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ALL IS LOST

Continuing to earn cool points following their November booking of *Enough Said* – a marvelous movie that finally landed in our area several months after its initial national release – schedulers for Moline's Nova 6 Cinemas have done it again with the booking of

All Is Lost,

another critically acclaimed title that managed to bypass the Quad Cities' first-run cineplexes. And given the overall strength of writer/director J.C. Chandor's achievement, I couldn't be happier about its arrival, late though it may be. (Not too late, however, for those of us wanting to catch as many Oscar-nominated films as possible prior to the March 2 ceremony. Chandor's follow-up to 2011's exquisite

Margin Call –

which

also

made its local debut at Nova 6 – is nominated for Best Sound Editing.) You may have heard about the film: It's the one in which a lone sailor played by Robert Redford has to contend with a slowly sinking ship while adrift in the Indian Ocean, and with the exception of roughly 50 words, it's as lacking in dialogue as

The Artist

. It's also, for the majority of its 100 minutes, both wrenching and exhilarating.

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 02 February 2014 15:13

A cinematic master class in the art of showing rather than telling, *All Is Lost* is painstaking in its detail. Redford (whose character is listed in the credits simply as "Our Man") finds himself at the mercy of a sizable hole in his ship's hull, vicious night storms that turn his craft upside-down, a power outage, a massive head wound, a lack of food and fresh water, a school of sharks, a fire, and more. Yet the means by which, through instinct and careful procedure, he attacks every new challenge are so lucidly presented and executed that the film could be its own survival manual for unfortunate souls lost at sea (albeit those with functional Blu-ray players). And the wizardly editing, photography, and sound effects add immeasurably to the

vérité

of the endeavor; on all levels, the movie is a technical wonder. I just wish – and this may be a heretical opinion – it were more of a

performance

wonder.

Of course, Redford is an effortlessly engaging movie star, as he's been for close to a half-century now, and the situation Our Man finds himself in certainly supplies more than its share of built-in empathy. But the problem with his casting, for me, is that Redford is *all* movie star, and what this role really needed was a dyed-in-the-wool

actor –

a Robert Duvall, or a Tommy Lee Jones, or someone else who could similarly suggest the true emotional toll of this traumatic event. Redford doesn't do anything

wrong

, per se, but he's such a steadfastly untouchable icon of Old Hollywood that you never really feel close to him here, and his natural reticence as a performer means that we have to spend too much time decoding his subtlety, which consequently makes us view

All Is Lost

's tale less as a story than a cryptic analogy. (Granted, Chandor's decision to name Redford's character "Our Man" suggests that that's exactly what he had in mind.) We continually search Redford's eyes, and his very occasional readings, for some hint about what this horrific struggle

means

to him, but don't get much beyond a bit of wide-eyed panic and the completely understandable screaming of “

Fuck!

”; Our Man remains unknowable to the end, and as a result, his crisis doesn't carry the weight it could have.

All Is Lost

is a spectacular visual and aural achievement, and you may easily agree with the

New York Times

rave

that Redford gives “the performance of his life,” and the

New Yorker

appraisal that “Redford does more acting in this movie than he has done in all his earlier movies combined.” I agreed, too. I just wished those sentiments meant more than they actually do.

Written by Mike Schulz

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THAT AWKWARD MOMENT

Writer/director Tom Gormican's *That Awkward Moment* is like an extended, particularly crass episode of *Sex & the City* for straight guys in their early 20s. How oh how did this thing ever tank at the box office?! Listening to the overly practiced, grimly unfunny banter between Zac Efron, Miles Teller, and Michael B. Jordan – two of whom are usually terrifically talented – as they tried to negotiate the tricky divide between casual flings and actually caring for someone, I routinely wanted to bash my head against the nearest hard surface, aching for even one moment between the loquacious gents that didn't feel like an exchange too generically smutty for *Two & a Half Men*

. But while I was groaning at the dialogue and marveling at the astonishingly inane plotting, with Efron's misunderstanding of his girlfriend's "dress-up party" too ludicrous to be believed, two female co-stars, at least, made the sit less unendurable. As Teller's opposite-gender wing man harboring a not-so-secret crush for her pal (and he for her), Mackenzie Davis displays a lovely naturalism and lends the movie shrewd comic timing, and her playful repartee with Teller provides the rare opportunities for Gormican's comedy-in-name-only to actually breathe. And as the hook-up who's originally mistaken for a hook
er

, Imogen Poots is really quite sensational. Delivering sensible zingers in a wholly believable American accent, the British ingénue has never before appeared this relaxed and confident and offhandedly sexy on film, and she even pulls off the rather remarkable feat of making her laughter at screen beau Efron's bad and badly timed jokes sound believable. That's not worthy of praise. That's worthy of a freakin' Oscar.

For a review of Labor Day, visit "[Peach Pits](#)."

There's a Hole in Your Vessel, Dear Redford, Dear Redford ... : "All Is Lost" and "That Awkward Moment"

Written by Mike Schulz

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Follow Mike on Twitter at [Twitter.com/MikeSchulzNow](https://twitter.com/MikeSchulzNow).