

Cannes 2015: Sicario (Denis Villeneuve, 2015)



Denis Villeneuve is fast becoming one of the most exciting Hollywood/indie crossover directors in recent years. Following on from the success of the engrossing abduction drama *Prisoners* and the lesser success of his Jake Gyllenhaal doppelganger movie *Enemy*, he presents *Sicario* – a drug cartel movie that has a bite that's vicious, but struggles to veer from the cookie cutter mould.

After the uncovering of a murderous drugs cartel on the US/Mexican border, FBI kidnapping specialist Kate Macy is put on the job to bring it down with the assistance of a CIA team with ideas deeply engrained in violent ideals. As she enters the group, she soon has to decide between her professional ability, and her moral conscience.

Back in April, following the Cannes lineup reveal, Canada's Villeneuve spoke to *The Guardian*, calling *Sicario* a "dark, violent poem". For the most part, he's right. From the onset, limbs are detached from their respective bodies and there's very little sign of hope for anyone. The story looks into the life of a woman stuck in between her obligation to protect and her moral stance in a world of seemingly senseless killing. The result is something brooding and scintillating; a well performed drama with a nail-biting amount of tensity; especially in its first half.

Emily Blunt shines in her central role, undoubtedly some of her best work. She echoes a character similar to that of Jessica Chastain's part in the highly accoladed (and admittedly better) *Zero Dark Thirty*. She's a strong willed, fairly non-sexualised female protagonist in a film about all

things considered rather 'unladylike'. She's one of few actresses to make the transition from chick flicks and period dramas to something with grit between its teeth and do a good job of it. Although we always seem to forget her brave cinematic debut in *My Summer of Love*.

Benicio Del Toro and Josh Brolin too deliver some excellent performances here. Del Toro, in all of his great glory plays Alejandro – a brutal, bloodthirsty detective that fights back following his dangerous encounters with the drug cartel. Villeneuve has created complex, rewarding characters but sadly, placed them in a script that becomes a little lazy as it progresses.

There are moments of seriously great stuff. By that, we're referring to work that rivals the exceedingly stronger *Prisoners*. The two are obviously different films in terms of plot, but that signature Villeneuve tensivity fizzles out sooner than it really should. A mindbogglingly great opening scene soon gives way to a film that you would struggle to differentiate from the cartel-busting films that came before it. Rare moments of quality still do arise (it involves nightvision, gunfights and an underground tunnel), but they're quickly painted over with something a little bit more predictable.

Saying this, they're still is a lot to love about *Sicario*. It is dark and indeed, exceedingly violent – but something's telling me this isn't as poetic as Denis Villeneuve would like to believe.



Sicario has its world premiere at the 68th Festival de Cannes on May 19th 2015. It has its UK release on September 18th 2015.