

Southern
comfort
Cage takes
a breather.



Joe

★★★

Dir. David Gordon Green. 2013. R. 117mins. Nicolas Cage, Tye Sheridan, Gary Poulter.

Adapted from Mississippi author Larry Brown's 1991 novel, *Joe* is a moody, melancholic throwback to the regional dramas that first gained David Gordon Green (*George Washington*) attention, though it's not an entirely successful about-face from the stoner comedies with which he's lately occupied himself (*Pineapple Express*). A subdued Nicolas Cage is terrific (really!) as the title character, an ex-con who runs a semi-illegal business poisoning trees for corner-cutting corporations. When troubled 15-year-old Gary (Sheridan) crosses his path, there's an instant fatherly connection.

Joe and Gary's mentor-protégé relationship is the heart of the tale, though the film frequently shuffles off the narrative path to sketch in the economically depressed environs, which Green populates with people who might have stepped out of a Faulkner story. Yet the director, as is his wont, too often strains for poetic effect through flowery voiceover and tone-deaf interactions that undercut the genuineness. (Local theaters; opens Fri)—*Keith Uhlich*

THE BOTTOM LINE Nicolas Cage impresses in a minor-key melodrama.