

No Man's Land

No Man's Land is a testy, gripping little chamber drama about the war in Bosnia, circa June 1993. Ciki (Branko Djuric), a big, raw-boned Bosnian militia man, gets separated from his unit and ends up in an abandoned trench where he eventually confronts a nerdish Serb soldier Nino (Rene Bitorajac). The two come to a stand-off while another Bosnian, Cera (Filip Sovagovic) first thought dead, lies wounded on a spring bomb, which, if he moves, will release a trigger which will blow them all up. The two enemies, at an impasse, are finally able to communicate with their respective sides, and a cease fire is arranged around the trench. First UN blue helmet forces, led by a harassed French soldier, Sergeant Marchand (Georges Siatidis), show up, followed by a British TV team, with anchor Jane Livingstone (Katrin Cartlidge), who gets wind of the incident on radio. Two antagonists in a trench quickly balloons into an international "human interest" story, and poor Ciki and Nino are its unwilling protagonists.

These are not professional warriors, after all, so what you really sense with Ciki and Nino is their black fear of combat, along with the visceral punch of their ethnic hatred, with hints that they are not, of course, all that different (they share gossip about a girl from a small town, for instance). The UN peacekeeping contingent, headed by a mildly irritated Colonel Soft (Simon Callow), offers some comic relief, while the Frenchman proves a decent fellow in a environment where decency has long fled. There is nothing in human affairs as bitter as civil war, and *No Man's Land* gives us an ample taste of its fruits. .

This is one of those "absurdity of war" stories, made the more plausible by a realistic recreation of a battle site (it was actually shot in Slovenia, one of the ex-Yugoslav republics) and the tense, fretful playing of the lead actors (themselves Slovenian or Croatian). Bosnian first-time director Danis Tanovic, who also wrote and music for *No Man's Land*, has been quoted as saying he does not want his film to accuse anyone or point fingers of blame; "the point" he said, "is to raise a voice against war." That he certainly does.

Need I say that there is no clever, tidy wrap-up to this ornery film, as any American combat flick would surely do? It is far too faithful to its purposes for that, and much the better for it.

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