

## Audience jolted by 'Deer Hunter'

No other film about Vietnam ("Go Tell the Spartans," "Coming Home,"

"Who'll Stop the Rain") has captured the horror or delivered the emotional jolt that charge Michael Cimino's epic work, "The Deer Hunter" (R).

From its apocalyptic base it explores with savage power the impact of the war on the lives of a group of Russian-Americans from a small steel town in Pennsylvania. The first third of this three-hour film establishes the men's camaraderie against a richly detailed background of social, ethnic and religious experiences.

Within the group, Michael (Robert De Niro), Nick (Christopher Walken) and Steven (John Savage) are the three who are closest to each other and who, in 1969, enlist to fight in Vietnam.

With the kind of boisterous vitality that vivifies the details of Flemish painting, Cimino takes a long, lingering look at the character of their lives before they leave for Vietnam.

RITUALS PERMEATE their activities, from the explosive choreography of movement at the blast furnaces to the boozing kinship of the saloon to the mysticism and revelry of a Russian Orthodox wedding and, finally, to the tense sobering drama of their last deer hunt together.

If the film had not gone beyond this first "act," it would still be outstanding for the way it captures the texture of life in this community.

The shabby homes, belching mills and gray streets are ugly and depressing. Yet, Cimino seems to be implying that the quality of life here is not determined by external amenities, but by the closeness of the people bonded by a common heritage and accepted traditions.

Visually, the thesis is exemplified by the stunning contrast of the opulent church whose onion-shaped dome dominates the mean cityscape that surrounds it.

The battlefield chaos and moral anarchy of Vietnam appear even harsher and more strident when seen against this rich background. The scenes of fighting, capture by the Viet Cong and escape constitute the shortest but most excruciating segment of the film.

THE HORROR it evokes springs from a realization of the violence and terror that dehumanization produces. In the most nerve-jangling and graphic scenes ever filmed, the prisoners are forced to play Russian roulette against each other. Each round results in the click of an empty chamber or a squirting stream of blood and brains.

John Savage creates a haunting image of uncontrollable fear as he waits his turn. Later Christopher Walken, in a searing performance, reveals Nick's psychological breakdown and stony dissociation from reality.

Ultimately, De Niro, who has returned home as a reluctant hero, is responsible for trying to restore the sense of order and bring his shattered comrades together again. He goes back to Vietnam to seek out Nick. His journey through the dark routes and waterways of the doomed Saigon resembles a trek among souls in hell.

There are major flaws in this film but they are overshadowed by riveting and brilliant passages. Not the least of them is the startling ending.

Whether intended as a reflection of pride or irony, it works on an unexpected level that reaches to the child in every adult.



As they dance together at a wedding reception, Linda (Meryl Streep) and Michael (Robert De Niro) are attracted to each other.

## Glimpses

### NEW RELEASES

AGATHA (PG). Sketchy characters but intriguing story and fine acting by Vanessa Redgrave and Dustin Hoffman carry film based on Kathleen Tynan's speculations about the 11-day disappearance of Agatha Christie.

THE BELL JAR (R). Crack-up of a young poet, torn between life and art, is presented in somewhat flattened film version of Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel.

THE BRINK'S JOB (PG). William Friedkin directed this comic adventure about the big heist with Peter Falk, Peter Boyle, Warren Oates and Gene Rowlands.

THE CHINA SYNDROME (PG). A gripping melodrama about an accident at a nuclear power plant and the potential danger. Jane Fonda is a television features reporter; Jack Lemmon's the plant engineer.

FAST BREAK (PG). Gabriel Kaplan is a N.Y. deli clerk named to coach a motley crew of basketball players at an obscure college.

GET OUT YOUR HANDKERCHIEFS (R). Eccentric view of male-female relations as woman's husband and lover work toward her happiness in unconventional way.

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (PG). Adventure caper in 1855 as three attractive crooks plan the first robbery of a moving train.

HAIR (PG). The counterculture musical of the '60s, directed by Milos Forman, comes to the screen with amazing vitality and musical energy — if a decade late.

MOVIE, MOVIE (PG). Expert and entertaining spoof of past double bill movies with George C. Scott in fight movie and Busby Berkeley-type musical.

MURDER BY DECREE (PG). Christopher Plummer and James Mason play Holmes and Watson as they stalk Jack the Ripper in foggy London.

NORMA RAE (PG). Sally Field is outstanding in contemporary story of union organizing activities in southern textile mills.

THE PASSAGE (R). Cliche-ridden film about family's flight from Nazi persecution during World War II.

QUINTET (R). Paul Newman and Bibi Andersson play deadly game of survival in Robert Altman's icy, bizarre film.

SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR (PG). Alan Alda and a radiant Ellen Burstyn in warm, witty tale of an extramarital affair that persists for 26 years.

### MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
- PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
- R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.



## What movie will be year's Best Picture?

One of these movies will enter film history as Best Picture of the Year when the 51st annual Academy Awards is televised live beginning at 10 tonight on ABC-TV, Channel 7. Nominated movies are (top, from left) "Heaven Can Wait" (James Mason, left, and Warren Beatty); "Midnight Express" (Mike Killin, left, and Brad Davis); "An Unmarried Woman" (Alan Bates and Jill Clayburgh); (bottom, left) "Coming Home" (Jane Fonda and Jon

Voight) and "The Deer Hunter" (from left, Christopher Walken, Robert DeNiro, Chuck Aspegren, John Savage and John Cazale). If you cast your vote in the Observer & Eccentric's third annual Oscar-guessing contest, read the Monday, April 16, edition of the paper to find out if you came closest to picking the same winners as the members of the academy.

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