

## Tribeca Review: Meskada

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There are plenty of low-budget American indie [films](#) that make the most of their limited resources and budget, cleverly executing realism and original plots with cheap cameras and less-than-stellar [actors](#). But somehow none of these ever seem to wind up at the Tribeca Film Festival, which each year offers half a dozen indies-- almost always American-- that match their pitiful production values with a screeching earnestness that just makes you feel bad for your inevitable scathing review.



This year's MVP of that weird little subgenre is *Meskada*, a small-town crime movie clearly inspired by the work of the Coens and other noir masters, but not remotely equal to any of them. Taking place in a blank kind of American Anywhere, between two nearby towns rife with class tensions, *Meskada* has a few good ideas marred by any number of mistakes, from casting to production design to the strained performances boasted by nearly the entire cast. It wouldn't be fair to pick on a film this small and this obviously destined for a limited release if any, but with names like [Kellan Lutz](#), Rachel Nichols, and Meryl Streep's daughter Grace Gummer in the lineup, it will be getting attention-- and you deserve to be warned.

Another relatively boldface name, Nick Stahl, actually turns in one of the stronger performances as Noah Cordin, a small-town sheriff charged with investigating the clearly accidental murder of an 8-year-old boy, son of local wealthy and influential woman [Allison](#) Connor (Laura Benanti). Noah is teamed up with implausibly hot fellow cop Leslie Spencer (Rachel Nichols) in his investigation, and based on what's basically a stroke of dumb luck, he winds up questioning the roughnecks in his hometown of Caswell, significantly poorer than his new home of Hilliard and more than little resentful of that fact. Noah's actually on the right track-- the two killers, played by Kellan Lutz and Jonathan Tucker, really are in Caswell, but he and Leslie still spend nearly the entire film on the wrong track, harshly questioning everyone from an innocent brother-in-law of the killers (nicely played by Norman Reedus) to the local flirty barmaid (Gummer).

The murder investigation, for some reason not well explained, comes to jeopardize a new manufacturing plant that would bring much-needed jobs to Caswell, which means that the climax of the movie doesn't happen with guns or in darkened alleys, but in city council meetings, where Caswell and Hilliard citizens duke it out with fiery speeches. Neither writer-director Josh Sternfeld's script nor his skills of directing actors are quite equal to the courtroom [drama](#) his crime movie mysteriously turns into.

Packed with any number of weird mistakes, from bad sound mixing to odd edits in the middle of a character's movement, *Meskada* feels like a [student film](#) that somehow snagged a high-profile cast and didn't really know what to do with them once it had them. The crime drama is a stalwart genre that succeeds often, but *Meskada* is proof that it's not always an easy one to pull off.

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