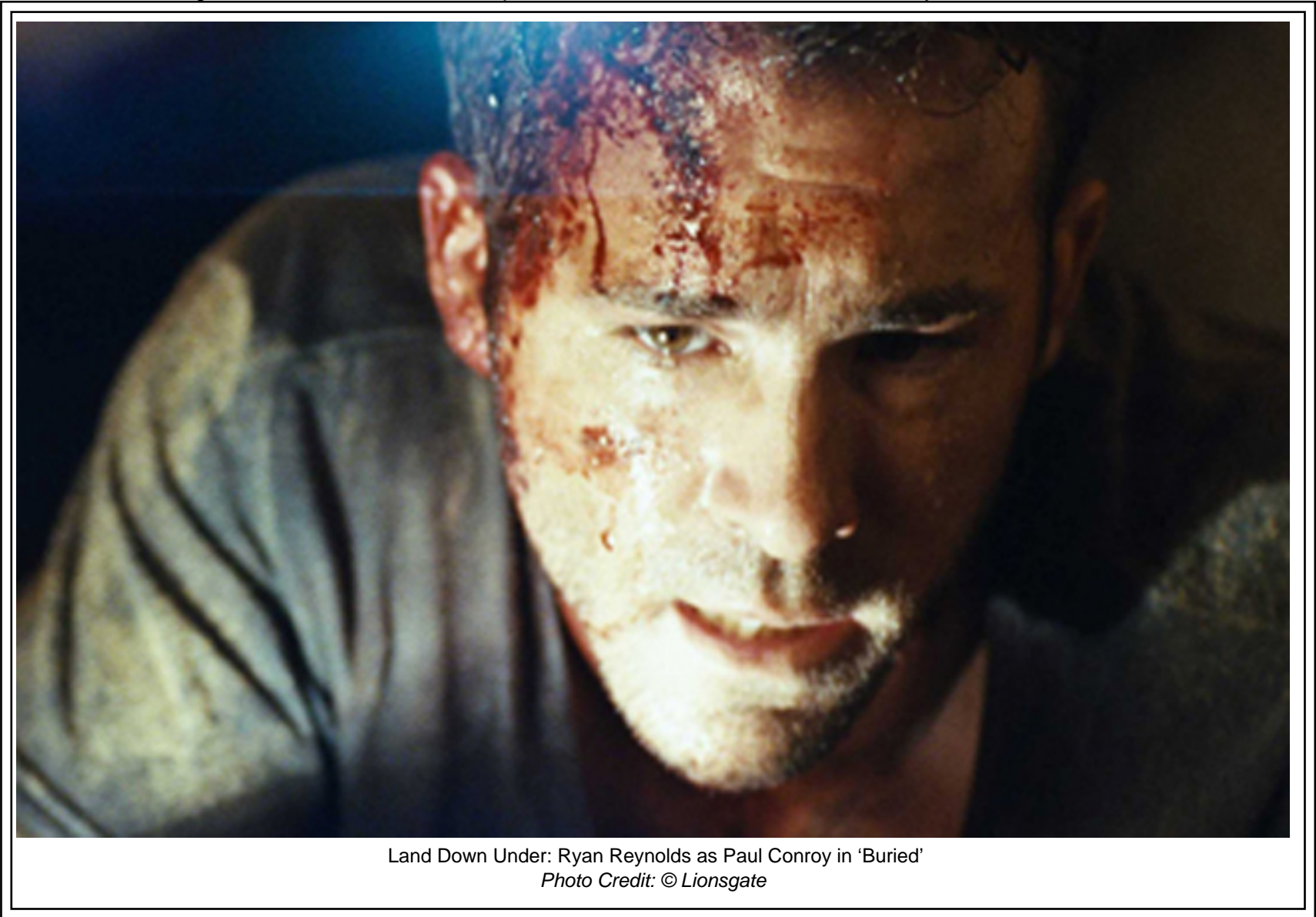
Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – In one of the most unusual settings for a film, actor Ryan Reynolds performs as a one-man tour de force as the only on-screen character in the new film “Buried.” Set in a coffin buried beneath the sands of Iraq, Reynolds conveys the panic, hope and inevitable outcome of a man buried alive and fighting for his very existence.

