

Hunting Party captures one great performance, little else

filmreview

The Hunting Party

Now Playing

Written and Directed by Richard Shepard

Starring Richard Gere and Jesse Eisenberg

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Some stories are so utterly spectacular and brilliant that they need to be told on the big screen—*The Hunting Party* should be one of them. But for some bizarre reason, director/writer Richard Shepard has managed to turn a fascinating, true tale of journalistic mishaps into a steaming pile of feces.

The movie is based on the story of journalist Scott Anderson and his intrepid band of nostalgic journalists that decide to go looking for the infamous Serbian war criminal Radovan "The Fox" Karadzic. Unexpectedly, their halfhearted attempts to find Karadzic result in people thinking they are a CIA hit squad, and set in motion a series of bizarre events that led to NATO and American security officials becoming involved.

But in Shepard's eyes, such a historically accurate story wasn't good enough for the silver screen, and he attempted to make it extreme. Instead of focusing *The Hunting Party* on its natural protagonist, Scott Anderson, Shepard created an entirely fictitious journalist named Simon Hunt (Richard Gere)—one of the greatest

war correspondents in the world who eventually cracks from the pressure and disappears, only to re-emerge at the beginning of the movie. But, since being an insane and discredited journalist isn't extreme enough, Hunt also had the mother of his unborn child killed by none other than Karadzic.

Despite this convoluted excuse for a character, Richard Gere manages to mold this into one of his better performances. In a fantastic display, he actually makes Hunt's search for The

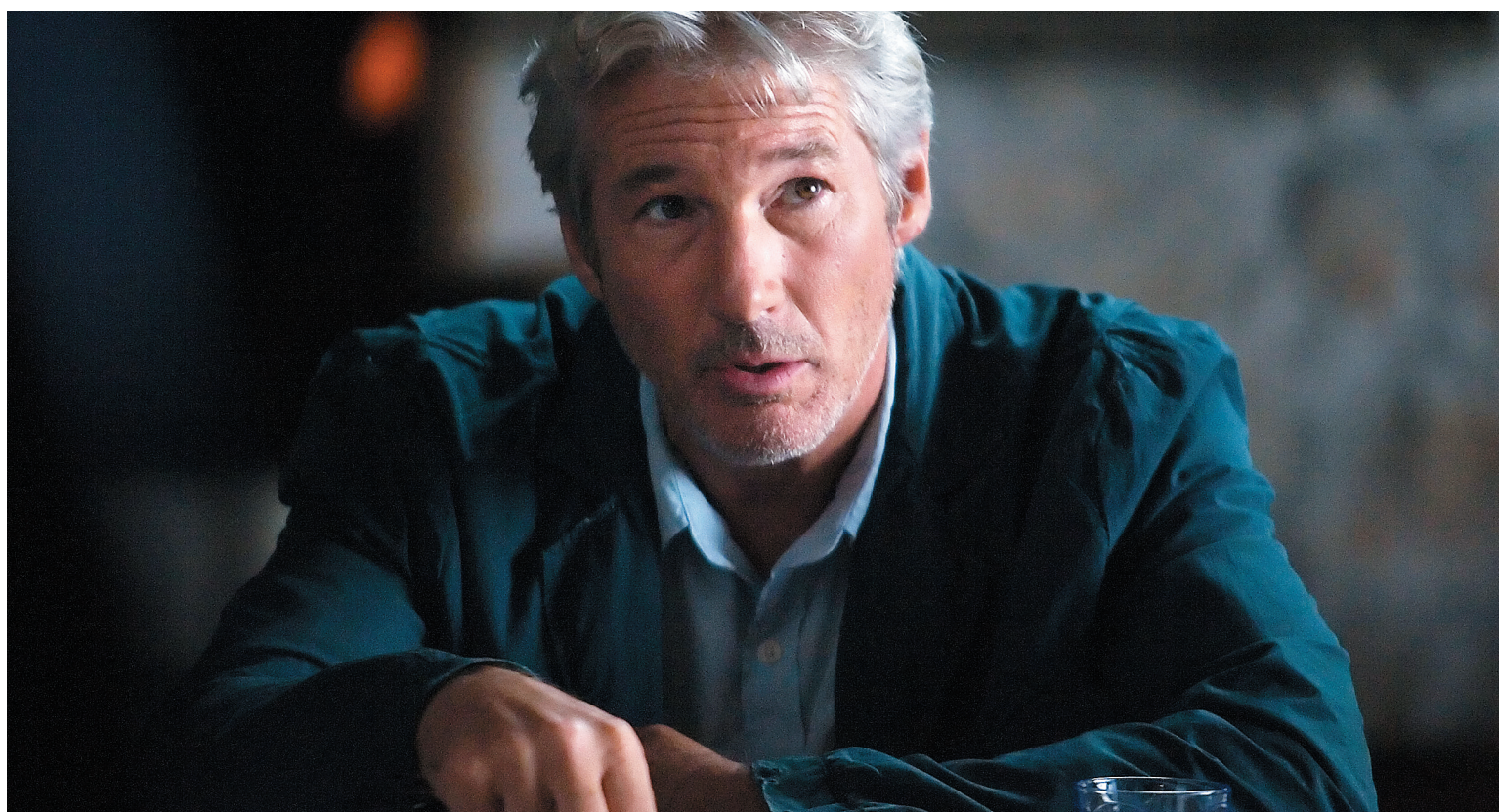
Fox convincing and dealing with his own emotional confusion believable. However, Richard Shepard apparently would have none of that, and engineered the film to obfuscate Gere's excellent performance with a series of Hollywood clichés.

Despite being the film's biggest star, Shepard relegates Gere to cameo status for half of the movie. Instead of Gere, the movie is filled with inconsequential characters such as a whiny and idealistic journalist (Jesse Eisenberg); a veteran cameraman

(Terrence Howard) who's addicted to war; and a busty, bikini-clad girlfriend (Diane Kruger) vacationing in Greece.

Maybe Shepard was attempting to inject sex appeal and some humour into the movie, but he ended up creating a film that's really a double-feature: one starring Gere in a fascinating story of a broken man dealing with conflicting emotional and ethical forces, and another following a merry team of thrown-togethers and the wacky hijinks that occur.

This split-identity is the central problem of the film. Richard Shepard took a factual story that examined relevant issues such as the nature of journalism, and instead turned it into *Harold and Kumar go to Bosnia*. But even if Shepard was banking on an audience looking for a feel good comedy, he decided to alienate them by keeping several graphic and emotionally charged war scenes. As a result, Shepard took a combination of great acting and an excellent premise to create a movie no one could possibly enjoy.



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