

SUNDANCE REVIEWS

WRISTCUTTERS: A LOVE STORY

★★★1/2

Starring Patrick Fugit, Shannon Sossamon, Shea Whigham, Tom Waits, Leslie Bibb and John Hawkes. Directed and written by Goran Dukic. Produced by Chris Coen, Tatiana Kelly, Mikal P. Lazarev and Adam Sherman. No distributor set. Black comedy. Not yet rated. Running time: 91 min.

Killing oneself doesn't solve anything, literally, in the clever dark comedy "Wristcutters: A Love Story." Based on Etgar Keret's short novel "Kneller's Happy Campers," this existential tale about an afterworld exclusively for sui-



Patrick Fugit serves pizza in the afterlife in "Wristcutters."

cide victims and a handful of newcomers attempting to navigate the landscape pulsates originality through its uncanny way of incorporating the familiar into the offbeat.

In this mundane universe—emphasized by drab, dusty settings purposefully filmed to look washed out—an amiable young man named Zia ("Almost Famous" Patrick Fugit) finds things to be pretty much the same, only "a little worse," as he puts it, in his post-suicide life. Having passed into this existence after slashing his wrists because of a breakup with his girlfriend Desiree (Leslie Bibb), Zia now works at a pizza parlor and is doing his best to get along with his complete stranger of a roommate. He soon develops a friendship with an uninhibited Russian named Eugene (Shea Whigham), whose own arrival resulted from self-electrocution by way of electric guitar. When word reaches Zia that his beloved Desiree herself committed suicide shortly after his own demise, he and Eugene set out on a roadtrip to try to find her. Along the way, they pick up Mikal (Shannon Sossamon), a pretty and spirited hitchhiker attempting to make her way to the rumored "People In Charge" to plead the case that her drug-induced suicide was accidental.

Considering the moroseness of the topic at hand, it is with a deft touch that

director Goran Dukic fills his debut film with genuine humor and a tangible warmth that permeates the relationships of the trio of dead friends. These tonal staples remain constant throughout "Wristcutters," no matter how bizarre or nonsensical a direction the story takes, including a wonderfully plotted detour into an eccentric commune run by the indefatigable Kneller (Tom Waits in a memorable cameo). The absurdist narrative also does well in avoiding quirkiness for quirkiness' sake, instead using the peculiarities of the suicide-purgatory to demonstrate the actual surprising pleasures to be had in the unexpected.

The onscreen chemistry between Fugit and Sossamon, moreover, further fuels interest in the two leads—both of whom play their parts with a subtlety and surprising poignancy that resonates and sweetly underscores the "Love Story" in "Wristcutters."—*Francesca Dinglasan*

LA TRAGEDIA DE MACARIO

★★★1/2

Starring Rogelio Ramos, Milicent Figueroa and Tina Rodriguez. Directed and written by Pablo Veliz. Produced by Jeff Horny. No distributor set. Drama. Spanish-language; subtitled. Not yet rated. Running time: 71 min.

A promising if inconsistent debut from San Antonio-based writer/director Pablo Veliz, "La Tragedia de Macario" uses magical realist components (a ranchero music song cycle describing the action with literal explicitness; recurring visions of the Virgin Mary) to tell the story of Macario, an illegal immigrant who dies a horrifying death by suffocation in an unventilated boxcar when a human trafficking "coyote" fails to appear to let Macario and a dozen others out of the train.

A largely excellent cast seems at times a bit too young for its roles (this is particularly true of the lovely Tina Rodriguez as the Virgin Mary), and there are other signs of minimal budgeting and limited experience. But Veliz's eye for mundane detail and the importance of his theme transcend these limitations, and the central performances from Rogelio Ramos and Milicent Figueroa are graceful and assured. Inspired by a real incident in which 19 illegal immigrants died a similar death, "La Tragedia de Macario" takes one of the great issues of our time and makes it human in scale. The suffocation scene is surely one of the most terrifying sequences that will appear in any movie shown this year.—*Ray Greene*

RIGHT AT YOUR DOOR ★★★1/2

Starring Mary McCormack, Rory Cochrane, Tony Perez and Scotty Noyd Jr. Directed and written by Chris Gorak. Produced by Palmer West and Jonah Smith. A Lions Gate release. Thriller/Drama. Not yet rated. Running time: 96 min.

An auspicious beginning is lost to substandard disaster-film conventions in "Right At Your Door," a Los Angeles-set thriller that quickly loses its momentum in the close exploration of the relationship between the film's two leads. Though performances are credible and the special effects are admittedly cogent, especially in light of the indie feature's budgetary limitations, inconsistent pacing and dramatic detours tend to detract from the intimate story unfolding amongst the spectacular destruction.

Newlyweds Lexi (Mary McCormack) and Brad (Rory Cochrane) start off their day like any other, as the breadwinner wife heads off into the morning traffic to get to work and the musician husband stays at home to map out his errands for the afternoon. This ordinary routine is rudely disturbed by a series of panicked radio broadcasts conveying that a terrorist attack has been unleashed on the city, with dirty bombs simultaneously detonating at LAX, Beverly Hills and downtown Los Angeles, where Lexi works. Brad, who can see the devastation clearly from his hilltop home, tries to reach his wife on her cell phone. Between the harried radio reports and Lexi's unanswered calls, the plot successfully builds in tension and desperation.

That same tension, however, starts to fizz out as Lexi finds her way home. Pressured by the guidance of radio broadcasts and a neighboring handyman (Tony Perez), Brad has sealed the house to keep dusty fallout from penetrating the perimeter. After initial arguments from a frenzied Lexi, they decide that she should remain outside the house in case she has been contaminated. From here, the plot settles into their worried conversations through a makeshift plastic barrier about her health and the lack of outside help in the mass confusion.

Gorak's plausible script, convincingly supported by the economized shots showcasing L.A.'s burning skyline and the increasing amount of ash littering the external setting, becomes weakest at the very moment that the emotional intensity is meant to kick in. The couple's desperation and fear never quite produces the anxiety intended by the dramatic turns. A not-so-shocking surprise ending is unable to redeem "Right At Your Door's" promising premise.—*Francesca Dinglasan*