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Gere leads inconsistent film

Movie Review
 BY **BRET SCHULTE**
 Film Critic



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO GOLDWYN MAYER PICTURES
SHEN YUELIN (Bai Ling) begs Jack Moore (Richard Gere) not to run from Chinese officials in "Red Corner."

Hollywood's most unrestrained silver fox, Richard Gere, has been gnashing his teeth at the Chinese government for years over human rights violations and the suppression of religion in the communist nation — specifically, his own worship of choice, Buddhism.

Gere's newest political crusade, "Red Corner," is the marriage of Gere's noncommittal acting career and his devout dedication to Buddhism, which has been suppressed by Communist China throughout its mainland as well as in occupied Tibet, the former home of the exiled Dalai Lama.

But we all know how Gere's marriages turn out.

Like his ex-wife, Cindy Crawford, Gere's politics and religion proved to be too much for "Red Corner" to handle as well.

Partially filmed in China and largely completed in Los Angeles, "Red Corner" is an extremely confused and potentially political film about a brilliant American corporate lawyer, (always Gere's best character) Jack Moore, who becomes ensnared in China's shadowy and omnipotent justice system.

Sent to China by some monolithic American entertainment conglomerate, Moore is negotiating with Chinese officials to open up China's notoriously closed society to Western programming. The closing of the deal means billions of dollars for both parties involved, as well as a momentous step toward China's re-introduction into the Western world.

Of course, Gere's character meets a beautiful woman, who works as a model at a Chinese club and, of course, they land in bed before you have gotten a chance to wipe your glasses clean.

The next morning, Moore is arrested for the murder of the model, who was found stabbed to death in the early morning by Chinese soldiers.

Moore is promptly imprisoned and urged to confess his guilt, or face the 99 percent likelihood that he will receive capital punishment for his not-guilty plea. In China, the bullet for your shot to the head is billed to your family.

As the American's court-appointed

defense advocate, yet another beautiful woman (Bai Ling) enters the equation. Initially abrasive and stand-offish, she finally warms up to Moore (duh), and places herself in direct opposition of the system she so adamantly believes in to save his life.

While director Jon Avnet ("Fried Green Tomatoes") deserves a nod for not letting Gere sleep with more than one woman in the movie, he does little to minimize the obvious physical attraction between the characters, which ultimately only marginalizes the serious political nature of the film.

Moore fights for his innocence against nearly the entire Chinese political system, which is portrayed as consummately corrupt and intentionally evil — an interpretation easily embraced by Westerners, but one that is rather unfair, and even in its attempt, inconsistent at the same time. Treated with both respect and disdain by the Chinese, Moore finally reveals a plot against his life involving the communications deal and proves his innocence.

Remarkably consistent in the film are inconsistencies. Moore is beaten, intimidated and imprisoned by Chinese officials, but when he escapes through Beijing with a loaded weapon, the Nazi-like Chinese decide not to shoot him as they pursue him to the American embassy.

The Chinese court systems are equally unbalanced, with Moore struggling to interpret Chinese law and cus-

The Facts

Title: "Red Corner"
 Stars: Richard Gere, Bai Ling, Bradley Whitford, Byron Mann
 Rating: R (violence, adult situations, language)
 Grade: C
 Five Words: Leave political films to Stone

toms to save his life and the officials making jokes about him. Clearly influenced by Chinese officials, the court's judges seemingly arbitrarily decide to listen to him and ignore him, only to release him in the end.

While "Red Corner" paints a favorable portrayal of Chinese society and its people, its treatment of the political system is absurdly childish and one-dimensional, as is the character of Moore himself as a misunderstood playboy with a haunted past.

With Moore as a successful-yet-innocent protagonist, accompanied with a few cute moments of the blossoming love on behalf of two spiritually wounded souls, "Red Corner" looks like a puppy-love John Hughes adaptation of a pseudo-challenging John Grisham novel.

If you want to see a Richard Gere film, go rent "An Officer and a Gentleman." If you want to see a movie about China, rent "Empire of the Sun."

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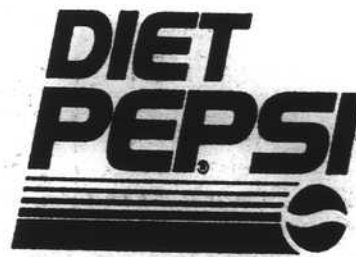
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