Reynolds portrays Paul Conroy, an American truck driver who has taken an assignment to provide transport during the Iraq war. When his convoy is ambushed, he is taken alive and kidnapped. As the film opens he awakens in complete darkness. Using the illumination of a cigarette lighter, he determines that he has been buried alive by his captors.

This is confirmed by a ringing mobile phone. The captors have buried with him some survival gear, including some portable lighting and a communications device. When Paul answers, the man on the other end of the line is telling him to demand five million dollars in ransom money from the American government or they won’t dig him out.

This begins a series of frantic phones calls, ranging from the absurd wrong numbers in the United States, to Paul’s wife and parents, to the bureaucrats outside of his potential grave who manage simply to try to calm him down. This becomes a desperate situation, as the clock ticks down on the timing for the ransom and Paul’s possible rescuers seem more distant by the minute.



Land Down Under: Ryan Reynolds as Paul Conroy in ‘Buried’
Photo Credit:    Lionsgate

Meanwhile the war rages above ground and a series of percussive hits above Paul may make for a game changer in the rescue attempts. As each phone contact becomes his only lifeline, another piece of hope becomes checked off with each new hang-up,

Ryan Reynolds gave a stunning performance in this unusual film, handling the chore of an entire movie like it was an inner monologue. He goes through the five stages of dying...denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance...all mostly through real time, switching back and forth between these emotions as the situation develops. His bargaining is particularly well played. It had both the proper desperation and the utter frustration of essentially being abandoned.

Director Rodrigo Cortés fashioned an impressive atmosphere within the tiny coffin. He created an entire world, winnowed down to the microcosm of a man in a box buried in the sand. All angles of the confines are explored, drawing the audience into a trap that strange as it may seem, can be easily imagined. In one of the few shots outside the inner sanctum, the camera draws up to reveal Paul as if the lid has been lifted, his exposure viewed from the surface. It is one of the most frightening camera angles in the whole film.

The outside phones calls took on the air of morbid black humor. From the accidental reach of a call center back in the states, with it's usual dismissal of anything out of sorts, to the negotiations with his captors, Paul is a pawn to uncontrollable outside forces. Even his rescuers had a sense of detachment, either in the State Department in Washington or a middleman trying to locate Paul in Iraq. Although the film takes care not to make an overt statement regarding the conflict, there are enough signals to illustrate the sheer stupidity of war and bureaucracy.

The phone calls are also part of the slight flaws in the narrative. After having to believe that a cell signal could penetrate the earth in the middle of Iraq, some of the contacts are annoyingly breezy. While this may contribute to the war-in-a-box, it becomes distracting and irritating. This is probably the point, but it is the aspect of the circumstance that detracts from the tense reality.



Two Man Team: Ryan Reynolds and Director Rodrigo Cortés on the set of 'Buried'

Photo Credit: © Lionsgate

This is a essential evolution in Ryan Reynold's nascent career as a serious actor. It proves he can move from the light comedy he's known for and display a range of emotions that most actors wouldn't get the opportunity to do in ten films, and he pulls it off like a champion. It will be interesting to note if that buzz lasts to awards season.

With the conflict in Iraq declared essentially "over," Buried becomes a metaphor for the whole situation. An American, stuck in a box, with the sands of time threatening to overtake him. If that doesn't describe the folly of the country's involvement in Iraq, then I've failed Symbolism 101.

"Buried" has a limited release in Chicago on September 24th, and opens nationwide on October 8th. Featuring Ryan Reynolds, and José García Pérez, Robert Paterson, Stephen Tobolowsky, Samantha Mathis and Erik Palladino in phone caller roles. Screenplay by Chris Sparling, directed by Rodrigo Cortés. Rated "R"



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [16]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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Source URL (retrieved on *Apr 16 2024 - 5:36pm*):
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