

Force Majeure (Turist) (15) Sweden/France/Norway/Denmark **5 December 2016**

DIRECTOR: **Ruben Östlund** Running time: 120 minutes (Swedish, French, Norwegian with English subtitles)

LEADING PLAYERS: **Johannes Kuhnke** (Tomas), **Lisa Loven Kongsli** (Ebba), **Vincent Wettergren** (Harry), **Clara Wettergren** (Vera), **Kristofer Hivju** (Mats), **Fanni Metelius** (Fanni).

SCRIPT: **Ruben Östlund**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Fredrik Wenzel**. EDITING: **Jacob Secher Schulsinger**. MUSIC: **Ola Fløttum**.

Force Majeure, or *Turist*, to give it its much blander, less ironic Scandinavian title, is a film which, far more chillingly than an American horror such as *The Purge*, exposes the soft underbelly of our safely ordered Western life style. At least among the 'haves', which most Scandinavians seem to be.

It presents us with a Swedish couple and their two children, on their annual, richly deserved, skiing holiday. The emblematic force of this 2.2 composition is underscored by the widescreen framing of shots depicting them lined-up on the moving walkway to and from the *pistes*, or descending the slopes in harmony, or simply collapsed in après-ski exhaustion on their double bed. (This reviewer never could see the point of skiing, and these sequences bring out the Sisyphean stupefaction of the exercise rather than any sense of elation!)

The elation comes soon, in the shape of a controlled avalanche, which first acts as sideshow, then as an unwanted distraction from their morning collation on the café terrace. Suddenly it seems, in an impressively judged single take by Östlund and his crew, as though the routine exercise by which the mountains are relieved of their burden of snow before it becomes dangerously thick, has been mistimed, or misdirected. In any event, Mr Swede decamps with somewhat unseemly haste amid the oncoming cloud of snow powder, only to return moments later to retrieve his family cowered beneath their table.

This is what *we* see, and, for the time being, that is where the matter remains. No close-ups, or cutaways showing the reactions of the players highlight either his shamefaced guilt, or their injured sense of security. But it's there, like an elephant in the room, and when eventually the wife speaks to him about it, it is clear that the husband

remembers the incident quite differently. Or pretends to. Before long it is clear that these twin emotions of guilt and resentment are set to tear this family unit apart if nothing changes. And on a skiing holiday all that does change is the weather.

Force Majeure is one of those films that builds slowly, gradually chipping away at the composure of its characters until a moment of catharsis can be reached. Never before have these winter resorts seemed so clinically utilitarian and so unsettling, like something out of science fiction. There are some wonderful bits of business involving one of the cleaners on the couple's floor, and I loved the repeated shots of snow cats redistributing the snow on the *pistes* by night, like the staff clearing away the damaged robots in *Westworld*. Östlund delights in revealing to us that, for all our need to channel our adrenalin drive through winter sports, for example, when the chips are down and the real McCoy arrives, we are still as unprepared for how we will respond.

When a *deus ex machina* does eventually arrive for the traumatised family unit, it is not in the shape we expect, and it is a sign of the times that, in a scene showing the renewed bond between father and son, the former's newfound emotional honesty manifests itself in the admission to the latter that, well yes, he does smoke!

David Clare