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Deer Hunter, Savage, Racial; Opium War Opens at the Surf

By RICHARD SPRINGER

"The Deer Hunter" is an unlikely candidate for praise in an Asian American publication, since the Asian characters in the film are portrayed as either helpless victims or cruel, bloodthirsty gamblers. Nevertheless, the film deserves serious consideration as an anti-war film of incredible power with devastating implications.

Divided almost evenly into two segments, "The Deer Hunter" follows the camaraderie of five relatively young steelworkers in a

There are four Russian roulette scenes in the film and none of them are easy to take. All five men are ultimately drawn into the game.

As one could expect, De Niro is the central character in the film.

is in love with both Walken and De Niro, but they are too caught up in their barroom chatter and deer hunting to understand her feelings. De Niro becomes sexually impotent, not from wounds suffered during the war, but from a preoccupation with Walken's disappearance in the dens of Saigon. De Niro can't function while his buddy is trapped.

The ending of the film offers some hope that man can rise above even the most brutalizing experience. The deer hunter can just as heroically use his will not to kill. But again, the director Michael Cimino has overpowered this hope with a film glorifying the strong-willed man of action annihilating viciously-stereotyped villains, who in this case, with the exception of one Machiavellian, profiteering Frenchman, happen to be Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese.

"The Deer Hunter" is overlong and needs editing (the long wedding scene, for example), uneven, inconsistent in characterization (especially Walken's who seems cultured and sensitive at one point and just another of the blue collar hell-raisers in the next.) It is racist in its portrayal of Asians and self-contradictory in its implications.

The film is also challenging, of grand scope, and an anti-war film of incredible intensity and power. True, the characters show no self-examination about why they, as Americans, must fight in Vietnam. Cimino and his scriptwriter Deric Washburn have, perhaps perversely, taken that interrogatory smoking pistol, put a bullet in the chamber, and turned the gun toward the audience. If, and only if, you are in the mood, gird your loins and see this **film**.

PROGRAM NOTES



Robert De Niro and John Savage cling to a log in Vietnam in a scene from "The Deer Hunter."

Russian Orthodox Pennsylvania community in 1968. Three of the men, played by Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken and John Savage, are a few days away from their military service. Savage is about to get married to his pregnant sweetheart who is bearing someone else's child. The two other men, John Cazale, a destructively insensitive person, and Chuck Aspegren as the bear-like, even-tempered fellow, will be left behind.

POWS

The second half of the film is a destructive, brutal account of the three men's gut-wrenching experiences as prisoners of war, the disfiguring and dismembering of their bodies and spirits, De Niro's inability to return to a normal life in the Pennsylvania community and his last-ditch effort to rescue Walken from a Russian roulette gambling den in Saigon, as South Vietnam collapses around them.

He is a Nietzsche superhero whose power of will enables him to rise above the blue collar, herd mentality. The motif of deer hunting is used as the Nietzschean test, a Wagnerian Valhalla that elevates De Niro above his friends, who do not possess his force of will. In the Russian roulette scenes it is, first De Niro, and then Walken who transform what is first the only way for survival into a dehumanizing state of unfeeling.

CONTRADICTORY

The film is in many ways contradictory. Walken and De Niro are made both heroes and zombies by their foolhardy acts of bravery. They can't experience any satisfactory relationship with women either before or after their involvement in the war. Before the war they are so involved in male camaraderie and rivalries that they treat women as objects. Meryl Streep plays a woman who