

## ‘War Dogs’ Fires Blanks in a Sorry Attempt at Satire

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 19, 2016 - 6:39am

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “War Dogs” is an insufferable, self important, and heavy handed attempt at satire that can’t stop congratulating itself for all the big truths it’s blowing up, bro. “Old School” and “Hangover” director Todd Phillips fancies himself an auteur, but here it seems like he’s imitating David O Russell imitating Martin Scorsese.

He’s picked a subject ripe for satire. Inspired by the true story, David (Miles Teller) and Efraim (Jonah Hill) play a couple of old high school friends in Miami who reconnect at a friend’s funeral during the early oughts in the middle of the Afghan and Iraq wars. David is struggling just to get by as a massage therapist with a wife and a baby on the way, while Efraim has found a way to make easy cash by exploiting the bureaucracy of the military.



Miles Teller and Jonah Hill in ‘War Dogs’

*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

Efraim bids on small military contracts for things like night vision goggles or body armor, that the big defense contractors don’t bother with. He’s strictly a middle man making a good living off the crumbs left behind – but he’s got big plans to score a relatively big contract, and he brings David in on the operation. Together they become international arms dealers while barely leaving their office.

The film eventually sends our young arms dealers on a gun running trip to Iraq, and then they get mixed up in what could be the biggest score of their careers. They bid on a contract to outfit the Afghan Army, but get mixed up with a shady arms dealer (Bradley Cooper) offering Albanian arms on the cheap. What Cooper is doing in this movie is a mystery only Perry Mason could solve. As a movie actor, he's gone on to bigger and better things, and definitely seems like a star slumming in this misguided "prestige" project.

Jonah Hill has shown himself to be a good dramatic actor as well as a comedic one. While not everyone liked his Oscar nominated turn in "The Wolf Of Wall Street," I bought it, and his mannerisms and tics informed that character. In "War Dogs," he's all mannerisms and tics again, but there's nothing underneath other than a propensity to call people "bro," and then laugh at it his own awesomeness and what he sees as the incompetence of others. Instead of informing the character, Hill becomes grating, then annoying, and then downright intolerable. This may be a case of getting into the character too well, but I couldn't stand the sound of him by the time this movie was over.



Hill and Teller are Fired Up in 'War Dogs'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Miles Teller, meanwhile, seems to be getting pigeonholed into self-absorbed-prick type of roles. He made that vibe work for him for a while in movies like "Whiplash," "Divergent" and "The Spectacular Now," but the charm has worn off, especially when he doesn't have a steady hand guiding him. He's less annoying than Hill here, but director and co-screenwriter Todd Phillips is unable to make this character anything more than just a lying prick.

Phillips wants to be saying something about the relentless pursuit of the American Dream and the costs of capitalism, but he is not one for subtlety, and delivers the story's satirical punchlines about Bush and Cheney with a sledgehammer. He doesn't have any legitimate laughs to help him out here either, so those messages land with a resounding thud. Phillips does accomplish one thing – he almost makes Michael Bay's brainless bodybuilder bank robber caper from "Pain and Gain" look smart by comparison. And that takes some doing.

*"War Dogs" opens everywhere on August 19th. Featuring Miles Teller, Jonah Hill, Bradley Cooper, Kevin Pollak and Ana de Armas. Screenplay by Todd Phillips, Stephen Chin and Jason Smilovic. Directed by Todd Phillips. Rated "R"*



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