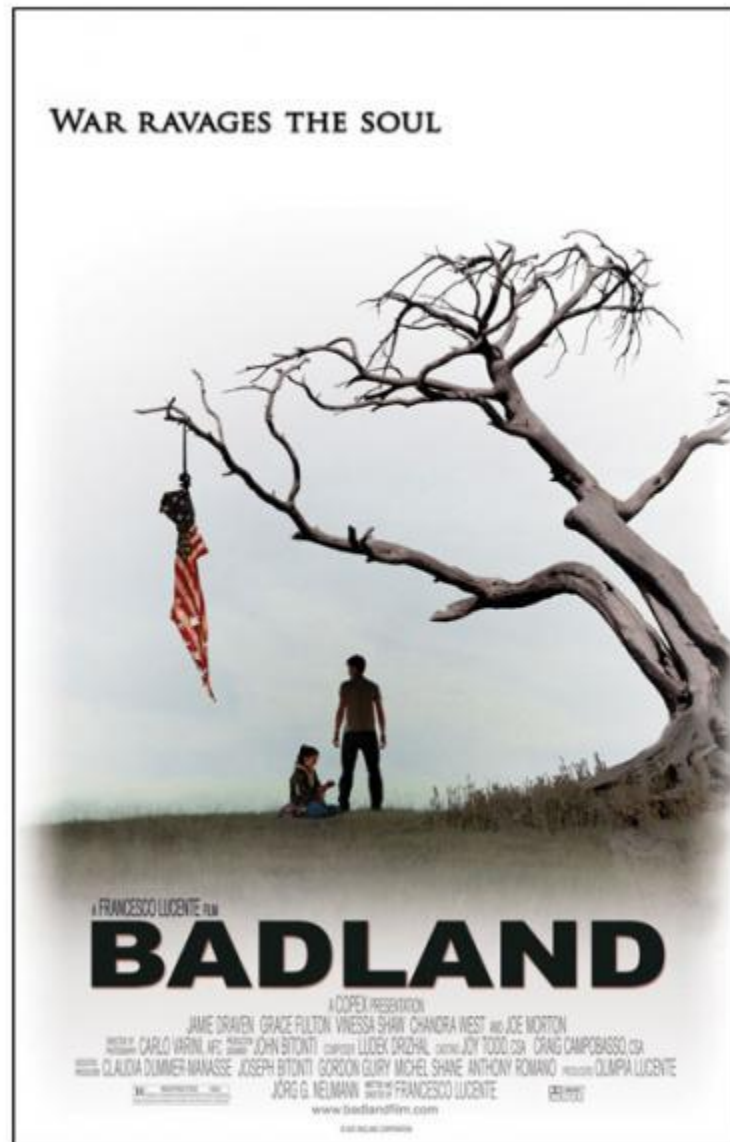


# Badland



Badland \*\*1/2

Directed by Francesco Lucente

Written by Francesco Lucente

Starring:

Jamie Draven as Jerry

Grace Fulton as Celina

Vinessa Shaw as Nora  
Joe Morton as Max  
Chandra West as Oli

160 Minutes(Rated R for some strong disturbing violence and pervasive language. )

---

Here we go. More politics. "Badland" is the sixth or seventh anti-war statement film since September's "In the Valley of Elah," and the only reason why it isn't getting more press is because its a little indie movie with a cast of no-name actors. The only name that I even recognize is Vinessa Shaw, and her work is limited to "40 Days and 40 Nights," "Corky Ramano," and a bit part in Woody Allen's "Melinda and Melinda." No very impressive, although the Woody Allen was fun. And while this does actually tell a story, unlike Redford's "Lions for Lambs," and while it doesn't get flashy with visuals and methods like de Palma's "Redacted," it does need a little sorting out. I oddly found myself absorbed in what was happening on the screen, and if writer/director Francesco Lucente trimmed it a little-the film is a mean 160 minutes, and it doesn't need to be. There is a lot of fat on this monster. And the ending just about ruins the entire film, but more on that later.

Our main character is Jerry, a depressed and rather mentally unstable Iraq war vet who was discharged after an incident. His pregnant wife doesn't seem to care about his depression spells, and is tiring of his silent crying and nose bleeding constantly. They have three other kids, two sons and a daughter, the daughter who seems to actually sometimes give a damn about him. When he is framed at work for stealing money, he goes home in an angry fit which gets worse when he learns that his wife has been stealing money and saving up to run away from him. He snaps, shoots and kills her, and then kills his two sons, and just when he's about to do his daughter in she pleas for his life. He changes his mind, puts her in his car, and they go on the road. He eventually finds himself in a small time working in as a cook in a diner-his face plastered on the news, but luckily he manages to blend in. That is until he meets Max, the town cop who has just returned from eighteen months away and is as scarred at Jerry is. But maybe Jerry could help Max in ways that nobody would help him.

I did find myself absorbed in this movie for some odd reason. It doesn't exactly make any points that I haven't already heard, and yet it is well made. The cinematography is quite something to look at, and I was lucky to have a huge screen to admire it all on. For the most part the acting is fairly decent, with the exception of an argument between Jerry and his wife which was poorly written-maybe that's because my ears were only hearing the "F" word over and over again. Nothing challenging about writing that over and over again, I would know. And despite its flaws there are the moments where you really are involved in this story-moments of power are there, but you just have to be a little patient.

And then the last five minutes comes along and practically ruins everything. The movie offers two plot twists. The first comes along and I rolled my eyes a little-it seemed like a pretty far stretch to go, and the anti-war message began to stab me in the face. I felt it went one step too far. And then it went an even further step with the final twist and the final few shots, which ended up ruining the movie in a way that the indie release from last week "He Was A Quiet Man" managed to ruin that film. Lucente seemed to have run out of ideas and tacked on a final one minute out of nowhere that does nothing but make you feel cheated-cheated of your time and cheated of your sensibility. When "Badland" is good, it's pretty good, but perhaps a shorter cut, and a more satisfying ending is what is needed to be something beyond a so-so indie flick. Or maybe I've just had enough of politics these last few months to last me a lifetime. Who knows?

-----