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Losing Ground

By Jay Carr

★★★ "Losing Ground" unfolds in real time in a deliberately claustrophobic black hole of a setting -- a seedy Vegas gambling bar where daylight rushes in like an invading army every time the door is buzzed open.

You think you already know its handful of losers in a place where time and life itself seems to have stopped. And maybe you do. But they get to you anyway in their unitalicized, cumulative way. Both mood piece and ensemble piece, the film is a sad exhalation of life -- or what passes for it -- among the rudderless.

Wisely, the film never tries to impose dramatic highlighting on characters whose lives are ebbing away by slow, corrosive degrees in measured, note-perfect performances. The biggest winners among the sadomasochistic losers, unable to enjoy the infrequent wins that only feed their need to keep losing, are Eileen O'Connell's Michelle, whose looks are about to vanish because of her addictions, and Kendall Pigg's bartender and ringmaster, whose own rage and wounds are never quite concealed by his professional veneer.

Losing Ground. Written and directed by Bryan Wizemann. Starring Eileen O'Connell, Kendall Pigg, Matthew Mark Meyer, Monique Vukovic, Rhonda Keyser, John Good

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