

The Hunting Party (2007)

Rated R. Our ratings: V- 6; L-6 ; S/N-1. Running time: 1 hour 44 min.

*O Lord, you God of vengeance,
you God of vengeance, shine forth!
Rise up, O judge of the earth;
give to the proud what they deserve!
O Lord, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?
Psalm 94:1-3*

Iraq and Afghanistan have pushed One of the hunting parties on the Balkans from the headlines, the road.

but as this film shows, the US-(c) 2007 MGM Pictures

led NATO intervention in the civil war that was destroying so many innocent people during the 1990s did not complete its job. There are still many mass murderers on the loose. Such is the case of The Fox (Ljubomir Kerekes), and veteran TV reporter Simon Hunt (Richard Gere) is convinced that he can find, capture, and bring him to justice. Quite a daunting project, or so his former partner Duck (Terrence Howard) thinks when the two meet up again in Sarajevo. Five years earlier Duck had been cameraman for the star reporter, but then Simon had an on-camera breakdown in the midst of a live broadcast from the site of a

massacre—Simon had just discovered the body of his fiancé, and, passing by close at hand the Serbian leader who had killed her, known by his nick name, the Fox.

Now, years later, Duck a successful producer for the network anchorman is back in Sarajevo, accompanying network anchorman Franklin Harris (James Brolin). Also along is the tenderfoot intern Benjamin Jesse Eisenberg), who had successfully wrangled the assignment only because his father was a network big wig. Simon's fortunes have fallen since his screw-up. He works for whatever small TV outlet he can persuade to hire him, despite his consumption of alcohol and drugs. When the two meet and reminisce, Duck initially turns down the proposal that he accompany his friend to interview the Fox. Finally he gives in and reluctantly agrees, and Benjamin insists that he go with them. Both are appalled when they discover that their assumption that Simon knows how to contact the quarry, and that Simon's intentions extend beyond just interviewing him.

As they drive up into the mountains where the Fox is rumored to be hiding, they encounter the lethal hostility that the natives harbor against outsiders, especially those who might be CIA operatives. In a humorous earlier sequence Boris (Mark Ivanir), the local NATO commander, is convinced that they are a CIA team of assassins, not the reporters they claim to be, an assumption that everyone else also apparently shares. What follows quickly changes the dark humor of the film into the makings of a tragedy, and, at the end, an indictment of the failure of the US, NATO, and the UN to seriously pursue war criminals responsible for so many thousands of deaths of Muslim civilians during the genocidal Balkan civil war.

Director Richard Shepard based his film script on a 2000 Esquire article by Scott K. Anderson about a group of reporters who set out to find the real Radovan Karadzic. The

prologue of the film assures us that “only the most ridiculous parts of this the story are true.” Somewhat similar to Oliver Stone’s caustic *Salvador* (in each a washed up journalist is accompanied by a comical sidekick), this film falls far short of that work’s greatness. Nonetheless, as dark comedies goes, it is worth watching, both because of the excellent cast and the issues it raises, no matter how belatedly. It is good to see a comedy-drama dealing more than with a boy or girl having trouble with their sex lives or self esteem.

For Reflection/Discussion

1) What other film characters have you seen who are similar to Simon and Duck? Compare the pair to those in *Salvador*. (And if you have not seen this, by far the best of Oliver Stone’s films, do so soon!)

2) How do the characters change during the course of the film? Or as Joseph Campbell would put it, what is their “hero’s journey” ?

3) What do you know of the atrocities committed during the wars in Bosnia during the 1990s? What other acts of genocide were going on during this period (See *Hotel Rwanda*), and what was the response of the US government? Check out Wikipedia for more details.

4) What do you think of the effectiveness of the frequent cutting to scenes of a real fox being hunted by the Fox? What does this add to the meaning of the film’s title?

5) How do the flashbacks help us understand Simon’s on camera breakdown? How is what happened to his lover the story of the country in microcosm? What about the occasional insertion of scenes from a Chuck Norris film—what do they add? Perhaps provide a contrast between Hollywood fantasy and real life under oppression?

6) How is the cry of the ancient Psalmist still relevant in this film? Where, if at all, do you see God or justice in this film? Some critics have inferred that by treating such a serious topic so lightly, even if the humor is dark, the film does not do justice to the events in Bosnia. What do you think?