

## Freedom's Path

"Freedom's Path" is a Civil War drama with a distinctive perspective. It focuses principally on a group of free, autonomous Black Americans living in the south on the fringes of the War.

It opens, however, telling the tale (with nods to Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage") of an unseasoned, white Union soldier, William (Gerran Howell). In his very first foray into battle. He is terrified and decides to flee, covering his cowardice by stabbing himself in the thigh with his bayonet and pretending he is dead among the casualties.

Now roaming out on his own, crushed and limping, he is discovered by a young, charismatic Black man, Kitch (RJ Cyler), who helps him find aid within a community of stable Black farmers. Rather than capture or kill William, Kitch brings him to a small ranch where Kitch's extended family accepts William and cares for his wounds.

The two young men, initially suspicious of each other, slowly bond over farm work, chores, fishing, chats on a porch, and dips in a lake. Living close to the Union border, Kitch and his family are already active in the Underground Railway, shepherding runaways across the border.

The young men's easy camaraderie eventually comes to include a gentle mockery of each other and a generally joshing around. But their almost idyllic life ends when the nearby war impinges directly on their community, and a gang of nasty slave hunters, led by the sadistic Wes (Ewen McGregor), discovers them occupying their refuge.

Then the film turns harsh, even vicious, as the slave hunters capture and torture Kitch while William, who has run away, looks back to see his friend being gruesomely beaten and almost lynched before he decides he must intervene at the cost of his own life.

The film's writer and director, Brett Smith, devoted 12 years of his life to making "Freedom's Path." telling the heretofore untold story of autonomous black Freedmen living in the deep-South during the Civil War. Smith realized early on, with his script in hand, that he would need "real money, a lot of money."

In a searching essay on the production, he wrote "How on earth would I get it without an MBA or robbing a bank? ...I decided I would follow my intuition and use the two key resources at my disposal...an iMac computer and my limitless passion to tell this story.

"The ultimate trick is to never stop putting one foot in front of the other, lean on those you love, and take a moment every now and then to stop and look out on the beautiful vistas that lay behind you....You will have far more setbacks than you had hoped along your journey, but take it from someone who is 12

years into their climb...every step is worth it.

A heartfelt dream finally makes it to the screen as a heartfelt story.

*(This film, now in select AMC and Regal theaters, runs 131 minutes and is not rated)*

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