

*I Care A Lot* Review : The Pursuit of Power and the What It Takes to Achieve the American Dream  
Hayley Croke

In the pursuit of the American Dream, the world becomes black and white. There are those who are willing to work to achieve their goals and those who settle for the life they have. Those who lead and those who follow. Those who are a lion and those who are a lamb. Or in the case of Marla Grayson, those who are a lioness.

J Blakeson centers “I Care a Lot”, his nouveau gangster-crime movie satirizing the American Health System, around a female lead that feels so criminal, you might mistake her for a Martin Scorsese character.

Marla Grayson is a wildly successful legal guardian who has turned her position of a caretaker into a thriving business. Marla has created her empire through a carefully crafted team of doctors, assisted living home directors, and judges which have all built her a reputable brand. She thinks she’s lucked out when new ward Jennifer Peterson (Dianne Wiest) is ushered into her care with no family on record to fight the legal guardianship. It’s soon revealed that Peterson has ties to the Russian Mafia and Marla’s life begins to descend into madness.

J Blakeson wastes no time and employs no nuance in his introduction of Marla. The film initially presents Marla in her domain, the courtroom. She fights off a concerned son and defends the merits of her guardianship. She pushes hair from her precisely cut bob behind her ear, she fixes the positioning of her belongings on the table in front of her, she patiently waits to speak, and she wears a bright red, wrinkleless dress. She speaks with eloquence, reason and has ample evidence to prove her capabilities. The audience knows she will not lose.

“I Care a Lot” puts a unique spin on the gangster crime genre. A major difference from its predecessors like “The Wolf of Wallstreet,” “Goodfellas,” and “Casino” being the antihero’s work is legitimate. As writer/director Blakeson puts it, Marla is a [“legal gangster”](#).

The legality of her work serves as the primary point of satire for the film. The disdain, and at times hatred, traditionally felt towards the protagonist of these gangster films is soothed by the idea that this type of behavior exists in a place far, far away or isn’t a legitimate concern in the realm of most audience members. Anti-heros of these films often get far but the threat of the law is constantly in the protagonist’s rear-view mirror, waiting for an inevitable slip up.

“I Care a Lot” is not based on an insane, yet real story but rather created based on events that have the potential to happen to normal, everyday people. There’s no drug smuggling or fixing fights or insider trading. The embellished medical reports are troubling, but loopholes don’t always equate to hard jail time, so unfortunately the film lacks an explanation on how to create a traditional Italian Sunday dinner within the confines of a prison kitchen.

Marla’s ruthless pursuit of wealth is matched with a precision and care most protagonists in this genre lose sight of. Character’s like Jordan Belford work to gain their “wolf” status, only to throw

their money towards feeding their drug, sex, and alcohol addictions. Marla's only vice is the desire for more power. She exudes greed and has an insatiable appetite for wealth at the expense of her wards. Every time she is offered an opportunity out of her troubles with the Russian Mafia, she declines because she knows she can get more than she's being offered. Marla says that she's been threatened thousands of times throughout her career, but not even the threat of death will deter her from taking what she feels she deserves.

Blakeson's venture into the gangster genre does not come without faults. His filmography is a bit all over the place and his voice as a director is far less established than those who are considered titans of this genre. While he creates an inciting characters and an unpredictable plot, he lacks the ability to bring the audience from point A to point B in a sophisticated way.

It seems as if the main focus of the film for Blakeson was developing Pike's character and giving her ample material to do what she does best. Pike's performance is reminiscent of her portrayal of Amy Dunne in David Fincher's 2014 "Gone Girl." The film's "cool girl" monologue has recently been echoing throughout the internet, spreading its take on modern femininity. The infamous monologue discusses how internalized misogyny has framed the way women act in society to appear more appealing to men. Pike's performance stood as the prototype of how female rage should be portrayed in modern films. Finally, a female villain who could stack up against her male peers and be empowered by her femininity; not debilitated by it.

Pike's depiction of Marla does the same. She is not held back by her [femininity](#) and is not fearful of the men who challenge her as well. She has a strong belief that she has the potential to achieve the ever illusive "American Dream", and won't let anyone stand in her way.