

‘Dark Waters’: a powerful indictment of a corporation

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 13 December 2019 08:13



Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 126 minutes

While a filmmaker’s imagination can spin fantastic, incredible and disturbing tales, you often find that even the most fervent creative mind can’t tell a more horrifying story than those that are ripped directly from the real world and newspaper headlines. Such is the case with *Dark Waters*, a biopic that tells the story of a corporate defense attorney who discovered a plot so heinous that even he had to confront the company responsible and seek some form of justice. It all results in a passionate, informative and compelling feature.

The story follows Robert Bilott (Mark Ruffalo), a new partner in a Cincinnati law firm whose grandmother asks him to assist a local farmer who believes his cattle are being poisoned by the DuPont chemical factory. After convincing supervisor Tom Terp (Tim Robbins) that he’ll look into the situation and quickly wrap things up, he begins seeing disturbing evidence lending credence to the local’s claims. The case ends up taking the protagonist’s complete attention, leading him down a rabbit hole that ultimately takes more than a decade to investigate. This causes friction not only at work, but also with his wife Sarah (Anne Hathaway). It also makes for some awkward maneuvering with old friend and DuPont executive, Phil Donnelly (Victor Garber).

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While a man doing years of research studying chemistry and tying together company paperwork dating back to the 1940s doesn't initially seem like exciting cinema, director Todd Haynes (*Far from Heaven*, *Carol*, *Wonderstruck*)

) takes the right approach with the material. The story is almost played like a mystery, with the protagonist slowly uncovering one secret after another as he attempts to discover what the compound named PFOA aka C8 is, and the relation it has to his case. More and more revelations are slowly unveiled that are nothing short of stunning.

The movie also benefits from a great cast. Ruffalo plays things in a low-key manner, with his fears and frustrations growing as the years pass and even begin taking a physical toll. It also details his own personal torment as others around him express their anger, either for actually taking on the job, or, for not moving quickly enough to reach a resolution. Of course, none of this is Bilott's fault, but the anguish certainly is visible on the character as time passes. It's an excellent performance, and the man's suffering and anger as DuPont fights back legally and tries to cover up its nefarious activities, is expertly handled and portrayed.

A very minor criticism can be made that as Bilott begins to learn what is really going on at DuPont, the character begins acting out around his home and taking precautionary steps that almost come across as unhinged. They may have actually happened, but given the character's measured and quiet personality, these brief moments may come across as slightly exaggerated, in an attempt to create more personal drama.

Although the news media reported on this story a few years back, the specific details are equally enlightening, shocking and enraging. If you're coming in cold and don't know much about this story, then you'll likely walk out furious at several corporate entities. Indeed, their actions were nothing short of horrendous and will affect human beings around the world for decades to come. *Dark Waters* does an excellent job of reminding the audience of these crimes and inspiring all to take a stand and fight back, no matter how arduous and long a battle is required. If you don't mind walking out of the theater wiser and perhaps angrier than when you walked in, then this is a potent and powerful movie worth watching.

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