

Film Notes: Season 2025–26

8th January 2026

Dead of Winter

Cert 15 | 1h 38m

Country: US/Germany, 2025

Director: Brian Kirk

Stars: Emma Thompson, Judy Greer, Marc Menchaca, Laurel Marsden

Language: English



Synopsis

Dead of Winter follows Barb (Thompson), a solitary Minnesotan fisherwoman grieving a recent loss. While travelling through a remote, snow-choked region, she stumbles upon a kidnapped young woman being held in a secluded cabin by an unstable couple (Greer and Menchaca). With no phone signal, lethal weather conditions, and miles of wilderness between her and help, Barb becomes the girl's only chance of survival. Barb's grief and compassion drive her into a dangerous rescue attempt.

Context and Craft

A snowbound kidnapping thriller with echoes of *Fargo* and "ordinary person becomes action hero" narratives. Critics note the film's generic thriller framework but highlight how Thompson's casting subverts expectations and how Kirk's unobstructive direction emphasises claustrophobia, harsh natural conditions, and escalating peril. Thompson's portrayal has been widely praised for its grounded toughness and emotional depth. Adopting a faultless Minnesota accent, Thompson plays Barb as "tough but tender," driven by compassion rather than action-hero bravado. Judy Greer's performance as the antagonist is snarling and darkly humorous, adding unpredictability to the film's tone, while the raging blizzard and remote setting serve as additional antagonists.

Critical Reception

- "A refreshing little thriller...Judy Greer's 'fentanyl lollipop-sucking' villainy is a standout element." — *Independent*
- "Technically polished but increasingly improbable... an icy, generic thriller elevated by Thompson's palpable aura of capability and down-to-earth shrewdness." — *Variety*
- "Deeply moving and tense kidnapping drama." — *Saga Magazine*
- "Both Thompson and Greer for playing 'against type... an exhilarating wilderness thriller.'" — *Collider*

Conclusion

Dead of Winter stands on its performances, especially Emma Thompson's unexpected and compelling turn as a reluctant action heroine. The film uses its wintry setting to create tension and atmosphere, while weaving in themes of grief, compassion, and moral courage. It is widely regarded as a gripping, emotionally resonant thriller elevated by its cast and strong sense of place. Barb's emotional wounds shape her choices and give the thriller a sentimental undercurrent, and the film asks what an ordinary person owes a stranger in danger.