

Comatose Russian refugee children. Sweden hasn't been this scary since Midsommar.

From the outset, *Quiet Life* announces itself as part of the lineage of contemporary Greek cinema that has come to be known as the "Weird Wave", a movement defined by its emotional austerity, deadpan performances, and unnerving visual precision. Alexandros Avranas fits comfortably alongside filmmakers like Yorgos Lanthimos and Athina Rachel Tsangari, who have used clinical aesthetics and rigid formalism to probe the darker corners of modern society. In *Quiet Life*, however, this stylisation works against the film's urgent subject matter. It's only in the final title card that the viewer learns Resignation Syndrome is a real, documented phenomenon among refugee children from Eastern Europe in Sweden. A fact that retroactively reframes what felt, until then, like a cold dystopian fantasy. Of course, there's not much place for naturalism in an absurd film and one has to admire the bold choice to tell a true story in this style.

The story follows a Russian family seeking asylum in Sweden: Sergei, Natalia, and their two daughters. They were unsafe in Russia after Sergei got violently attacked for giving his students books that are banned in the country. But the Swedish authorities have no proof of the attack, hence denying their application. Their youngest daughter Katja is the only one who can save their application because she was the sole witness to the attack but she falls into a coma. So, then they teach the same story to the other daughter Alina, but the Swedes see right through that. And then Alina falls into a coma as well.

Avranas is clearly aiming for a slow-burn critique of institutional apathy. The Swedish officials are portrayed with an almost cartoonish detachment: polite, smiling, and horrifyingly indifferent. They're not characters so much as clinical props, as if Sweden itself were the villain in a sci-fi parable. It's an amusing choice, but it never loses track of the serious tone and the gravity of the subject. However when everything feels so exaggerated and drained of texture, it's hard to believe in the stakes, let alone feel them. Even though the stakes are incredibly high since they might get deported and potentially killed in Russia.

Visually, the film maintains Avranas' signature coldness as explored in his 2013 child suicide drama *Miss Violence* and his 2016 detective film *Dark Crimes* with Jim Carrey. The interiors of hospitals, government offices and even the family's apartment, are sterile to the point of surrealism. The muted color palette, dominated by greys and pale blues, makes everything look drained of life, which is fitting thematically and emotionally numbing. The camera rarely moves. Time stretches out. Tension doesn't build, it just idles. A horrifying portrayal of bureaucracy that Beckett would be proud of.

But the main issue lies in the film's approach to characterization. Avranas does remarkably little to flesh out Sergei and Natalia beyond their pain. They are not allowed to be fully human. The performances are quiet, controlled, and intentionally flat. This may be a deliberate humanist gesture, suggesting we should empathize with them regardless of the lack of charisma or relatability. But in practice, it doesn't work. For most viewers, it's difficult to care deeply about characters who are rendered as symbols rather than people. But Naomi Lamp as Alina manages to break through the fog. As the older daughter, she conveys the unspoken pressure of having to hold everything together. She is the lone emotional anchor in a film otherwise adrift in its own stylistic rigor.

Quiet Life keeps everything at a safe, sanitized distance. The result is a film about numbing that ends up numbing us, too. We become part of the bureaucracy as a viewer. But there's an incredibly loud roar hidden behind the screen, whether you are able to hear it or not.