

Just finished watching "Sicario: Day Of The Soldado" last night. This surprise follow-up to the critically praised original is directed by Stefano Sollima(This is his mainstream directorial debut) and written by Taylor Sheridan("Wind River" "Yellowstone"). The film stars Benicio Del Toro, Josh Brolin, Isabela Moner, Jeffrey Donovan, Catherine Keener, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Matthew Modine, Shea Whigham and Elijah Rodriguez.

This one's a heavy hitter guys. The original "Sicario" shook me to my core when I saw it 3 years ago. It deeply affected me and I still consider it to be a near perfect film in its depiction of the drug wars in Mexico. I left that film feeling dirty, shocked and the need to take a shower directly after. When I got wind that a sequel was in the works, I was intrigued but nervous. After all, the same director(Denis Villeneuve), cinematographer(Roger Deakins) and composer(Johan Johansson) were not returning for the sequel. So I remained positive and open minded as I walked into the theater.

Before I get into the review, I would like to mention that this is by far the most INTENSE theatergoing experience I've ever had. There's a few contributing factors as to why. For starters, I was really taken aback when I saw that the majority of the audience last night was of multiple ethnicities. I had 3 Indian guys sitting behind me as well as a couple Hispanics in front of me. On top of that a Hispanic couple brought their 2 year old son in and sat about 3 seats down from me. That's a whole other issue I'll get to later. The reason I'm telling you this is because this only added to my anxiety while watching the film. It didn't help that the movie opens with 2 horrific scenes depicting suicide bombings either. I constantly had to fight the urge to leave the theater. That's how uncomfortable I was and my mom felt the same way. This was the first time where I felt like the minority and it wasn't a good feeling at all. I HATE to say it because I'm sure those people were very nice, caring human beings. I just couldn't help but feel that way. Anyway I just thought I'd share my feelings and perspective on the matter. Let's talk about the film now.

This is not a easy film to watch at all. It's not supposed to be. If you thought the first film was difficult, you're in for a rude awakening with this one. This film deals with much more complex themes and issues than the 1st did. The original woke people up and started a conversation. This one furthers the conversation and themes to greater, more disturbing effect. It deals with the issue of children in Mexico and how they can be caught in the crossfire in different ways. This will undoubtedly be a problem with a lot of people and understandably so. Sheridan isn't trying to entertain you. He's trying to show you what happens regularly in Mexico and how messed up it is. Similar to his show "Yellowstone" going on right now on Paramount Network(Which I highly recommend watching) he's showing how certain cultures of people live and how drastically different it is from our own. He's asking you "Is this right?" and "Is this ethical?".

Now that we've addressed that, let's talk about the film from a technical standpoint. As I said before, this opens with 2 scenes that locked me in right away just from the unflinching brutality of them. Similar to the original, this film grabs your attention very quickly and hardly ever lets up until the end.

From an acting standpoint, this film is very impressive. Del Toro is arguably even more compelling as "Alejandro" in this than the original. He felt more fleshed out and I was able to see his humanity which surprised me very much. Brolin once again brings a no nonsense icy demeanor to "Matt Graver" and a early interrogation scene shows just how far he'll go to achieve his goal. Moner's "Izabela" was another standout. She was the audience's eyes back into this world(similar to Blunt's "Kate Macer" in the original) and she was incredibly believable. Her expressions and delivery were frighteningly realized and it felt like I was right there with her in the chaos. It was genuinely terrifying. The only other standout performance for me was that of Rodriguez's "Miguel", a teenage boy who falls into the wrong crowd and is ultimately corrupted because of it. This kid had to do some very shocking things and like Moner, he never felt like he was acting in a film. It felt startlingly real. Too real.

Visually this film looks very good. It is unfortunately a step down from Deakins work in the original. Granted he's easily the greatest cinematographer working today so I didn't expect this to even come close. That's not to say that Dariusz Wolski's work isn't good however. Having previously shot "The Martian" and the more recent "Alien: Covenant", Wolski definitely knows how to film a movie that evokes emotion from an audience. The movie has a grainy yellowish filter to it during the day and a clear sleek look during the night scenes. Both of these communicated the gritty reality that the film was presenting.

Of course no "Sicario" film would be complete without it's bellowing score. Johan Johansson (R.I.P.) created an absolutely haunting score for the original and this one takes several beats from it, at times sounding completely identical. I was truly saddened when I found out that he passed away this past February at the age of 48. He and his music were a true gift to this world and both will be forever missed. This new composer Hildur Gudnadottir does a fine job of matching that score and effectively using it to ramp up the tension. At times I had to close my eyes because it was so overpowering. I felt the same way in the original as well.

One last thing before we wrap up. As I stated earlier, a Hispanic couple brought their 2 year old son into this movie. I'm almost positive that that's ILLEGAL to bring a kid that young into a incredibly violent R rated film. As I sat there listening to the little boy say "Uh Oh" multiple times during scenes of shootings and explosions, I couldn't help but feel sick. That kid did not understand what he was watching and his parents should have known better. I'm still kicking myself that I didn't go out and tell the manager about it. Next time(god forbid there is a next time) I will without hesitation.

To conclude, this is not a entertaining film. It's brutal, grim and challenging. It asks very tough questions and wants you to sit with them. It knows that it doesn't present any easy answers. Is it a hard watch? Absolutely. This is about as hard as they come. Is it a necessary watch? Personally I think it is but that's up to you to decide. I sat in my seat staring blankly at the screen when it was all over, just like when I saw the original. That being said, I do think it's a step down from the original in a few areas. 3 years ago I gave "Sicario" 5/5 stars. Standing by that decision, I'm now giving "Sicario: Day Of The Soldado" 4/5 stars. As far as sequels go, this is a very effective one. This film is going to stay with me for weeks to come, as did the original.