

A Tale of Two Theaters

It's not by chance that this weekend, while kazillions of Americans pack theaters to watch what is arguably the year's most anticipated movie, *The Hunger Games*, a Gideon-sized army (by comparison) will opt for a far lesser-known title that centers on the same theme: the fight for life.

October Baby, a small-budget film about an "abortion survivor's" journey to self-discover, can't compete with *The Hunger Games*' production costs, marketing dollars, merchandising revenue, book sales, media fixation or even adolescent obsession. It does, however, represent the profound crossroads our culture stands at concerning something as simple as life—and more specifically, how we define it, protect it and further it.

For those who've been living in a cave for the past few months, *The Hunger Games* depicts a government-run reality TV show that pits 24 teens against each other in a fight-to-the-death competition. Though the big-screen adaptation commendably stays away from glorifying an inherently violent storyline, its fundamental premise—kids trained in a bloodthirsty culture to delight in killing their peers—is nonetheless disturbing. Make no mistake: This box-office goliath isn't afraid to expose—or at least question through sci-fi allegory—the point at which a culture's moral decline of treating violence as entertainment corrupts the very heart of what it means to be human. And ultimately, the movie's heroine, a 16-year-old rebel named Katniss, represents the hope that we can somehow stop our own moral decay.

It's telling, then, that while countless movie critics and moviegoers will be challenged by *The Hunger Games*' fantasy-world depiction of barbarity, most will never stop to consider how another all-too-real practice of inhumanity has made its way into our moral fabric. Call it anti-abortion, pro-life,

life-affirming ... whatever you want to say about *October Baby*, it's clearly a case-in-point tale of how we can justify evil at any self-gaining cost.

Hannah (Rachel Hendrix), the central character of *October Baby*, is the living fruit of this justification. At 19, she discovers her lifelong medical and emotional issues are linked to what the doctor describes as a traumatic birth experience. Yet the more shocking revelation—which her parents have kept hidden—is that she was adopted after a failed abortion attempt. Determined to “find out who I really am,” Hannah embarks on a road trip to uncover her roots and make sense of the life she now believes has been a complete lie.

Her journey is at times poignant and at other times raw—both apt descriptions of this feature-film debut from co-director brothers Jon and Andrew Erwin. Though the movie has garnered awards and (not surprisingly) praise from many pro-life leaders, its flaws are most obvious in pacing, forced dialogue and one-dimensional characters. Whether this is a result of being heavily influenced by fellow Christian filmmaking brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick, whose movies (*Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, *Courageous*) have at times had the same struggles, it doesn't overshadow *October Baby*'s key messages of forgiveness and redemption found in Christ and, of course, the value of a single life. It's through these elements, the film clearly relays, that we find the beauty of life.

“To be human is to be beautifully flawed,” a policeman tells Hannah in one scene. And as the credits roll, a similar sentiment echoes through a Chris Sligh chorus: “The world is broken in too many pieces / But the brokenness is beautiful, it's beautiful.”

Indeed, it's amazing that God finds beauty in us, just as it's unexpected to find such beauty in a true story essentially built around the blood-filled, brutal act of murdering a baby. Like Hannah, that beauty is most often discovered after

intentionally searching—and even then, it emerges where we least expected it. But on a weekend when countless Americans will be immersed in a brutal fantasy world, the tragedy isn't just that most will miss an opportunity to experience such redemptive beauty through a parallel story; it's that the fantasy barbarity they're watching is actually a reality today—yet another broken element in need of God's beautiful redemption.

Marcus Yoars *is the editor of Charisma. You can connect with him on Twiter @marcusyoars or . Visit his blog, "Yoars Truly," at .*