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DIRECTOR JOHN FRANKENHEIMER BRINGS THRILLER "BLACK SUNDAY" TO SCREEN:

"I FEEL THAT MOVIES DON'T CHANGE THE TIMES, BUT TIMES CHANGE MOVIES"

"This movie has political content but no political intent," says director John Frankenheimer of his new film, "Black Sunday."

"Because we deal with a political subject this could be taken to be a political film, but it's a total suspense thriller," adds Frankenheimer about the story which pits an Israeli commando against a Black September terrorist and a vengeful American war veteran who are trying to stage a monstrous attack in the United States.

The Paramount Picture is based on the best-seller by Thomas Harris, a former Associated Press reporter who got the idea from the news stories of the 1972 terrorist attack on the Olympic Village in Munich.

"There are legitimate motivations shown on all sides," says the director. "We want to show how and why these characters do what they do. But we have avoided making propaganda. We have tried like hell not to make a 'statement picture.'"

"'Seven Days in May' and 'The Fixer' were political films," recalls Frankenheimer. "They were meant to be." But he does not consider his classic thriller "The Manchurian Candidate" a political movie.

"I have no desire to make a film about what's happening in the country today," notes Frankenheimer. "Because I don't know what's happening. I don't think anybody does."

"I feel that movies don't change the times, times change movies. I don't think people today want to be preached at like the 'message films' of the late Fifties and Sixties or the 'kitchen sink drama' we did



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in the early days of TV. We're in a period now where audiences wish to be entertained."

The entertainment in "Black Sunday" features a mammoth action climax in which the terrorists (Marthe Keller and Bruce Dern) navigate a bomb-laden blimp right into the ongoing Super Bowl game, pursued by the Israeli agent (Robert Shaw).

The film also shows the workings of the Black September group in a Beirut hideout, the smuggling of explosives into the U.S., behind-the-scenes dealings between the Israeli agent and an Egyptian official and the not always smooth cooperation of the Israelis and the F.B.I.

The dramatic tension springs from what Frankenheimer calls "three fiercely motivated characters."

Of the female terrorist he says, "Her point of view is not that of the entire Palestinian nation or the Arab world, it's just Black September. Which is why these people are so dangerous. They're absolutely dedicated to their cause, dedicated to dying."

Marthe Keller says she has not played the role as a totally black villain, but has tried to invest the character with some humanity: "She is a product of her environment. Anyone who had her experiences could do what she does. She could be a girl from any country."

"There are people in the world who have been through what these characters have been through," says Bruce Dern, who plays a bitterly deranged ex-POW of the Vietnam War.

"Politics don't matter to him at all. He just wants the biggest platform possible to demonstrate his anger and his rejected talents."

"This story could be in a sense about any terrorists," states Robert Shaw. "It could easily be Greece before the present regime."

"The film can never be totally apolitical, because that's the setting,

but I don't think the political element in 'Black Sunday' is terribly heavy. The movie is not a pulpit," adds Shaw, author of the admittedly political play "The Man in the Glass Booth."

"I think Kabokov (the Israeli commando) is definitely the hero of 'Black Sunday,' but John (Frankenheimer) is not trying to make Israeli propaganda or a political platform at all. He's just trying to tell a very good thriller."

"Black Sunday" was produced by Robert Evans with Robert L. Rosen as executive producer. The film was directed by John Frankenheimer from a screenplay by Ernest Lehman, Ken Ross and Ivan Moffat based on the novel by Thomas Harris.

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