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PHOTO BY SHANE YOUNG

Who's killing whom: *Federico Luppi, left, and Dan Rivera González look for answers.*

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'Men with Guns'

John Sayles's latest parable: heavy-handed but heartfelt

A DECENT mythologizer and the most committed leftist-humanist writer in mainstream Hollywood, John Sayles continues to turn out work from indie production channels with the secret symbolic swagger of someone still living under McCarthy's anticommie blacklist. He is a writer (mistaken for a director) who can make anything (including factually based material) sound

like a downtrodden parable. His newest, *Men with Guns*, intends to be his politically purest film but is in fact the most remote and polar thing he's ever issued as a director, a vague and freakish coupling of *The Wizard of Oz* with *Salt of the Earth*. Produced in Mexico, the film is the tale of Humberto Fuentes (Fernando Luppi), a well-off and distinguished doctor whose program, which sends conscientious new medicos into the country to take care of poor and indigenous populations, edifies him until he hears reports that his former students are being gradually killed off. He then takes his annual holiday in the hills, searching for them, and meets the child of a mother raped by a soldier

(Dan Rivera González), a quiet refugee woman, and a fierce, defecting indigenous soldier (Damian Delgado). Sayles's tendency toward allusion when he wants to frame a political reality (making him fingerpaint beautifully in areas where Oliver Stone caustically fingerpoints) is not aided by his choice to set the film in a fictional Latin American nation and to use a generic Spanish sandblasted of specifically Mexican idioms. Ultimately he tells more than he shows, and the film's language ("You're like a child, Humberto"; "The world is a savage place") tends to sound like it was composed by an inept subtitler. Unstirred propaganda, heart at the bottom. (Edward E. Crouse)