

DRUMMER REVIEW

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Drummer Views the Flicks

THE DEER HUNTER

by Jack Fritscher

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AUTHOR'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT INTRODUCTION



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The Deer Hunter is the most macho, brutal, sadistic, and purposefully violent movie ever filmed. Delivering way more than *Deliverance* dared, *The Deer Hunter* follows three men from their small town in the 60's to the full blowup of their action and torture in Vietnam.

A fully nude Robert DeNiro proves that the set line of his bearded face and topman's cool eye are as big a hardon as his good ass and fair dick. And DeNiro's command-presence face, along with Vilmos Zsigismond's incredible cinematography, is the icon that holds this fragmentation grenade of a movie together.

The Deer Hunter whose title sounds purposefully reminiscent of James Fenimore Cooper with his macho heroes always moving on to new frontiers, unreels more like a slick TV miniseries than a tight widescreen movie. The small-town sequences are pure Robert Altman. The spectacular Saigon/Vietnam scenes are of the epic quality of David (*Zhivago*) Lean meeting David O. Selznick for the "Burning of Atlanta." In fact, the VA hospital scenes make the railroad hospital scene in *Gone with the Wind* seem like

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antiseptic child's play.

The acting, the directing, the cinematography are all splendid. The editing is effective but is debalanced by the script that indulges itself in excessively long sequences (the wedding reception) and in unexplained coincidences and in poorly developed characterizations.

Why are these guys friends? Why do they hunt? Why the continual Russian Roulette? Why is one bullet *pure* and two bullets *pussy*? Why do they keep crossing coincidental paths in Nam? Why is the wedding reception flat-out documentary without either satire or commentary? Why do things fall apart?

Stevie's mother, played by the remarkable Shirley Stoller, who played the S&M NAZI Commandant in Lina Wertmueller's brilliantly sadistic *Seven Beauties*, directly asks this central question, before her son Stevie's wedding: "Why do things fall apart?" Even her Pennsylvania priest can't answer that one.

The Deer Hunter displays men as men. So fuck the heavy analysis. Get righteously ripped and take each bit for what it is. Brawlers, boozers, bowlers: an array of incredible blue-collar meat.

The Deer Hunter boasts the best cigar-smokers any movie has ever featured as atmosphere actors in the wedding-reception stomp. The Vietnam torture sequence of Americans was so devastating to the viewers next to me that I suggested if they couldn't stop disturbing everybody with their puling and puking, if they couldn't handle it, they ought to fuck off and leave. They did. One wonders how they handled the reality of the war itself a mere four years ago.

Pigeons always come home to roost, and the Great Vietnam War Movie Descent is now on us: *The Boys in Company C*; *Go Tell the Spartans*; and the best so far: Nick Nolte, Michael Moriarity, and Tuesday Weld in the ball-breaking *Who'll Stop the Rain?* If Nolte killed you as Tom dying in *Rich Man, Poor Man*, you ain't seen nothing till the final railroad-tracks scene of *Rain*. Yet to come is the highly-touted, long-awaited Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.

All these movies seem like pieces that fit into the puzzle of whatever that war was and what that war did to us. Its grisly reality telecast live on the small screens of ABC/NBC/CBS was nothing compared to what this breed of new young filmmakers, now a bit distanced in time and space from the battles and the last failing days of Saigon, is careful, calculated, and conscientious enough to show us. Their widescreen Technicolor violence is purposeful, even in bloody close-up, to the end of exposing once and for all to our small-screen eyes what our hearts and minds have long known: that this war was the epitome of man's inhumanity to man; that nothing ever has been more American than America's un-called-for involvement in shit hitting a fan that was never meant to be our concern, and certainly not our trauma.

The Deer Hunter is a long and serious meditation; its factory workers, soldiers, hunters, and mayhem are quite suitable for *Drummer* men. Its three hours is so long, you should take your lunch. And maybe, like the fools next to me, be prepared to lose it. Unlike them, don't leave. While *The Deer Hunter* somehow fails as a whole, its glorious parts make it totally worth your seeing the film the very night it premieres at a theater near or not-so-near you.

Besides, in the powerful, wordless opening of the truck-and-bar-and-billiards sequences, the group of deerhunters absently singing and getting off on the jukebox's

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period song, "Can't Take My Eyes off of You—I Love You, Baby," is as mesmerizing, as their own hypnotized, unexplained involvement in the war itself.

And then there's that last, final, in credible, incomprehensible scene...

You won't be able to take your eyes off *The Deer Hunter*.

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