



'Not Forgotten'

By Kirk Honeycutt

“**N**ot Forgotten” reminds you of a paperback you pick up at the airport just before a long flight where the cover art promises a pulp-ish combination of suspense, murder and some nonsense about devilry and a Mexican red light district. But the story turns out to be so engrossing you wish the fight were longer. The cast sparkles, especially Simon Baker, a sturdy leading-man type, who is primed to break through any day now, and Paz Vega, already a star in Latin market.

The film, which screened at AFM, has commercial appeal, but will need savvy marketing to reach an audience that appreciates suspense and mystery as opposed to sensational thrills that arrive like clockwork.

The film is by Dror Soref, who

has primarily worked on music videos and commercials. The screenplay he co-wrote with Tomas Romero starts off as a somewhat conventional missing person/kidnap melodrama yet contains hints of a turn into revenge and the involvement of a weirdo religion. That turn is sharply made but still catches you by surprise. Like David Cronenberg’s “A History of Violence,” everything hangs on a seemingly everyday Joe who has a murky past.

Baker plays this “soccer dad,” a hardworking bank employee who coaches his daughter’s (Chloe Moretz) soccer team and has recovered from his first wife’s cancer death to enjoy a happy second marriage to a Mexican-American (Vega) in a New Mexico border town.

Then his daughter goes missing and his world collapses. First the local sheriff (Michael DeLorenzo), his wife’s cousin,

gets the call. Then two FBI agents (Mark Rolston, Gedde Watanabe) take over. A promising lead involving a child molester fizzles out, but a soccer match video turns up, which points to a mysterious man with a lengthy criminal record in Mexico. The dad and sheriff cross the border to follow this lead.

By now though, you no longer trust the protagonist. He suddenly starts to speak Spanish — a language he supposedly doesn’t know. He makes pay phone calls to a gamy brothel in Mexico City. A whore across the border recognizes him. Most mysterious of all, he relapses into his former religion of Santa Muerte, a death-worshipping cult long venerated by, among others, drug dealers and prostitutes. Thus, the stage is ready for double-crosses, vengeance and revelations about not just the dad’s past life but others as well.

The film also gets away with what at first seems like a weird device where the story is occasionally narrated by the missing daughter in a voice-over. This sets up a final twist that not only

sends your mind racing back over everything that has happened but everything that can potentially happen in the future.

“Not Forgotten” is a neatly packaged suspense drama that takes full advantage of atmospheric cinematography by Steven Bernstein, a Latin-infused score by Mark Isham and Cynthia O’Connor and strange flashbacks from the past woven well into the modern-day crisis by editor Martin Hunter.

Oh, by the way, nothing involving Santa Muerte or Holy Death is made up. It’s very much a cult that flourishes to this day.

BOTTOM LINE

A fine suspense drama built around a cult religion and several characters’ guilty pasts

PRODUCTION COMPANIES: Skyline Pictures/Zuckerman Entertainment/Myriad Pictures in association with Blue Rider Finance **CAST:** Simon Baker, Paz Vega, Michael DeLorenzo, Chloe Moretz, Ken Davitian, Claire Forlani. **DIRECTOR:** Dror Soref. **SCREENWRITERS:** Tomas Romano, Dror Soref. **PRODUCERS:** Donald Zuckerman, Dror Soref. No rating, 93 minutes.