

‘Sully’ is a nice tribute, but lacks drama

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 95 min.

The basis of drama in cinema is very simple: characters perform and enact highly tense and volatile situations for effect. The stories are often filled with various forms of conflict between the characters, building to a heightened climax. Of course, there are always exceptions to any rule, but generally speaking, the more opposition you can create, the better the results.

Sully is a biopic based on the admittedly flawless heroism of a man and his compatriots during a real-life crisis. It's efficiently made and a decent film, but it's also one that struggles to create a lot of drama.

The plot depicts the events of Jan. 15, 2009, when United Airways pilot Chesley 'Sully' Sullenberger (Tom Hanks) and co-pilot Jeff Skiles (Aaron Eckhart) lost both engines of their aircraft shortly after takeoff from New York's LaGuardia Airport. As everyone will remember, the two managed to pull off an incredible landing in the Hudson River, saving the lives of everyone onboard.

This biopic picks up after the events, as the two men prepare for a hearing that will detail exactly what happened during their unfortunate flight.

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And that's where a few problems arise as a narrative feature.

The end result is crystal clear from the outset; the movie has to work especially hard to create crisis. It does so using an investigation hearing, wedging in some material wherein Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board members question the pilot's decision to land in the Hudson instead of attempting to reach the runways of LaGuardia or Teterboro Airports.

As the story unfolds, we do get to see more of what actually occurred from the protagonist's perspective.

Director Clint Eastwood handles the airplane-based scenes quite well.

The images of a large passenger aircraft coming down in the highly populated areas of Manhattan are impressively rendered and at times chilling to watch. However, the three-minute flight and its aftermath are by far the movie's most compelling moments; even the storytellers seem to realize this... they return again and again to this flight. This includes recollections, nightmares, as well as simulations of the same event.

It's initially interesting, but it can't help but feel repetitive. In fact, it seems as if the film has a hard time stretching this material to 90 minutes.

There may have been more personal aspects that could have been elaborated on, but they're left unexamined. Sully's nightmares suggest some post-traumatic stress disorder, but are never elaborated on.

There's the suggestion of tension in the relationship between the pilot and his wife Lorraine (Laura Linney), but again, it doesn't lead anywhere.

There are also a couple of vignettes of a passenger or two, as well as the flight crew, but they're

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too brief and straightforward to lend more depth to the proceedings.

As expected, Hanks does a solid job in the role of a relatable everyman. But as mentioned, this isn't a deep examination of the personal ramifications of such an event, and he isn't given much more than the basics to work with.

The pilot pretty much does everything perfectly and holds his character with grace and poise throughout the entire process. At least the performance gives viewers an inspiring and strong role model of how to handle pressure and anxiety.

To be fair, *Sully* is a decent film. It's a nice tribute to the pilot, crew, and passengers of the United Airways flight, as well as to New York City emergency service workers and first responders. Under stress, these people made all the right decisions and did all the right things, leading to an incredible and miraculous feat. As an ode to these people and their grace under pressure, the movie works just fine.

But dramatic narrative films primarily revolve around conflict; beyond the event itself, this feature doesn't end up developing a whole lot of tension.

***By Glenn Kay
For the Sun***