



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Cinema Review - The Hurt Locker and Green Zone**

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I've never been one for walking out on movies. Even if it's a turkey, I usually think that if you've paid your money you might as well see it through.

However, there was an occasion – a long, long time ago now – when I *did* walk out on a movie. And it wasn't because it was bad. In fact, it was because it was too *good*. I guess I was about eleven or twelve years old at the time and the movie was that lacerating saga about the First World War – *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

This Academy Award winner was more than twenty years old when I got to see it. However, I didn't see it all. The power of its images of the fighting in the trenches of France was so overwhelming – particularly the sequences capturing the horrors of artillery bombardments – that, eventually, I couldn't take it any more. I had to leave my seat and go outside. I stood outside the theatre entrance door and listened to the sound effects – that was bad enough – and, when I gathered that the shelling had stopped, I went back in and resumed my seat.

I've never yet seen that movie all the way through - and perhaps I never will. However, it's long-lasting effect was to leave me – to this day – feeling very equivocal about war movies.

On the one hand I'm drawn to them because of the action and the potential for drama inherent in the life or death situations which abound in warfare. On the other hand I hesitate to expose myself to the terror and horrors which – if a movie is to be truthful – really should be a significant part of almost any war movie. It was therefore with some reluctance that I eventually went to see *The Hurt Locker* – a movie about a United States Army bomb disposal squad working in Iraq. But I felt obliged to see it after it won the Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best director.

It turned out to be not quite as confronting as I had expected. It is tough and persuasively well-situated in locations ranging from garbage-strewn city streets to bleak stony deserts. And director Kathryn Bigelow shows great skill in generating megawatts of dramatic tension throughout the movie. The performances are perfect from a cast made up almost entirely of unknowns.

However, the movie lets itself down in its basic scenario which, on several occasions, calls for the bomb disposal expert who is at the centre of the story, to display characteristics which would be much more appropriate for Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry*. These somewhat surreal lapses in the storytelling have the effect of undermining the credibility of the movie and thus reducing its potential to persuade us that its characters are real people involved in stressful situations.

I don't know that *The Hurt Locker* deserved to win the Oscar for Best Picture. I certainly don't think that it has anything like the stature of its main Academy competitor, *Avatar*. So I gave it three stars.

Then yet another Iraq-war movie emerged – *Green Zone* – so I thought it would be interesting to compare it with *The Hurt Locker*. My assessment is that *Green Zone* is a much better movie. *Green Zone* is painted on a much larger canvas than *The Hurt Locker*: its central theme is massively powerful. It also has a major star and it's clear that its budget is enormous. *The Hurt Locker* depicts the dangers and dilemmas faced by a few ordinary soldiers in Iraq, whereas the plot of *Green Zone* centres on the issue of the mythical weapons of mass destruction which were trumpeted by the so-called Coalition of the Willing as the underlying need to invade Iraq.

The fundamental issue of *Green Zone*, therefore, is a consideration of the validity of the entire Iraq war. The great power of this central theme gives the plot of *Green Zone* enormous strength and the story is told in the manner of a first-rate conspiracy-theory thriller. The story revolves around a professional soldier, played by Matt Damon, who leads a small unit in the task of trying to locate the alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction. After following some false leads he begins to form the belief that the military intelligence he has been given is seriously flawed.

However, when he tries to alert his superiors to this issue he is told to keep quiet. But, of course, he doesn't and the gripping, cleverly-written action-packed story unfolds from there on. Given that *Green Zone* stars Matt Damon and is directed by Paul Greengrass who directed Damon in the *Bourne* trilogy, you might expect that *Green Zone* could really be re-titled: *Bourne Goes to Baghdad*.

But it's not that. Damon's soldier is tough and resourceful but does not have the super-hero characteristics of Jason Bourne. In addition, we are engaged by the underlying seriousness of the story because the plot is so firmly grounded in issues which we know – or, at least, *think* we know – to be historically true. I thought that another of the qualities of this fine movie was the use of a number of unknown Middle Eastern actors who put in strong performances portraying well-written characters. Their dialogue is mostly in Arabic and this lends a touch of authenticity to the movie. English sub-titles enable us to follow their conversations.

I gave *Green Zone* four and a half stars.

And just a tip: when you see it, look carefully at the very last image. It's subtle – but it's packed with irony and it makes a great finish for the movie.

Well, goodbye for now. I'll see you in the back stalls.