




# 'Blood Stripe': LAFF Review

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Courtesy of LA Film Festival

## THE BOTTOM LINE

*A worthwhile alternative to the usual macho posturing.* 



Kate Nowlin plays an emotionally wounded combat veteran attempting to readjust to civilian life in Remy Auberjonois' directorial debut.

Prolific actor Remy Auberjonois takes a turn in the director's chair for *Blood Stripe*, a tense drama dealing with an American veteran's struggles with the crippling effects of PTSD. After a slew of features and documentaries from the frontlines of the nation's seemingly interminable wars, Auberjonois' film brings it all back home, ably demonstrating the difficulties that returning soldiers often face in attempting to reintegrate with society. Winner of the US Fiction Award at the recent Los Angeles Film Festival, *Blood Stripe* is centered on an outstanding performance by Kate Nowlin (who co-wrote the script along with husband and collaborator Auberjonois) and could easily attract attention from streamers and broadcasters looking to diversify their programming.

Apparently to emphasize the universality of the narrative, the script coyly refers to Nowlin's character not by name but by rank, as "Sarge" returns to a weary welcome from her husband Rusty (Chris Sullivan) at home in suburban Minnesota following three tours of duty in Afghanistan with the US Marines. Once the faint glow of marital reunion wears off, it becomes clear that Sarge isn't so comfortable with her return. Insomnia, heavy drinking, punishing exercise and flashes of violent temper all signal that she's still suffering from battle fatigue, but won't seek help from the VA, recognizing that she would face a significant wait for treatment.

So she takes the path of least resistance, fleeing north toward the Canadian border, guided primarily by sense memory to lakeside Camp Vermillion, where she used to vacation as a child. Rather than happy family memories, she discovers Dot (Rusty Schwimmer) the caretaker and her husband, who are in the

series of caretaking chores.

Manual labor becomes a kind of therapy for Sarge and slowly she starts to come around to a more balanced temperament, although the hard drinking and punishingly intense workouts continue. The solitude and dark, quiet nights also start to bring back her combat paranoia and soon she's starting to suspect that she may have been targeted by a couple of rough-looking local hunters. Once Sarge finally decides that it may be time to go back home to Rusty, it may already be too late to preserve her sanity, or her safety.

Thematically, Auberjonois and Nowlin are clearly of two minds that don't necessarily meet as the narrative unfolds. While the film concentrates primarily on the drama inherent in Sarge's fundamental conflict with those who are closest to her and the battle to tame her own demons, the screenwriters can't resist introducing a thriller subplot that develops with the emergence of her PTSD symptoms. Favoring enigmatic plotting and a heightened visual style, these sequences repeatedly serve to misdirect the audience, but deliver inconclusive and less than satisfying results.

Nowlin's performance, however, is a marvel of inner turmoil and physical exertion, as Sarge struggles to contain her destructive impulses or channel them into more productive pursuits. Midwesterner Schwimmer strikes a sympathetic chord as the camp manager and Rene Auberjonois (Remy's father) plays a folksy preacher with a slight edge of menace, but Tom Lipinski as his protege and potential love interest for Sarge remains fairly underutilized.

The film's title refers to a red seam appearing on the trousers of Marines' blue dress uniforms.

*Production company: Tandem Pictures*

*Cast: Kate Nowlin, Rene Auberjonois, Tom Lipinski, Rusty Schwimmer, Chris Sullivan, Ken Marks*

*Director: Remy Auberjonois*

*Screenwriters: Kate Nowlin, Remy Auberjonois*

*Producer: Schuyler Weiss, Julie Christeas, Remy Auberjonois, Kate Nowlin*

*Executive producer: G. Mac Brown*



*Production designer: Cassia Maher*

*Costume designer: Camille Benda*

*Editor: Jeremy L. Kotin*

*Casting directors: Kerry Barden, Paul Schnee*

*Venue: Los Angeles Film Festival (US Fiction Competition)*

*Not rated, 87 minutes*

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