


'The Fallout:' A piercing look at a teen's turmoil after a school shootout



CHENNAI: While children continue to die in shootouts at schools which parents think are the safest places for them to be, politicians and arms manufacturers unashamedly go about pushing the sale of guns, oblivious to how this impacts the community.

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A host of films have fictionalized such tragedies. The best examples are “Elephant,” “We Need to Talk About Kevin” and “And Then I Go,” but while these have examined the psyche and background of killers, and what led them to go on a murdering spree, US actress, Megan Park, has stepped behind the camera to present the emotionally draining “The Fallout,” now on HBO and Amazon Prime. It probes the aftermath of a school shootout through the eyes of a 16-year-old girl, Vada Cavell (Jenna Ortega).

A stellar directorial debut, narrated with honesty and simplicity but with a brilliant power and punch, Park's (who also penned it) work opens with a classroom in progress. Vada heads to the washroom to comfort her little sister Amelia (Lumi Pollack) and finds Mia Reed (dancer Maddie Ziegler) also in there. It is at this moment that they hear gunshots, and both of them shut themselves inside a toilet, and are joined by another schoolmate, Quinton Hasland (Niles Fitch).

Park quickly passes through this introductory scene to take us to the disturbing times that the three children face following the school calamity, but the movie focusses mostly on Vada, who has been traumatized the most.

"The Fallout" asks big questions, but wisely leaves them unanswered, and the way it ends merely tells us how America's gun culture continues to leave behind a trail of blood, vicious violence, hatred, remorse, and an utter sense of hopelessness.

"The Fallout" uses actors who look like teenagers, and the masterful directorial ability stresses Vada's paranoia about returning to school. She finds it almost impossible to get back to the classroom, and even the shrink she visits appears of little help.

On the one hand, she suffers from a guilt complex (why did I live?) and on the other, the idea of school becomes a frighteningly unbearable thought.
