

Movie Draft: *The New Land*

by Joe Mulder

(*The New Land* is one of five made-up films generated during PoopReading.com's recent [Movie Draft](#).)

In a perfect world, one would feel secure in the assumption that the American public would reject trash like *The New Land* out of hand. In an era that can make "2 Broke Girls" a TV hit, however, all bets are apparently, and tragically, off.

The premise of *The New Land* is as simple as it is nonsensical: four people fall off a cruise ship into a lifeboat, drift for days, and are convinced once they wash up on a small deserted island that they've hit the American mainland... in the early 1600s, just prior to the arrival of the Mayflower.

The four people in question are Evan (Gary Oldman), a recently retired teacher; his niece Nikki (Rooney Mara), a recently graduated high school student; chef Alain (Jean Dujardin), who works on the cruise ship; and CEO Coretta Parks (Octavia Spencer), a recent divorcee.

When Alain and Coretta, fleeing cruise ship security and an angry ex-husband, respectively, knock Evan and Nikki overboard and the entire quartet winds up adrift in a lifeboat, one would be forgiven for assuming that something resembling hilarity would ensue. What comes next, however, is an offensive, slapdash attempt to mine humor out of topics as diverse and unfunny as slavery, domestic abuse, anorexia, colonialism, and taxidermy (don't ask). It would be presumptuous to claim that such topics are "off limits" for comedy, and perhaps a more capable, creative team of filmmakers could find a way to joke about them successfully. *The New Land*, however, seems to take an almost perverse pride in refusing to satirize, lampoon or parody; all of its ugly, racist, misogynistic, bullying humor seems to be played relatively straight.

The plot doesn't so much thicken as congeal, and we find that Evan believes it is his responsibility to faithfully recreate American history, warts and all, to avoid tearing a rift in the space-time continuum. What might have been a funny premise – a delirious, shipwrecked cast hastily rushing through half-remembered bits of Americana – is undone by the serious and lugubrious manner in which Evan makes his fellow castaways participate in his delusion (the movie grinds to a halt during a particularly galling 25-minute reenactment of a Salem witch trial). By the time Alain sets up an "underground railroad" to free Coretta, whom Evan has insisted become his slave, you're just about ready for the Pearl Harbor sequence; maybe a few Japanese Zeroes can put a blessed end to all this nonsense. (too soon?)

The cast, generally excellent performers all, doesn't help matters much. Gary Oldman, mesmerizing when he's utilized properly, seems to realize that he's adrift in a creative

wasteland for much of the movie and appears to have been thinking "maybe it will help if I scream all of my lines like a late-1980s Bobcat Goldthwait." Rooney Mara all but sleepwalks through the film with the enthusiasm of somebody who signed on to do this movie just before her career really started to take off, and couldn't get out of the commitment once it did. Octavia Spencer plays her role as though she's ashamed to be in the movie, which is probably her not-so-subtle way of informing us that she is. As for newly minted Oscar winner Jean Dujardin, his American movie career is likely over as soon as it began. One can't help but be reminded of Roberto Benigni, who won a Best Actor trophy and quickly became something of a Hollywood punchline. I'd say that the same fate awaits Dujardin, except that punchlines are sometimes funny.

The New Land is sure to be a major blemish in the career of anyone associated with it, and it's two hours of your life you'll never hope to get back. Other than that, it's fine.

The New Land is rated PG-13 largely due to a surprisingly tastefully handled Thomas Jefferson-Sally Hemings inspired sex scene.
