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Cleveland International Film Festival  
*First Snow* Review

Australian actor Guy Pearce returns to Southwestern motel room hopping in *First Snow*. The result isn't quite as thrilling or original as *Memento*. Jimmy Starks (Pearce) is a traveling salesman hoping to make it big distributing vintage jukeboxes. All is going well for this cocky, smooth-talking peddler until he visits a trailer-based psychic (J.K. Simmons). This disturbing encounter predicts Starks will not survive the first snow of the season. Jimmy initially dismisses the prophecy as simply part of the fortune-teller's hustle. But when he is diagnosed with a heart condition and the weather becomes chilly, his whole life is turned upside down. He then plays it cautiously and decides to put his affairs in order. He pays more attention to his girlfriend, played by Piper Perabo. He seeks to mend his relationship with an estranged old friend (Shea Whigham), recently released from prison, whom he had betrayed. Jimmy's battle with his supposed fate tosses him deeper and deeper into paranoia. Does he control his future, or does his future control him?

*First Snow* is screenwriter Mark Fergus's (*Children of Men*) directorial debut. This stylistic indie film is by no means fast-paced and heart-pounding like *Memento*. Fergus is more subtle in his approach. His freshman effort is a slow-burning psychological suspense piece. Guy Pearce seems to have found his niche playing these average Joe's thrown into extraordinary, paranoia-inducing circumstances. He, as always, does a splendid job. The primary subject of the camera, he is frequently alone and in silence. Pearce's facial expressions and body language portray a once confident big shot now falling apart. He excellently submerges himself into the fearful obsession of his character. Piper Perabo, as Pearce's onscreen girlfriend, takes what could have been a worthless role and gives it depth. Come to think of it, the entire cast does that. The film has no co-stars, just supporting roles. William Fichtner of *Invasion* fame (though "fame" might not be exactly the right word) is dead-on as Jimmy Starks's lighthearted, fun-loving best friend and coworker. Rick Gonzalez is equally superb as a young protégé in the sales market who feels betrayed by Jimmy. The film does well as a character study with its strong acting, New Mexico landscapes, and rich, inventive interior sets.

Though gripping, *First Snow* does have its faults. The story and its elements never completely gel. The subplot with Jimmy's fresh-out-of-jail old friend seems to come out of nowhere. Its connection to the psychic encounter is never established. The film's root problem is its writing. Written by the same duo that helped pen *Children of Men* (Mark Fergus & Hawk Ostby), it shares the same shortcomings. Both films have intriguing premises and engaging plots, but the scripts just don't come together onscreen and leave something to be desired. All in all, *First Snow* is worth checking out if you're looking for an offbeat noir film.

Rated R for language, some violence and sexuality.

**Runtime:**

101 min