

"When it comes to war, America means business."

Written by Mark Leyner and Jeremy Pikser and John Cusack

Directed by Joshua Seftel

John Cusack ... Brand Hauser
Hilary Duff ... Yonica Babyyeah
Marisa Tomei ... Natalie Hegalhuizen
Joan Cusack ... Marsha Dillon
Dan Aykroyd ... Mr. Vice President
John McLaughlin ... Himself
Montel Williams ... GuideStar Voice (voice)
Ben Kingsley ... Walken / The Viceroy

Walken: Every empire is summed up in Rome. The Romans, Hauser, dudes of the human race, torchbearers of culture! You and I are centurions, on about to defend civilization against the barbarians!

Brand Hauser: Let's cut the shit, Walken! I like killing people as much as the next guy, but I signed up to kill the bad ones! Health clinics, trade unionist, journalists, agricultural coops, catholic liberation theologians, impoverished Colombian coffee farmers, these are the barbarians that are brave opponents of civilization? We turned Central America into a fuckin' graveyard! Whoever momentarily interrupts the accumulation of our wealth, we pulverize! I'm just not feeling good about that anymore, sir!

The conversation above illustrates what's both good and not so good about John Cusack's brutal satire, War, Inc. In it we see the understated yet incisive deflation of the Viceroy's (Ben Kingsley's) grandiose sentimentality by his number-1 mercenary, Brand Hauser (John Cusack)—and that's effective satire. Yet we also see the description of a reality that is not in the least fictional—it's like a comedian lampooning the Holocaust by giving an actual description—and that's when a satire doesn't work so well. If you're more or less exactly representing a reality that is unmitigatedly evil, the humor can't come through such representation.

And there are a number of truly horrifying scenes, in particular those affecting the conscientious journalist Natalie Hegalhuizen (Marisa Tomei), that stay engraved in your mind... not remotely ha ha funny, but grim records of an inescapably wretched corporate-America-run slaughterhouse in actual fact bequeathed to us courtesy the Bush Years. When you see a Gattling-gunship mow down a pocket of a hundred or so civilians, like a weedwhacker thru the dandelions, who have the audacity to get trapped between fighting forces, you'll know what I mean.

So in order to watch this movie with the right frame of mind, you need to focus on the folly and insanity of human behavior that leads to such gruesome consequences. And in realm of lampooning the principals behind America's psychotic foreign policy, the writers and director are unexcelled. They capture just the right balance between fiction and reality, such as the former vice president and Tamerlane chairman (Dan Aykroyd) telling Hauser to stop agonizing about his job and get with the goals and objectives:

The Vice President: [about Omar] Son of a bitch is trying to build a pipeline through his own cheap fucking country. We didn't liberate Turaqistan to get hustled by some cocksucking fezzhead, Hauser. Terminate. You do that voodoo that you do so well.

Tamerlane is clearly an analog to Halliburton and the other oil-consortium players behind America's imperial wars; Turaqistan is an Iraq-like country who's oil minister doesn't want to cut in the Western oil junta on his country's black gold; Hauser is the prototype for a military special forces expert whose conscience is beginning to unravel him; and Natalie is the straight-shooting true human who dies a little on the inside as she witnesses and reports on horror after horror... not only does she cringe at each instance of wrongdoing, she realizes any objective reporting will be twisted through the Orwellian mind-control machinery and reach few who care or can do anything about it.

That's the main plot: Will Hauser come to a change of heart through his budding relationship with Natalie and will anything close to truth and justice gain a foothold amongst this terrible human devastation? The subplot is more entertaining: The oil minister that Hauser is supposed to kill has a playboy son who plans to marry a sex-crazed international pop star Yonica Babyyeah (played with cool Britney-Spears sleaze by Hilary Duff). Hauser is given a cover as head of an American (Carlyle Group-like) trade show from which to more easily assassinate Babyyeah's future father-in-law.

It's the commercial setting surrounding the trade show that sparkles with devastating satire of the corporate hit men out to Americanize undemocratic savages worldwide. The film includes a wonderful series of sight gags and clever background images and sounds. I'm reminded of such classic deadpan spoof films as *Airplane* and *Hot Shots*. One example: Tamerlane/CIA-ish headquarters is fronted by a Popeye's Chicken franchise in "Emerald City," and when Hauser drives his Humvee to the door, you hear a public address system, "Unattended cars will be crushed and incinerated."

My favorite satirical accessories, however, are the ubiquitous high-definition, flat-screen monitors occupying the walls. When there is nothing being broadcast, the screen saver if you will consists of constantly morphing images of American icons: Ronald Reagan, Babe Ruth, Ronald McDonald, John Wayne, Superman, Marilyn Monroe, we see probably a hundred or more of these symbols of American culture. Of course, the images symbolize imperial designs to crush the alien culture with our own. Oh and another priceless accessory is Guide Star, sort of a General Motors OnStar on steroids, which Hauser uses for everything from international travel directions to psychological advice.

War, Inc. is a movie you have to see a few times to pick up on all the gags and subtle commentary. But it's worth it.

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