

# 'Broken Glass Theory' Review: Comic Intrigue in an Uruguayan Backwater

This diverting Oscar submission feature finds an insurance claims investigator befuddled by a small town's arson wave.

By **Dennis Harvey** ▾



Billed as a black comedy, Uruguay’s Oscar submission feature stays on the breezier side of that description, bringing a playfully light touch to a fish-out-of-water tale that might have gone as dark as something like “The Wicker Man” or “Wake in Fright.” [Diego Fernandez Pujol](#)’s second feature (following “Darwin’s Corner” eight years ago) has been a home-turf theatrical hit, though as an export item its pleasing but modest impact is more likely to attract home-format sales. Remake rights might also prove a viable commodity.

[Martin Slipak](#), whose harried, clean-cut Everyman recalls the likes of Paul Rudd or Ben Stiller here, plays ambitious young white-collar worker Claudio Tapia. Having just “solved” a big claim case for his employer, Santa Marta Insurance Co., the appraiser is rewarded with a remote border town as his own dedicated claims territory. But the retiring agent he’ll replace smirks that this particular assignment is no promotion, and that Claudio “wouldn’t be the first stranger to get his ass kicked there.”

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After a long bus ride from Montevideo, he alights in the sleepy burg, expecting his business will take 24 hours or less. But almost immediately, he’s confronted by angry citizens demanding compensation, because somebody is going around every night setting cars on fire. We know from the start that this arson is being committed by a trio of teenage boys, whatever the motivation may be. But it takes Claudio considerable time and effort to figure out that and other mysteries, with little help from the local sheriff (Cesar Troncoso) and even less from other irate locals. Meanwhile, our hero’s extended stay exasperates his wife (Josefina Trias), who is most anxious he return to consult a specialist re their so-far-frustrated attempts to conceive a child.

The townsfolk are an array of deftly played colorful characters, alternately crusty and flamboyant. Among them are a rancher/politician (Roberto Birindelli) whose money calls most of the shots around here; his mistress, a voluptuous beauty-salon owner (Jenny Galvan); a sardonic hotelier (Veronica Perrotta); and the  representative from a rival insurance company (Roberto More).

They all seem to know something our protagonist does not, hiding that knowledge behind attitudes ranging from smirks to violent threats. Claudio is the classic white-hat interloper insisting on justice in a corrupt town of thieves and hypocrites, that whiff of classic Westerns like “High Noon” underlined by a whistling motif in Gonzalo Deniz’s original score.

The composer also contributes to the soundtrack a series of songs (sung by Humberto de Vargas) one only gradually realizes aren’t vintage melodramatic pop ballads but parodies that actively comment on the action à la “Super Fly.” It’s a gag that gets funnier as the film goes along, as do several here. Another measure of “Broken Glass Theory’s” larky goodwill is that it gets away with a climax not driven by action, but Claudio simply explaining what’s really been happening all along to a judge in a courtroom — as if he were Hercule Poirot tying up Agatha Christie’s narrative loose ends before a parlor-full of murder suspects.

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Though the film’s brightly lit look can seem routine at times, Fernandez Pujol keeps things moving at a sprightly clip, and provides some stylistic diversion via occasional dream sequences and a late bit of animation.

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#### ‘Broken Glass Theory’ Review: Comic Intrigue in an Uruguayan Backwater

**Reviewed online, Dec. 13, 2021. Running time: 82 MIN. (Original title: “La Teoria de los Vidrios Rotos”)**

**Production:** (Uruguay-Brazil-Argentina) A Parking Films production in association with Cordon Films, Tarfea Fina Cine, Okna Producoes. (World sales: Feel Content, Madrid.) Producers: Diego Fernandez Pujol, Micaela Sole, Aleteia Selonk, Juan Pablo Miller.

**Crew:** Director: Diego Fernandez Pujol. Screenplay: Fernandez Pujol, Rodolfo Santullo. Camera: Lucio Bonelli. Editor: Pablo Aiera. Music: Gonzalo Deniz.

**With:** Martin Slipak, Robert More, Roberto Birindelli, Jenny Galvan, Cesar Troncoso, Lourdes Kauffmann, Carlos Frasca, Veronica Perrotta, Jorge Temponi, Guillermo Arengo, Josefina Trias.

