

Laina March 2012 Movies
Posted On:December 31, 1969

ACT OF VALOR

Many movie critics prefer \223edgy\224 films to one like Act of Valor, which is a film that follows the actions of a group of Navy SEALs. It is not very chic to admire the military nowadays, except for the wonderful exercise that rid the world of Osama Bin Laden last year. After two presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush tried but failed to find and kill this Public Enemy No. 1, Barak Obama succeeded-by boldly using a crack team of Navy SEALs to carry out this mission. The usual anti-war activists cannot attack this mission-but they certainly will not like this film. It is definitely not chic to use such terms as \223valor,\224 \223honor,\224 and \223duty,\224 all of which are part of this excellent movie.

Seeing it in a multiplex in Watsonville, a majority Hispanic city, I was pleased to find so many people seeing this film-and applauding at its conclusion. I assume this was due to the number of people from such working class communities serving in our professional military.

The story follows a group of active-duty Navy SEALs (inspired by true events, we are told) engaged in fighting global terrorists on their own turf-before they can create havoc on our turf. The first issue is the rescue of a kidnapped CIA operative (a young woman) in Central America who is undergoing torture. They must free her before her captors kill her. The reason for the kidnapping and the rescue have to do with what this young agent has discovered about a planned deadly plot that would result in thousands of deaths in the US.

There were scenes in this film that reminded me of other movies that showed the terror war. In Act of Valor, an ice cream truck was used to lure children-US diplomats' children-with the purpose of detonating a suicide bomb. I remember a like scene in the movie The Kingdom, in which Americans in an American enclave in Saudi Arabia (probably Aramco) are enjoying a Saturday afternoon baseball game, only to be attacked by a suicide bomber in a truck. This willingness to attack civilians, and particularly the young, is a hallmark of the Islamist death cult.

Particularly alarming is the new partnership between Mexican drug cartels and jihadis, which spurred the most lethal exercise for the SEALs, pursuit and a shootout with jihadis attempting to infiltrate the US through tunnels currently used by drug cartels. The connection between Islamists and the drug business date back to the Taliban and the opium trade in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Criminal money and murderous ideology make particularly deadly bedfellows.

The movie's most touching moments showed the relationships of the SEALs with their wives and children. The families of these warriors always knew how dangerous the work is-but they too were expected to show the same kind of valor and honor as their men. The way the film showed these men at home, and the code that motivated all of them, parallels what I have seen among the professional military families at the Defense Language Institute and Naval Postgraduate School, both of them in Carmel. We all owe our safe lives to these people, and I, for one, honor them.

SALMON FISHING IN THE YEMEN

It was such a pleasure to see a movie that was clever, cheeky, imaginative, and very funny. It was also a love story about two unlikely people falling in love in a very strange venue, Yemen.

The story follows the actions of the British Prime Minister's chief PR person, an unflappable political operative (played by Kristen Scott Thomas), who never lets an opportunity pass without finding good publicity for her boss. The news coming out of the Muslim world is not good publicity for the Prime Minister (deaths in Afghanistan, for one thing). In a very funny montage, she clicks through scene after scene of things blowing up everywhere (from Pakistan through North Africa) until one unlikely item comes on screen: the possibility of a joint British and Yemeni project to create a water system in Yemen suitable for raising salmon for sport fishing.

Yemeni Sheikh Muhammed (played charmingly by Amr Waked), a multi-millionaire, wants to create a major dam to store the water from the annual monsoons (the wet season)

that can be used to breed salmon for the delight of fishermen.

The very idea of this is ridiculous on its face, as noted by a young fisheries scientist, Dr. Alfred Jones (Ewan McGregor), who is compelled (or get fired) to go along with this project. The PR department's agent, Harriet (the lovely Emily Blunt), corrects his notions of the dryness of Yemen with the information about the monsoon rainfall, and urges him to meet the Sheikh Muhammad, who owns a castle in Scotland where he travels to fish for salmon. The Sheikh is a devoted sports fisherman, a love that he wants to share it with his fellow countrymen, no matter what the cost.

Jones and Harriet meet the sheikh and spend a weekend in the elegant castle, salmon fishing during the day. The sheikh is an unusually spiritual man who finds sport fishing an act of faith (a rather exotic notion for a warlord from Yemen).

This movie is essentially a love story about two very likable people thrown together on a most unlikely project. But it is also a clever spoof about British politics, with much poking fun of the British bureaucracy.

Little touches of chilling realism emerge when the Sheikh's subjects decide to try to kill him for bringing something \223un-Islamic\224 into their country. They were right about that. Yemen, in antiquity (way before Islam), was a breadbasket of the ancient world. They had the world's largest earthen dam, which irrigated a quarter of today's Yemen, producing excellent food crops. The dam collapsed under torrential rains in the 6th century AD, a period of sudden climate change, and the dam has never been rebuilt. The Sheikh wasn't entirely mad; he wanted a dam to once more irrigate bleak Yemen, a country that is today running out of water.

A political fig-leaf is provided at the end of the movie when the Sheikh decides to do the project better next time, giving the people time to buy into the idea. At this, I left the theater laughing.

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN

There have been many films about a child from hell before this one. I would suggest that you rent Rosemary's Baby, The Bad Seed, or The Omen if you want to see really scary children, children whose mothers are not to blame.

I went to see this film reluctantly, only because I had heard that Tilda Swinton, an always interesting actress, was marvelous in it. She was, but I am still sorry that I saw it. And I wonder how anyone could bear to make it.

The story is told through maddening flashbacks in which the mother of a murderous teen-ager remembers the entire horror. The color red flashes on screen from the tomato festival (a wanton food fight) in Spain, through red paint thrown at the woman's house (not explained until later) and red lights flashing to remind you of blood, blood, blood. These visual assaults were accompanied by the most grating Country-Western music (why appropriate here I do not know). But most offensive of all were the implications that somehow this terrible child was terrible because of her. Apparently the mother thought so too (agonizing guilt), although nothing in her behavior indicated that she was a bad mother.

The mother knew from early on that there was something terribly wrong with her boy, but she could not get her husband to see this-nor did any professionals see it. The problem was that the child was a skilled manipulator and was exceedingly intelligent. These are perfect covers for a sociopath.

I must praise the casting in this film, however. Her child when young (Jasper Newell) looked much like her----and as a teen-ager (Ezra Miller), he looked exactly the same as the younger version. Both child actors were extraordinary and very, very frightening.

The guilt business was carried to inexplicable lengths when after the Columbine-style massacre, people in the streets either avoided or in one case even slapped the mother. She had lost everything, although she bore no culpability at all.

Rent The Bad Seed and cheer on the mother who does the right thing about that child.