

Laina with July Movies
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Netflix

Dresden

Dresden is a two-part 2006 German TV film set during three days before and during the horrendous British bombing raid on Dresden (13-15 February 1945). This film is particularly significant now to reconsider how little we remember history in the face of current issues, such as the clamor about the disproportionate war being fought between Israel and Hamas. War is not cricket, and throughout 10,000 years of the history of civilization, wars were never proportional.

The Dresden bombing raids of 1945 were horrific. So much ordnance was used that the entire city, once the most beautiful city in Europe, had fire-storms that sucked up all the oxygen. Most of the population died by asphyxiation.

The German movie raises a number of issues about that decision. The British airmen, although reluctant to destroy such a city, remembered who started that war and how it was started with the total destruction of Coventry, a peaceful old British city, Rotterdam in the Netherlands, and Warsaw. The Germans were the first European power to take the war to civilian populations, a giant step beyond the trench warfare of World War I. The Japanese introduced this horror in China.

A common issue throughout the film was decision-making. A doctor who owned and ran a hospital in Dresden made a decision that his family's survival was more important than his duty as a doctor. The doctor's daughter made a decision putting her love for a downed British pilot ahead of her engagement to another man and her loyalty to her country. A Nazi official decided that his own survival was more important than his duty or honor and he acted accordingly. The British made a decision that they had to carry out this raid, despite their reluctance.

Both the destruction of Dresden and the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were carried out because the Nazis nor the Japanese were unwilling to surrender. Had the war lasted another year or two, many millions more people would have died, many our own.

A critical note about this film: the love story between an aristocratic young German and a British pilot shot down over a raid is not very convincing. However, the movie is certainly worth seeing because of the visuals of that infamous bombing raid and the discussions about what wars are about.

Man On A Ledge

This thriller was far better than any of the other dreary movies shown in July. It is a 2012 film about an ex-con (once a policeman) who is threatening to jump from the Roosevelt Hotel rooftop in New York. He had been jailed because he was convicted of participating in a big diamond heist, a crime he insisted he did not commit. A police psychologist is called to talk down the man. Does she believe him?

An additional layer of interest in this film was the macho culture of the police who belittled the woman police psychologist and who may or may not be involved in framing the convicted cop. Very exciting film.

Lucy

This was the first major film in July worth seeing. Scarlett Johansson plays an ordinary young woman who unwittingly gets drawn into a criminal action in Taiwan. She and three young men are forced to be "mules" to transport bags of some unknown substance surgically implanted. They were all to be met at airports in Europe by members of the cartel who will then surgically remove the bags.

The bags contained a substance usually found in pregnant women, a hormone that promotes an explosion of brain cell growth in their fetuses. Lucy is beaten by the cartel and the bag inside of her bursts, flooding her with this brain cell hormone. She goes from a normal woman using (as humans do) only a small part of the brain cells we have. As she approaches 100 percent, her powers transform her into a phenomenon never seen before.

Scientists have long known that in our current stage of evolution, only a modest percent of our potential intellectual power is available to us. In evolution's slow process, human intelligence has grown from our origins in the first Lucy (the first upright ancestor of us all) to today. What would happen if this evolutionary growth

could be accelerated?

I would recommend renting the movie *Algernon* or reading the splendid short story: *Flowers for Algernon*, for a more serious exploration of human intelligence. I had difficulty in imagining that enhanced intelligence could also have control over matter (levitating weapons or tossing bodies), as shown in the film.

Despite this nonsense, the movie is very fast moving and exciting. A nice try.

A Most Wanted Man

This film is based on a John le Carré novel, which guarantees a jaundiced view of the spy business and whenever possible, a slap at Americans. Despite my distaste for Carré as a person, he certainly writes a good spy novel.

A Most Wanted Man also gives us a final look at the acting of Philip Seymour Hoffman, who died shortly after this film was made. But most important of all, it demonstrates that the intelligence business is more of an art than a science. Differences in approach still prevent the Western intelligence world from acting with any kind of trust or unity.

Hoffman (Gunther Bachmann) plays a German counterterrorist in Hamburg, and we learn that because of the German overcorrection of their Nazi past, counterterrorists must keep a very low profile. There is also a conflict in values between his approach, for example, and the American approach. Although both recognize that the Islamist enemy they are fighting is deadly, Hoffman's approach is subtle and nuanced whereas the Americans are heavy-handed and blunt. The British have long believed that about us.

A young Chechen Muslim (Issa Karpov) arrives in Hamburg seeking help from the Muslim community. He has been tortured by the Russians, and has the misfortune of being the son of a recently deceased, notorious criminal in Chechnya. The Americans and the official German Intelligence service are on the hunt, assuming that this young man is, like his father, a terrorist.

A naïve young German human rights attorney (played by Rachel McAdams) rushes in to protect the Chechen and she learns that he has indeed been tortured and that he detests his father, who raped Issa's mother when she was just 15, impregnating her; she died during childbirth. Issa is a religious Muslim, but in no way a terrorist. He doesn't know who he is, but he does know that he does not want to touch the inheritance of dirty money left by his father in a bank in Berlin.

Bachmann enlists the reluctant attorney to help him in an important caper, promising that her Chechen charge will receive a German passport in return for his help. The plan is for him to accept the money and turn it over to a respected Muslim doctor to disburse over a range of acceptable charities. If this plan works as designed, the Muslim doctor will try to substitute a terrorist recipient for one of the charities. Bachmann would then confront and "turn" the doctor in a plan to catch the next larger player in this terrorism. This is the sort of subtle gamesmanship and tradecraft used throughout the Cold War by both sides: entrapment and cooperation.

Things do not go as everyone hopes. The rest of the story unfolds with fascinating and regrettable consequences. Remember, Intelligence is not a science. Nothing that pertains to human behavior is. But this is very good cinema indeed, and well worth your time.