

LAND OF MINE

DENMARK/GERMANY

MARTIN ZANDVLIET



WINCHESTER
FILM SOCIETY

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It is the spring of 1945. Germany has surrendered and its forces are leaving Denmark after occupying it for five years. Driving by a column of bedraggled German soldiers, Sgt. Rasmussen spots one carrying a crumpled Danish flag. He screeches to a halt, jumps out of the Jeep and head-butts the man fiercely, screaming, "That's not your flag!" And that's not the end of it. While the dazed man lies on the ground, Rasmussen continues pounding him with his fists, till there's blood all over his face, the ground and the flag

Such a display of anger at the Nazi occupiers on the part of a Dane is understandable, but it's only individual. The punishment described by writer/director Martin Zandvliet in *Land of Mine*, though, is collective. It involved using numerous German soldiers to clear hundreds of thousands of land mines that the Nazis had left buried along the Danish coast.

Under the international treaties of day as well as the 1949 Geneva Convention, this action—which was ordered by the British but carried out by the Danes—was a war crime. According to Zandvliet, it has never been dealt with adequately in Danish histories or public discussions of the period.

Granted, there are large and very obvious reasons why Nazis have been portrayed as the most brutal of human monsters in the popular mythology of the movies. But it was always a simplification that invited correction. In 1981, Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot*, about the perils of life aboard a Nazi U-boat, became an international hit in part by humanizing the servicemen whose lives it dramatized. *Land of Mine* belongs to the line of mostly European films that have continued that effort.

Its task is simplified somewhat by the fact that the Nazi Reich has been reduced to smoldering rubble by the time the story begins, and the Germans we see are scared, skinny kids drafted into the army near the war's end—most look in the 15-to-17-year-old range. In an early scene, Danish officers explain to them that Denmark's coast was the most heavily mined in Europe, apparently because Hitler expected the Allied invasion to come there since it was the closest land point to Berlin. More than two million mines were left behind.

How many have seen mines, the boys are asked. Only a few hands go up. So, the Danes provide instruction on this very perilous undertaking. It involves taking a stick and probing the sand till a mine's metal bulk is detected, then gently removing it from the sand and defusing it by unscrewing and extracting the trigger. Needless to say, one wrong move and life or limb can be sacrificed.

When the story proper begins, Sgt. Rasmussen is in charge of 14 young Germans in a makeshift camp near a beach. At first, he seems as fierce as he did in that first scene. He tells the boys there are 60,000 mines buried on a nearby beach; if they remove six an hour, they can go home a few months hence—assuming they don't blow themselves up while executing their task.

Zandvliet has said he and his cinematographer wife Camilla Hjelm Knudsen looked to certain films of the 1960s as inspiration for the look of *Land of Mine*, and the influence is salutary. With its muted colors and naturalistic lighting the film aptly captures the beauty of seaside locales that frame the human struggle at the story's heart.

Godfrey Cheshire, RogerEbert.com

WRITER: Martin Zandvliet **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Camilla Hjelm **MUSIC:** Sune Martin

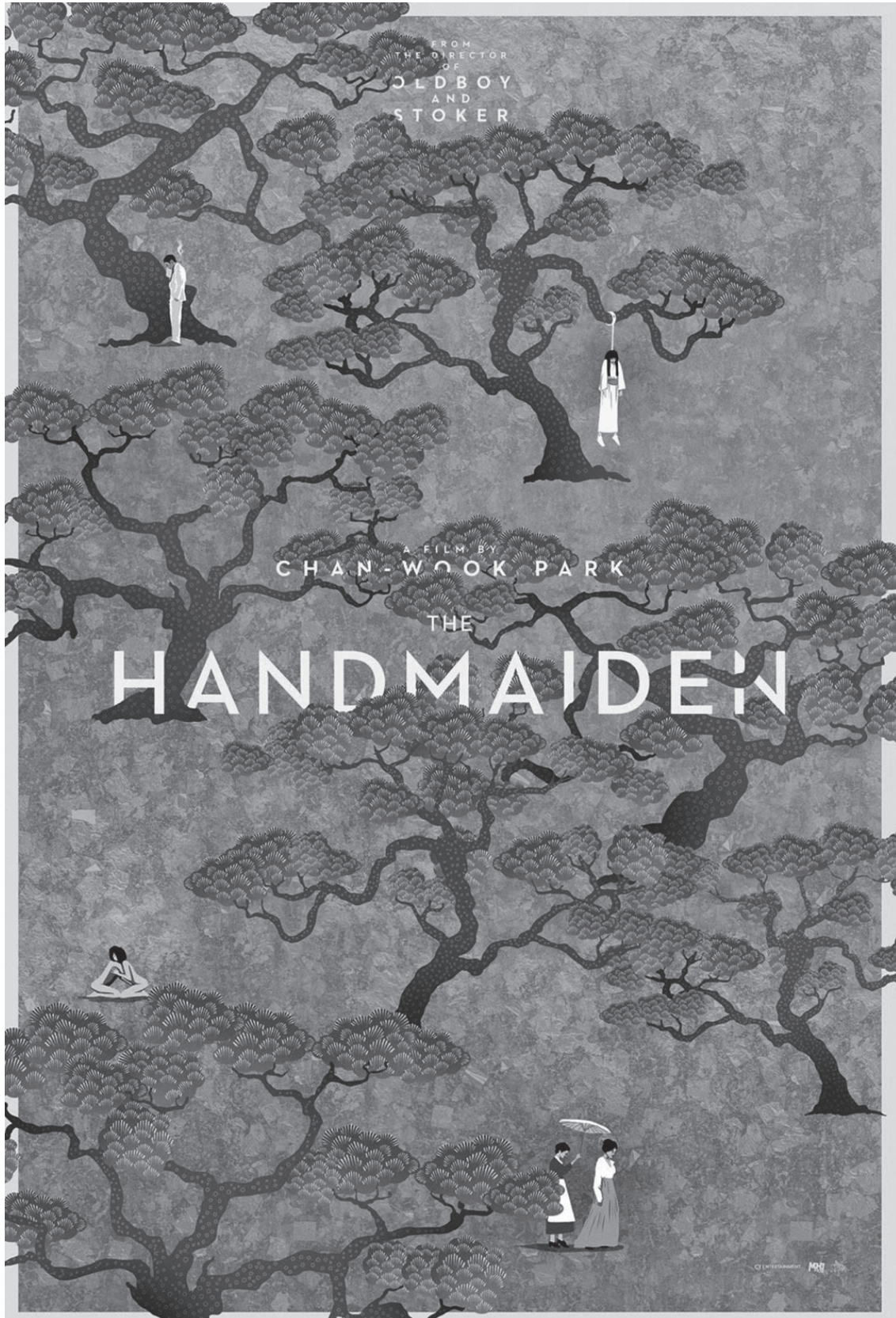
CAST: Sgt. Carl Rasmussen Roland Moller | Sebastian Louis Hofmann | Helmut Joel Basman | Lt. Ebbe Jensen Mikkel Boe Følsgaard

VOTING FOR AFERIM! A 20 | B 49 | C 28 | D 9 | E 9 | Rating 63.5% | Attendance 118

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