

## **MOVIE REVIEW; 'Badland' traces veteran's postwar battle; Francesco Lucente's gritty, beautiful story is a well-told tale with a raw, powerful punch.**

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### **Document Text**

"Badland" strikes like a bolt of lightning out of nowhere. This modest-budget picture with starkly effective Canadian locales standing in for Montana and Wyoming arrives with scant notice, no major studio campaign or big-name cast, but it unflinchingly illuminates the toll exacted by the Iraq War in a raw, deeply personal and completely compelling manner.

Writer-director Francesco Lucente pulls no punches in focusing on the plight of a Marine reservist, Jerry Rice (Jamie Draven), handed a dishonorable discharge, having been wrongly accused of participating in a My Lai-like massacre in Iraq.

Suffering from sudden rages and chronic nosebleeds, he struggles to support his family, who lives in a trailer near a small-town junkyard. He has a nasty boss who treats him with contempt -- as does his wife, Nora (Vinessa Shaw), who believes she's married to a mass killer -- and seemingly has never heard of post-traumatic syndrome.

Jumping ahead, we find Jerry and his young daughter Celina (Grace Fulton) on the road, eventually landing in an idyllic Montana town where a cafe proprietor (Chandra West) offers Jerry a job as a cook. Buoyed by the widow's kindness, Celina's unswerving love and a budding friendship with another, also traumatized, Iraq vet (Joe Morton), Jerry grows calmer yet cannot ever forget that the past, in more than one form, could catch up with him at any moment.

Expertly constructed and beautifully photographed, "Badland" easily sustains its 160-minute running time, and the portrayals of Draven, a British actor, and 9-year-old Fulton can stand alongside the year's best.

Shaw, West and Morton lend potent support, with Morton also contributing a song for the soundtrack -- as do Bruce Springsteen and Ray LaMontagne, among others. It is, however, the measure of "Badland's" towering, uncompromising vision that it survives Ludek Drizhal's self-important, overly pervasive score, which surely would have sunk a lesser film.

"Badland." MPAA rating: R for some strong, disturbing language and pervasive violence. Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes. Exclusively at the Sunset 5, 8000 Sunset Blvd. (at Crescent Heights), West Hollywood, (323) 848-3500.

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