



Full Metal Jacket: One of the finest war films I have ever seen...shapeless but pragmatic enough.

I have never seen a Stanley Kubrick film, despite boasting about my utter penchant for films. But I heard about them a lot. The horror genre in Hollywood can surely be exemplified by Kubrick's 'The Shining'. He even had furnished his mastery, when he gave the dream of eye-popping sci-fi effects a refined shape in his '2001: A Space Odyssey'. But, I started by watching the first Kubrick film, by giving his war film 'Full Metal Jacket' a try. Why Full Metal jacket? Maybe it is because war films have a strong flavour of despair, horror and plethoric human drama and I love it all.

Full Metal Jacket consists of two distinct parts. A soft tone of 'Kiss me goodbye and write to me when I am gone' marks the beginning of the movie, where a group of grunts are sitting in the saloon getting their heads shaved off. That is the drill; to get them trained on Paris Island, so that they can find themselves capable of being recruited in the Marine Corps. The Island is a place where a straight face and nods to the senior drill instructor's commands becomes their only fate.

However, the drill instructor sergeant Hartman is not the one worth belying with. He is arrogant, aggressive, regards the privates as lowest form of life on the earth & shows rapid impulses to petty mistakes by the privates. His favourite barb-target is Private Gomer Pyle (so renamed from Leonard Lawrence, by the instructor himself), an obese klutz, who is often taunted and contradicted for his obese body and his utter inability, to participate in workouts. He is in fact meant to be quite obtuse.

The rigorous physical training sessions, continuous streak of taunts by the instructor & predestined antipathy, which his associate privates have for him, puts Pyle's innocence &

endurance to a test; a test which concludes with Pyle transforming into an antagonist, shooting the sergeant and himself.

The latter half is based in Vietnam and showcases war scenes and a bloodbath. Private Joker (Mathew Modine), the one who used to bunk with Pyle and the one to witness his antagonism is recruited as a war correspondent, in Stars and Stripes, which publishes a military newspaper in Vietnam. Following incoming enemy attacks all over South Vietnam, Joker is briefed and sent to Phu Bai, along with his cameraman – Rafterman, to interview the platoon and record their experiences, regarding the war. He meets his Paris Island associate - Private Cowboy, in Lusthog Squad, as the entire party gradually gets drawn into a booby trap.

Even though the film is pragmatic, it is completely shapeless and fails to remain within the realms of realism. The second half invites a fruitful comparison to other war films, like 'Platoon', 'Apocalypse Now' and 'Saving Private Ryan'. As it progresses, the film culminates in a horrendous picture of war and horror.

It is comfortably understandable and has no easy catharsis. Kubrick has enhanced the visuals quite fantastically, by his daunting angles, at the scene of carnage. He manages to create a marvellous visual epiphany, on the trembling prisoner, at the end of the movie. As compared to 'Apocalypse Now' and 'Platoon', Full Metal Jacket appears naïve, but can hold a tight grip on the viewer's attention, for the complete duration.

8 on 10 stars

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