

My Winter Boner for Winter's Bone—err, Never Mind

My First Blog Post

The first time I had ever heard of *Winter's Bone*, written and directed by Debra Granik, was in a T.G.I.Fridays, about half way into a three hour hang out session with my editor Spencer and fellow bloggers Jeff and Dan. I had made a comment about how I "would totally be interested in writing for your blog sometime Spencer", to which he responded by throwing the movie into my lap, telling me to review it, and then continuing to eat the ice cream nachos that we were sharing at the time. The only thing Spencer said about the film was it had a lot of "atmosphere" to it; my only warning about what was to come.

The movie has a relatively straight forward plot: set in the Ozark Mountains, it focuses on a seventeen year old girl named Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence) who is going about a normal day heading a household of her mind-addled mom and two younger siblings, when up pulls the sheriff with some bad news. Their father was just bailed out of prison, but put the house up for collateral. Faced with the prospect of losing their house, Ree must then track down her father, who has conveniently disappeared, to make sure he makes his court date.

What makes this movie excellent though is what Ree has to slog through to track down her delinquent parent. Her quest leads her through the poverty and squalor of her everyday life to the lowlife drug cooking locals who are all tremendously vicious, though tenuously related to each other and to Ree. As this story washed over me, I realized Spencer was absolutely right: this movie is all about the atmosphere. It was about the subtle nuances and hardships of everyday life for these people. It was about Lawrence's steely gaze that spoke volumes about what this girl had been through and what she still has to expect from the future. It was about how visceral this woefully underrepresented part of the country can be. The greatest triumph for this film was not how stunning its visuals were or how clever the dialogue was, but how real this slice of terrible terrible life is. Such a reality, of course, provides for some incredibly bleak scenes. The movie's two colors are grey and beige and Granik paints a beautifully sad picture with them.

But with this sadness, came brief moments of hope, which ultimately this movie is about. Not in the "we're gonna get out of this town someday!" kind of hope. It's more of a "we're gonna keep living no matter what tries to tear us apart!" kind of hope, which doesn't sound like much, but when it peaks out from where ever it got squashed into, it turns out to be the most touching, powerful and pure kind there is.

Once the film ended, my feelings, which had left the neutral area that they had started long ago, settled into the contemplation mode that any great movie leaves you with. I sat back and thought about the “atmosphere”, the bleakness, and the excellent performances and the prevailing thought at the front of my mind was, “This whole movie reviewing is going to be blast”. That and “I really want some more ice cream nachos”.