



ABCD Online no. 10

August 2021

The Deer Hunter

1978 USA 175mins Cert 18

This multi-Oscar nominated film from Michael Cimino has gained praise and criticism at the time of its release and since then. It can be divided broadly along the lines of its three hour duration into three acts.

The first act sees our protagonists at home in the heavy industrial heartland of Clairton, Pennsylvania, where Michael (Robert de Niro), Steven (John Savage) and Nick (Christopher Walken), following a night shift at the factory, hit their local bar to wind down prior to Steven's wedding at the Russian Orthodox cathedral in their otherwise austere town. Cimino is keen to show us the back story of his protagonists (although some critics found this sequence overlong) before their departure to serve in the Vietnam war, for which none of their previous life experiences could prepare them. Following the nuptials, the men depart to the mountains on a deer hunting trip, continuing their masculine rough play and banter.

In act two, the three friends have fallen into the hands of the North Vietnamese forces and are being held in nightmarish conditions, where they are forced to play the deadly game of Russian Roulette for the amusement and financial gain of their captors. The story unfolds in an edge-of-the-seat but harrowing style, as we see the effect that their individual experiences have on their physical and mental states.

Act three sees us back in Clairton, where both Michael and Steve have returned home but Michael realises he will have to return to Saigon, where Nick (implausibly) is still living, to fulfil a promise made on the night of the wedding, to bring him back - as the Vietnamese capital is falling.

There are sequences in the film that will remain forever etched in the mind of the horror of war but Cimino's somewhat sketchy development of character leaves the viewer having to fill in the gaps in the protagonists' motivation and behaviour, which is disappointing. Nevertheless, the film deserves revisiting periodically as a reminder of previously accepted mores such as male bonding, mindless patriotism, the dehumanising effects of war, Nixon's 'silent majority'.

"The Deer Hunter is presented from the perspective of [...] three Americans and, as most PoWs attest, their captors [who] weren't humane towards them. Cimino had no responsibility to present three-dimensional Vietnamese characters or show that Americans committed atrocities as well. Those are beyond the scope of his film"

James Berardinelli, *Reel Views*

Leading Players

Robert de Niro	Michael
John Savage	Steven
Christopher Walken	Nick
John Cazale	Stan
Meryl Streep	Linda

Production Credits

Director	Michael Cimino
Producers	Michael Cimino, Michael Deeley+3 others
Screenplay	Deric Washburn
Original Story	Cimino, Washburn, Louis Garfinkle, Q K Redeker
Cinematography	Vilmos Zsigmond
Music	Stanley Myers

Zoom discussion meeting to take place
Thursday August 26th from 7.30pm to 8.15pm

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/96110546125?pwd=QmtiNHl3dWl0bmt5SytmXfINGUyQT09>

Meeting ID: 961 1054 6125

Passcode: Z60VCr



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