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REVIEW: THE HUNT



Historical and classic literature remains with us to this very day, not just in their original textual form, but in other ways—re-realized, re-envisioned, and redistributed. One need look no further than “**Sons of Anarchy**” to see a very modern, bloody, and bad-ass retelling of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. AMC’s massively popular “**Breaking Bad**” carries shades of both Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as well as the soul-to-the-devil legend of *Faust*. Even **Twilight**, the most absurdly terrible thing to happen to both literature and cinema, unfortunately must be associated with the bloodsucker that started it all, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (sans glitter and organized vampire baseball games).

The reason I bring this up is because there’s another dark tale from our literary past that often resurfaces in film—that of the 1924 short story “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell, a morbid tale of men hunting down their favorite kind of prey in a forest or jungle landscape: other human beings. This tale has inspired some massive contributions to our genre, including **Predator**, **Battle Royale**, the absurd Van Damme actioner **Hard Target**, and **The Hunger Games** (along with scores of others, whose titles get more and more cheesy the further we go back).

Thomas Szczepanski’s survival film **The Hunt** is the latest re-appropriation of Connell’s story, and it surely won’t be the last. While it doesn’t bring anything new to the table, it provides enough thrills and shocks to warrant a viewing.



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A young tabloid reporter named Alex is on his last leg at his paper. Readers no longer care about the dog-fucking women he interviews and shoots for his articles, and the editor demands he bring her something of substance, or he'll be without a job in one week's time. Desperate for any kind of lead, he visits his girlfriend, a local stripper/fetish sex-worker to see if she can point him towards any of her regular clients that could make for a salacious story. One thing leads to another and he finds himself drawn into the world of human hunting, run by a team of anonymous and extremely wealthy men. The game is simple: three victims, their tongues cut out to prevent being able to blow the lid off the whole thing, have small cases locked to their wrists and are sent out into the woods, where they are to be hunted down and killed. If they are, the successful hunter wins whatever awaits them within the locked cases; essentially, the "bets" that the hunters made before the start of the game. Alex, masking his true identity, takes part in the game to see just how far these men are willing to go in the name of the ultimate sport.

The Hunt landed unceremoniously on video earlier this summer, which is somewhat of a shame, given that the film is more than competently directed by Frenchman Thomas Szczepanski. With the film being 75 minutes, he has a lot of story to tell within that amount of time. And while the crux of that story is told in a way that's at least aesthetically thrilling, what could have been an exemplary take on the story, had it been more fleshed out, instead becomes merely satisfying. **The Hunt** never fails to entertain on a superficial level, being that you're watching a team of men hunt another, not going easy on their pray once they catch up. In that gleefully sadistic way of which only the French are capable (see **Haute Tension, Inside, Martyrs**), **The Hunt**, too, spares no expense when it comes to bloodshed. Though it is not consistently violent, when violence does occur, it has no problem with going over the top.



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There are very interesting themes at play here, especially being that the men in charge of the game are presented as extremely wealthy (which isn't a new addition to the story, but could have been much more exploited thanks to the present-day chasm between the middle and upper class.) Not to mention that as the camera pans across the walls the first time we see the mansion which houses what could be called home base of the game, snippets of antiquated paintings and portraits of stately men very subtly suggest that the hunt is anything but new—that, perhaps, it's been going on for centuries.

Szczepanski is more interested in spinning a stylistic tale than poking at your moral fibers, though there is one specific sequence in the film that's absolutely due for praise: in a moment where Alex finds himself in the midst of the game, splashing river water across his face in an effort to shock him back to reality, he spies one of the intended victims staring at him from the other side of the river. Alex stares at this victim for a long time, a peculiar look on his face, as the victim, unsure of what's about to happen, looks back in fear. It's a great moment because we, as the audience, have absolutely no idea how Alex is going to respond. We already know that Alex is already kind of losing his mind in the thick of the game's madness. And we also know the sole reason he's even involved in the game is to save his career, the goal behind that, of course, being money. Well, before him sits a wad of cash in the case chained to the victims' arm. Will Alex blow the lid off the story, as is the reason he is there in the first place? Or will he push all that aside and join the game, in hopes of hitting it big?. Presenting this question in the form of this scene was an extremely purposeful choice, and it's expertly handled by the filmmaker.

Unfortunately, the film suffers from that age-old adage: We simply aren't provided enough background on Alex for us to care about him as a character. All we really know about him is he's a muckraking reporter who is dating a sex worker, and whose only motivation in life seems to be keeping his job at the tabloid. Except for some sex, Alex and his girlfriend don't share any scenes together that make us feel like they are anything beyond roommates. Really, there's no emotional moments shared between either of them at all, so all we're left to root for is an empty shell of a man who could escape the game as just as easily succumb to it—and we, the viewers, wouldn't really care either way.

A brisk running time, some thrilling action scenes, and all kinds of bodily harm will ensure that viewers will certainly have a good experience, but those hoping for some more socially relevant themes might find themselves disappointed.

* Images from the film are impossible to find, so my thanks to [Basement Screams](#) for the use (stole 'em) of its screen grabs.

<http://the-end-of-summer.blogspot.com/2012/11/review-hunt.html>