

Review of *Foxtrot*, 2019.



A common Jewish saying is to wish someone life until 120. So, when people fall short of this metric it can be quite disappointing.

Foxtrot follows the Feldmanns, an Israeli family, amidst tragedy. Parents Michael and Dafna learn their oldest child Jonathon, a soldier for the Israeli Defense Force, has been killed while guarding an outpost. Except he hasn't been "killed", rather "fallen in the line of duty", which the army insists is the proper vocabulary required for an Israeli soldier.

The film excels in examining the blowback of death, the pendulum swings between emotion and rationalisation it causes. Characters lose themselves in despondence and drag the audience down with them. The action in each shot plays out slowly, for maximum effect. Emotion is evoked by leaving the camera on characters for as long as possible. There is more opportunity for empathy when observing someone on the toilet than there is in dialogue.

Like a boxer, *Foxtrot* throws both jabs and hooks, left and right, constantly. Unexpected hits come from unexpected directions. When the film seems to be coming to terms with its narrative, settling down in a comfortable manner, a surprise punch connects to your abdominals. Moments of despair are extracted from their vacuum and turned comedic, while moments of calm are torn to pieces without warning. Letting your guard down when watching can be dangerous, just as it proves to be for the characters.

Foxtrot allows grief to become empowering, a moment of clarity that allows characters an opportunity to look back on paths they have taken. The story is told with patience, with each event gnawing away to reveal further emotional pains. This works conceptually but also causes problems narrative-wise. The film's world, which is painted as vast and independent, at times reveals itself to exist only as an excuse for character study, deflating the balloon of a film that had begun to swell. Questions about society and ethics might be asked, but only for the sake of the characters' growth.

Despite its setting in Israel, a country of constant mourning, where every street is named after a fallen hero or war tragedy, the film's characters are as unprepared for death as anyone else. The politics of Israel is not told through a single perspective or with a goal in mind, but instead acts as a backdrop of suffering in which the film can take place. The country's ever-lasting conflict full of untold horrors mirrors the emotional damage characters have hidden from themselves and their loved ones.

Stories about mourning have been told since the dawn of time, but this film manages to contribute something else to the discussion. We see tragedy easily tear apart a web of pre-existing anxieties, leaving the characters naked to face their judgement. *Foxtrot* shows how grief can mean something more than just pain, a sobering emotion that forces people to acknowledge those they love and reconcile the nature of their relationships.