

The Hurt Locker (2009)

Rated R. Our ratings: V-5 ; L-6 ; S/N-0 Running time: 2 hours 11 min.

*In Judah God is known,
his name is great in Israel.
His abode has been established in Salem,
his dwelling-place in Zion.
There he broke the flashing arrows,
the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war.
Psalm 76:1-3*

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." 14Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.
James 4:13-14*

God might have broken "theThe unit sets off a roadside flashing arrows, the shield, thebomb while on a mission in the sword, and the weapons of war"country that ends with a fire in ancient Judah, but in Iraq infight.

2004 it is up to Bravo Company2009 Summit Entertainment to "break" the insurgents' weapon of choice, the road side bomb or IED as they are called. Director Kathryn Bigelow's film, perhaps the best to come out of the Iraq War, follows the tense exploits of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit with Bravo Company during its last 38 days of deployment in Bagdad.

When Staff Sergeant Thompson dies in a cell phone-triggered blast while he is attempting to defuse a bomb, Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner) replaces him. He soon becomes the bane of Sergeant J.T. Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Specialist Owen Eldridge, who cover him with their rifles and communicate by radio while he is inside his padded bomb suit figuring out what bomb wires to cut. James is reckless, sometimes even taking off his headset to avoid an order he does not like. While he is defusing an IED, his comrades nervously scan the site, with many Iraqis watching them. Any time they see a cell phone or, as in one case, two men signaling to each other across a square, their nerves stand on edge—this could be the bomb-setter getting ready to detonate the explosives. Little wonder that after each nerve-wracking mission, when they return to base, they resort to rough horseplay and drinking bouts to escape the tension.

Screenwriter Mark Boal was embedded with a bomb squad in Baghdad, so his story, though fictional, is based on reality. The director's use of hand-held cameras and frequent choice of close-ups over medium and long-shots makes us feel more a part of the action than usual. . The film is probably the most intense and suspenseful film you will see this year in that the three protagonists' mission each day could end in disaster. The ending left me thinking about war and the effect of potential violence upon the human psyche, something we hardly ever see in the popular thrillers that dominate the screens in the summer. The key to the meaning of that ending, as well as to that of Sgt. William James' seemingly reckless behavior is the quotation of New York Times reporter Chris Hedges that opens the film, "War is a drug."

For Reflection/Discussion

1. Compare the three main characters. Who is most likely to be able to slip back into civilian life?

2. How is the nature of the war against the insurgents conducive to soldiers making terrible mistakes? For example, when the car driver fails to heed the order to stop, what could have happened (and often has)? How is language an important barrier?

3. How does the relationship of Sgt. James to the Iraqi boy selling DVDs show his need or desire to connect with the people? How did this lead him to involve his buddies in what could have been a fatal mission?

4. When the soldiers broke into the professor's home, what did you think of the Iraqi's calm reaction and invitation? Might this also show his desire to connect with an American? Or could it be merely his attempt to keep matters calm? What do you think of his wife's reaction?

5. Compare this film to the usual blockbuster thriller: how does it show the phoniness of most action films? Perhaps the other Iraqi War film that compares favorably is *Three Kings*?

6. How does the film's conclusion bear out Chris Hedges' statement, "war is a drug" ?