

## **A Serbian Film: Blu-ray Wrong Turn 4: Bloody Beginnings Beware Pre-Halloween cult horror**

Consider the images we've just witnessed of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi being pummeled, shot and dragged lifeless down a highway by his captors, before being left in a meat locker to be gawked at and rot. Then, recall the photographs of naked Iraqi prisoners being humiliated and tortured by bored National Guard troops. Try to imagine, as well, what kind of sickness would prompt Sudanese soldiers to stand by and watch as millions of people are being allowed to starve to death in an endless war. Meanwhile, at the United Nations, the world's richest and most powerful nations can't even agree on the number of unarmed Syrian protesters have to die before a bounty is put on Bashar al-Assad's head. That's the kind of stuff a master of horror could use to his advantage. It's real and it's supremely frightening. If the characters didn't drop more than one or two f-bombs, expose their nipples or rip each other's heads off, such a movie theoretically could be rated PG-13.

And, yet, censorial bodies and distributors around the world routinely decide that obviously fictitious depictions of extreme sexual behavior and violence require censorship and, in the case of "**A Serbian Movie**," outright banishment. Even Netflix, a seemingly open-minded operation, has decided that adults aren't prepared to watch such a provocative movie in the comfort of their own homes. Such hypocrisy isn't ignored in the bombardment of points that director Srdjan Spasojevic makes "A Serbian Film." On its pock-marked surface, this much-reviled movie is an allegory in which a retired porn star is unable to resist the lure of easy money, even when he's left completely in the dark as to what he'll have to do to earn it. The porn star, Milos, accepts the offer believing that he's already performed every conceivable sexual stunt – short of pedophilia, necrophilia or actual incest – throughout his long and profitable career and there's precious little left to surprise him. That logic might apply in a lot of places, but not in the once vibrant, ethnically diverse region formerly known as Yugoslavia. Once the Iron Curtain was lifted, tinhorn potentates encouraged their loyalists to ignore every moral principle drilled into them at the feet of their teachers, clergy and parents, all in the name of nationalistic pride. Like the many soldiers forced to obey the unconscionable orders of madmen and sadists, Milos really should have questioned where the producer of such a movie would draw the line. This man, Milos, who believed he had seen and done everything a porn icon could be asked to do, quickly would discover veins of depravity even a coke whore would refuse to mine. When Milos decides it's to pull the plug on his participation in the psycho-sexual horror show, he's no longer in control of his own fate. Dead or alive, the movie within the movie in "A Serbian Film" will be finished. Instead of being an actor, Milos could just as well have been asked to portray an investment banker ordered to foreclose on homes owned by laid-off nurses, teachers and factory workers, or a political operative assigned to destroy the reputation of a kind and honorable opponent. These are the horrors of our time.

Even though "A Serbian Film" is Spasojevic's first movie – screenwriter Aleksandar Radivojevic already had penned "Tears for Sale" – it is an extremely accomplished work. The lighting, music and set design all contribute to the movie's we're-not-in-Kansas-anymore atmosphere, when Milos realizes he's passed the been-there/done-it barrier. By then, however, he's barely capable of distinguishing between his nightmares, drug-induced hallucinations and real life. So are we. At this juncture, Milos' hysteria resembles that of the characters in "Requiem for a Dream," the movie "A Serbian Film" most resembles. To be sure, "A Serbian Film" is strictly for adult eyes and discerning ones, at that. Like Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Salo" – also newly released in Blu-ray — it will test even the most open-minded of viewers.