

Story in 'Wind River' Gets Scattered in the Breeze

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 12, 2017 - 9:36am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Writer/Director Taylor Sheridan is a deep thinker regarding humanity in these United States. In the third film of his “American Frontier Trilogy” – after “Sicario” and “Hell or High Water” – he goes to the Wyoming Native American reservation, for a unwieldy story titled “Wind River.”

“Wind River” is definitely the weakest of the trilogy, suffering from a meandering uncertainty as to what it wanted to be. Did it want to be a cop procedural? It got off track from the main case several times, confusing the issue. Did it want to be a morality tale? Jeremy Renner, as the local authority, kept making emotional and poignant speeches that went nowhere. Finally, did it want to be an American frontier story, as the trilogy is so named? It certainly went to one of the last frontiers in the rough reservation lands of Wyoming, and the cinematography was properly breathtaking, but the “frontier” was used as a prop rather than an indication of character. All of it just didn’t add up, and the film was impaired by story deficiencies in each of the three themes.

The film begins with a woman (Kelsey Asbille) running barefoot in the snow, eventually collapsing. She is a Native American on the Wind River reservation in Wyoming, and she had died at the end of the run. Two local authorities are notified – Ranger Cory Lambert (Jeremy Renner) and Officer Ben (Graham Greene) – but they also have to contend with FBI Agent Banner (Elizabeth Olsen), who has also been called in.



Jeremy Renner is Cory Lambert in 'Wind River'

Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

Banner is a stranger in a strange land, so she enlists Lambert to help her with the case. But the Ranger is also a man with a past, and it is tied into the murder they are trying to solve. The atmosphere of *Wind River* becomes fuel for the twists and turns the crime-solving duo encounters, and what they finally reveal will be shocking enough to create a sense of redemption.

Both Jeremy Renner and Elizabeth Olsen are fine actors, and they were both enlisted to bring their respective characters to life... but there wasn't enough in this scattered tale for decent character development. Olsen was very difficult to believe as an FBI agent, there was something about her look and the way she infiltrated the main case that lacked authenticity. Renner tried so hard with his material, but ended up making speeches to various other characters that stopped the film cold, and were confusing in regard to what was happening.

There was also the murder investigation itself. The two possibilities for where the running girl came from both had association and action in connection with the incident. There wasn't much of a need for the FBI or any intense detective work, the situations that played out were local and solved itself. So bringing the FBI agent felt like it was establishing a more serious buddy picture, or as companion to the divorced Renner character, than something organic. That sounds picky, but it's apparent when experiencing the film.



FBI Agent Banner (Elizabeth Olsen) and Officer Ben (Graham Greene) in 'Wind River'

Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

The scenery is spectacular, and cinematographer Ben Richardson took full advantage of showing it off, with mountains and weather adding some vitality to the environment. The supporting character of Officer Ben, portrayed by popular Native North American actor Graham Greene, was a deadpan Greek chorus to the activities of Renner and Olsen. Reasonably, in regard to the setting, and since the film was about a Native American murder, it should have been about Greene's character.

But the "white savior" is alive and well in the Wind River reservation, and that may be the main reason the film doesn't work. There is a title card that comes up at the end of the movie, which has little to do with what had just transpired. It is very odd, but somehow fits in perfectly with this directionless, stark frontier.

"Wind River" continues its nationwide release in Chicago on August 11th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Jeremy Renner, Elizabeth Olsen, Graham Greene, Julia Jones and Kelsey Asbille. Written and directed by Taylor Sheridan. Rated "R"



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