

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#)

**BADLAND** [Send This Review to a Friend](#)

[G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#)

[M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#)

[S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#)

[Y](#) [Z](#)

One of the most troubling emerging stories from the disastrous Iraq misadventure that goes beyond the casualty list of American servicemen killed is the enormous number of returning veterans physically or psychologically maimed. This background gives extra weight to the new film “Badland,” a strong, absorbing, impressive and involving work. Some of the story is excessively drawn out and over the top, but the impact is disturbingly there in this very timely drama written and directed by Francesco Lucente.

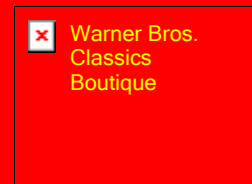
British actor Jamie Draven convincingly plays Jerry, who is a walking time bomb as a result of his Iraq experience. His life is a mess of disillusionment and he can't fit into the world to which he has returned. His wife Nora (Vinessa Shaw), fed up with him and the poverty in which they live with their three children in Montana, goads him into a state of angry resentment. One day early in the film, he explodes, killing Nora and two of their children, sparing only his young daughter Celina.

Jerry takes Celina on the lam with him to a new location with new identity. Grace Fulton is a marvel as Celina, who conveys the conflicting feelings of a youngster who loves her daddy yet has been thrust into this weird situation. She has to trust him even though she knows what happened is horrible. There is a bond between them in a no-win situation.

In his new environment, Jerry becomes friendly with Max, a local sheriff, played with depth and understating by Joe Morton, who has his own resentments about his past service. There is common interest between them, but given Max's lawman role, one knows the friendship will ultimately be tested. Jerry, getting a job in a coffee shop, becomes involved with the pretty owner Oli (Chandra West), who finds him appealing. We know that the relationship has to be doomed.

With Jerry a hunted man, the film has its melodramatic tension. Always close to the surface are the conditions that could drive a man to do something so horrendous, and one wonders at how many potentially dangerous veterans may be trying to keep the lid on their psychological problems.

I have a serious quarrel with the ending of the film concerning what I consider a gratuitous plot development that will leave a viewer upset, but in a way that detracts from the main thrust of what a viewer should be upset about. Without giving away the specifics, I can say that I felt manipulated unnecessarily in an occurrence that deviates from what the film is really expressing. Still, this unwise piling it on doesn't



take away from my admiration for the work as a whole.  
A Copex release.



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