

Review



Prior Bad Acts, a short film by Thomas Allen Gear, is based on true events — and it's one of those rare shorts that earns your attention not through spectacle, but through steady emotional weight. It unfolds with a deliberate pace, gradually tightening the screws of tension until, in its final minutes, it offers something like redemption. Not the kind that ties things up neatly, but the kind that acknowledges the complexity of justice — and human fallibility.

At its center is Marine Leroy Brown, played by Alex Richardson with quiet gravitas. Leroy is a convicted man — not because he meant to kill, but because he was trying to save someone and failed. Richardson brings an unsettling stillness to the role; his presence carries a heaviness that lingers in each scene. There's a kind of moral opacity in his eyes — not guilt, exactly, but the weight of being misunderstood by the world.

Opposite him is Emily Ann, a public defender portrayed by Anushua Aira. She believes in Leroy, and that belief doesn't come across as naive optimism — it's conviction rooted in intelligence. Their dynamic is sharp, layered. When they argue, she wins not with force, but with reason. Aira plays her with just the right amount of fire — professional, yes, but personal, too. You get the sense she's been through battles like this before, and refuses to let cynicism win.

The camerawork is restrained, almost invisible — which is exactly what this story needs. No stylistic flourishes, just framing that serves the performances. The simplicity works.

The one technical misstep is in the sound design. A noticeable drop in quality occurs when cutting to wide-angle shots — echo creeps in and becomes distracting. It's a reminder that in short films, even small production limitations can ripple across emotional beats. Thankfully, the strength of the storytelling keeps the film anchored.

Prior Bad Acts is, at its core, a courtroom drama without the courtroom. It's a story about people—flawed, determined, uncertain—trying to make sense of a single terrible moment. What's remarkable is that it doesn't force a moral answer. It allows ambiguity to breathe. And in doing so, it earns not just our interest, but our respect.