

## Angelina Jolie is 'In the Land of Blood and Honey' in Directorial Debut

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The sorrows of war has been played out too many times in our so-called modern age. The excessively cruel Bosnian war – a three year conflict that introduced the vile term “ethnic cleansing” – is the background of Angelina Jolie’s directorial debut, “In the Land of Blood and Honey.”

The Bosnian War began in 1992 and in three short years displaced two million people and killed over 100,000 more. The Serbian army was especially cruel to the Muslim population, and Jolie symbolizes this by showing a split between a Serb and Muslim who were lovers before the war. The camera doesn’t blink in this film, as rape, murder and abject human atrocities are played out in a war that was a useless, ideological waste of time. Jolie works from her own very literate script, exposing a horror that happened a relatively short time ago.

Danijel (Goran Kostic) and Ajla (Zana Marjanovic) are first shown enjoying a evening in a night club in Sarajevo. He is Serbian and she is Muslim, but that has not prevented their attraction to each other. An explosion rocks the scene, and the beginnings of what will be the Bosnian War has symbolically begun. Danijel is called into military service, since his father is General Nebojsa Vukojevich (Rade Serbedzija), who leads the ethnic cleansing of all religious and non-Serbian nationalities from Sarajevo.



Zana Marjanovic (Ajla) and Goran Kostic (Danijel) 'In the Land of Blood and Honey'  
Photo credit: FilmDistrict and GK Films

Danijel and Ajla meet again in the midst of this action, as the troops he commands flushes out the apartment building that she and her sister Lejla (Vanessa Glodjo) reside in. The women are rounded up and subjected to intense cruelties, including the violence of rape. Ajla is spared this punishment by essentially becoming Danijel’s property. Their specious relationship somehow grows in this environment, but Ajla’s urge

to escape is ever present. Loyalties, allegiances and the very notion of love is distilled and destroyed through a war torn atmosphere.

This is a stunning debut for Jolie, in the sense that there are few punches pulled in the depiction of the cruelty, and although the subject matter is dense and complicated for the ill-informed world outside of the conflict, Jolie manages to make the purpose of these hostilities clear by focusing on the horror of human nature. This is mostly the story of the women caught up in the web of the cleansing, and the willingness for their captors to consider them tools for revenge and heartless brutality.

The acting is top-notch, and because many of the cast are Bosnian Serb, Muslim and Croatian Serb actors, this demonstrates a passion to get the story right through the portrayals. Goran Kostic as Danijel is a stand-out. His connection to Ajla, both before and after the war, stirs an inner conflict within him that leads to a battle within his soul, which the actor effectively communicates. He is stuck in a classic military situation – it is easier for him to join and fight than listen to the better angels of his nature. Zana Marjanovic as Ajla must go through a spectrum of emotions in captivity, yet never shows the cards in her hand. It is an unique give and take in a relationship.

The supporting players are notable as well. Rade Serbedzija as General Vukojevich is the epitome of human blight in war. He lives for his destructive power, and places the same dispensation upon the head of his son. The performance is unforgettable in its chilling ruination. Vanesa Glodjo as Ajla's sister Lejla gets significant screen time, both within and outside the conflict, and has an unspeakable barbarity inflicted upon her. War is beyond hell, even more than can be imagined.



Rade Serbedzija is General Nebojsa Vukojevich 'In the Land of Blood and Honey'  
Photo credit: FilmDistrict and GK Films

The story is a bit inflexible, despite following a very apparent timeline. The unpleasantness gets a bit overwhelming, which I'm sure was Jolie's point. The bottom line is that this "celebrity" and movie star has morphed into a driven political artist through this realm, and provides for our narrow viewpoint a bit of the modern definition of war and remembrance to consider.

We are generally weak and cowardly as human beings. When fighting for the artificial "territories" that we believe we "deserve," we need the ever-gargantuan weapon equivalents when staking our claim. How proud we are with those killing implements at our disposal, how small we actually are when we use them against our brothers and sisters.

*"In the Land of Blood and Honey" continues its limited release in Chicago on January 6th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Goran Kostic, Zana Marjanovic, Rade Serbedzija and Vanesa Glodjo. Written and directed by Angelina Jolie. Rated "R"*



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