

Infinite Storm

An experienced mountain rescuer, Pam Bales (Naomi Watts), undertakes a familiar route up Mt. Washington in the White Mountains of Vermont near her home but turns back before reaching the summit when a blizzard approaches. On her way back, however, she encounters footprints which lead to a man who is barely alive, dressed as if he were going to the beach.

Pam takes it upon herself to get them both down the mountain before nightfall arrives and they succumb to the 80-mile-per-hour winds of the storm. The man, who she comes to call “John” (English actor Billy Howle, last seen in “On Chesil Beach”) is uncommunicative and weak, but she urges and drags him along, provides food and extra clothing, and quietly assures him everything will be all right.

Since this is a drama, they first encounter a snow hole, which throws them down a crevasse festooned with tree branches (allowing them to climb their way out—barely). While trapped in the hole, Pam’s thoughts flash back to golden scenes with her two young daughters.

Then John gets his foot injured on a rock, but Pam is an expert nurse and is able to keep him afoot in a stumbling limp. He eventually gains some strength and finally speaks, but his view is sour and he muses on dying, an attitude which dogged Pam cannot accept. All this struggle occurs through very lifelike roaring wind and snow.

Against all odds, the two make it back to a parking lot, but before Pam can get John into her car, he hobbles to his own vehicle and drives off, she knows not where. Only later does she come to understand what brought him there.

Watts, a veteran of ninety films of every stripe, has done survivor stories before, most memorably in “The Impossible,” (2012) the story of a family’s struggle during and after a South Asian tsunami. In that film, she won an Oscar nomination for playing an indomitable mom trying to keep her family together after the disaster. Here she is even tougher in another film of cataclysm that gets the heart pulsing early and doesn’t let up.

“Infinite Storm” is based on the true story of veteran mountaineer/rescuer Pam Bale told in a 2016 magazine article, which screenwriter Joshua Rollins adapted for the screenplay. Principal photography by Michael Englert puts you right in the deadly eye of this winter storm. Its director is Malgorzata Szumowksa, one of Poland’s most prominent filmmakers, who decided to shoot mountain scenes in Slovenia during the COVID-19 outbreak. She specifically wanted the athletic Watts as her protagonist and got both her wish and a convincing thriller.

(The film, rated “R,” is 98 minutes of mostly snow-lashed storm).

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