

## ‘Short Term 12’ is an Honest, Emotional Gem

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 13, 2013 - 11:52am

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – There are certain jobs that I know that I could not do not because of the physical requirements but the emotional baggage I would take home with me at the end of the day. The brilliant, moving “Short Term 12” captures one of these jobs – people who look out for abandoned kids, many of them abused, addicted, and troubled the point of pure heartbreak. Especially now that I’m a father, seeing kids abused shatters me to the point where I can’t even watch a movie about it without getting emotional. I’d be a wreck on the job every day.

And yet some people take on this challenge and Destin Cretton has used his experience doing so to craft his debut film. “Short Term 12” is difficult to describe without it sounding manipulative or melodramatic but I’ll do my best. Trust me when I tell you that this is one of the best films you’ll see all year. It’s pure, true, and remarkably moving. It’s a special piece of work.



Short Term 12

*Photo credit: Cinedigm*

It is Nate’s (Rami Malek) first day at Short Term 12, a facility for kids waiting to find a new home or until they can return to their own. The charismatic but scruffy Mason (John Gallagher. Jr. of “The Newsroom”) is telling Nate a story about a kid who tried to escape. It happens regularly and they can’t keep them prisoner, only try to convince them that they want to stay. It’s a funny story, and clearly one that co-workers Jessica (Stephanie Beatriz) and Grace (Brie Larson) have heard before. This is life at Short Term 12: Funny, kind of dangerous, and totally unpredictable.

We meet the residents and employees of “Short Term 12” through a series of scenes and moments that could be called episodic but those episodes build to a sense of remarkable realism. We believe that little stories are happening throughout the facility of Short Term 12 and so the ones we see have added gravity. The film works on an incredibly powerful emotional current right from the first act due to the honesty of its

presentation. There’s a musical performance about half an hour in that ripped my heart apart and it was both because of the truth of what was being expressed and the realization that I was watching a very special movie.



Short Term 12

*Photo credit: Cinedigm*

More than anyone else, “Short Term 12” is Grace’s story. She dates the very-supportive Mason (in one of the most genuinely believable movie couples of the year) and she seems to be a leader at the facility although there’s a rawness to the way she deals with the kids there that makes clear that her connection runs deeper than the guy who merely wanted to work with underprivileged children. Grace has demons of her own and when she’s confronted with them through both a major life change and the arrival of a cutter named Jayden (the great Kaitlyn Dever) with whom she identifies, some of the walls around her heart begin to crumble.

Why do people cut themselves? Why do gentle souls often shut down when faced with outstretched, loving arms? And how do people deal with these questions day in and day out, knowing that they can’t save everyone? “Short Term 12” is a small movie about very big issues. It captures the idea honestly that there are ways in this world to stop the bleeding and the worry and the depression – to take that helping hand and turn around and give one to someone else at the same time. It is about breaking out of what has emotionally imprisoned you both through love and straight-up aggression. Find a way back to normalcy. It is inspiring and profound purely through the truth of its characters and their emotional heartache. It’s a movie that you FEEL as much as you watch.



Short Term 12

*Photo credit: Cinedigm*

Performances throughout “Short Term 12” feel honest and genuine but it’s Brie Larson who truly elevates the piece, doing the best work of her notable year, which also included a supporting turn in the great “The Spectacular Now.” Larson is the real deal, always feeling like she’s in the moment, not putting on the artifice so many would have conveyed in an emotional piece like this one. She disappears into the part not

just through the dialogue and action but in the quiet moments. You can see her thinking, worrying, and feeling – always completely in character.

The whole cast here is good – even Gallagher Jr., who has never quite worked for me on Sorkin’s HBO drama – but the film belongs to Larson and writer/director Destin Cretton, who has made a major statement through drama that feels as important as Benh Zeitlin’s “Beasts of the Southern Wild” did last year. Zeitlin’s admittedly excellent film became something of a phenomenon on its way to major awards. Let’s hope the same happens to “Short Term 12.”

*“Short Term 12” stars Brie Larson, John Gallagher Jr., Kaitlyn Dever, Stephanie Beatiz, Rami Malek, Kevin Hernandez, Keith Stanfield, and Frantz Turner. It was written and directed by Destin Cretton. It opens in Chicago on September 13, 2013 and will be expanding across the country.*



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