

Movie Review: 'Trade'

by David_Elliott

Some films can make you squirm and resist, even resentfully, but then you add up the effort as valid. "Trade" crosses that saving line.

'TRADE' - In 'Trade,' Paulina Gaitan portrays a 13-year-old girl from Mexico City whose kidnapping by sex traffickers sets in motion a desperate mission by her 17-year-old brother, played by Cesar Ramos, to save her. CNS Photo courtesy of Marco Nagel. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Made by Marco Kreuzpaintner, the German director whose "Summerstorm" was sensitively gay-themed, "Trade" is about the world trade in children as sex slaves, as catnip for creeps. It first depicts Mexico City as hell, but then you realize that's just a blighted purgatory - hell is north.

"Gringoland" is where some Mexican kids are headed after abduction, plus the Polish teen Veronica (Alicia Bachleda-Curus). She has the worst language problem and is made to pay for it, partly because she offers the

clearest moral resistance to her vile transporters.

The story focus is the Mexican child Adriana (Paulina Gaitan), seized on the street while relishing her new bike. Her older brother Jorge gave her the bike, and so feels very guilty. Against steep odds, he tears off to find the terrified virgin, who can fetch a big price in an American sex auction (ah, more glory for the Internet).

As Jorge, actor Cesar Ramos fairly well owns the movie, at least until Kevin Kline appears. Ramos can be very boyish and very hardened, in a split-second switch. Such emotive fluency goes with bilingual skill to make him a plucky, desperate hero, and his fine performance is never maudlin.

Kline shows up in Juarez near the border, as the insurance cop Ray, looking for his long-gone daughter. Master of adventurous stage work, Kline can also play to perfection this regular, stolid guy. When his clotted feelings spill, Kline doesn't gush, they just leak out poignantly.

Man and teen bond on a shared mission. Ray soon realizes that Adriana must be the new goal of his quest. But Jose Rivera's script, based on a New York Times investigative story by Peter Landsman, keeps coming back to the captive kids - to their engulfment by adult violence, which hits raw dirt in a ghastly Texas pasture, where furtive men haul "dates" into shabby cribs.

Is this slumming? In a few moments, yes. Kreuzpaintner seems eager to match the coarse volatility of the harsh Mexican hit "Amores Perros." But he is more keen to brood hurtfully over human fate, not wallow as a pulper.

The teased-along bit about a thug escort who has doubts, even praying to the Virgin Mary to salve his conscience, finally seems extraneous. The Catholic touches are fairly blatant. And the climax, though engrossing, stacks its turns rather steeply.

If movies like this don't change the facts of a mean world, they do serve as blunt witnesses. Kline, Ramos and the two major girl actors are so viably inside the story, as suffering people, that they flesh the story beyond the briefly seen sex acts, and "Trade" transcends grubby voyeurism.

A Lionsgate release. Director: Marco Kreuzpaintner. Writer: Jose Rivera. Cast: Kevin Kline, Cesar Ramos, Paulina Gaitan, Alicia Bachleda-Curus, Marco Perez. Running time: 2 hours. Rated R. 3 stars.

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