

Tom, Thanks for Greyhound

July 17, 2020

GREYHOUND (2020)

Directed by Aaron Schneider

Written by Tom Hanks & CS Forester

Starring Stephen Graham, Elisabeth Shue, & Tom Hanks as Ernest Krause

We live in a harbour town, a cultural hub for essential Maritime lifestyle - lobster, naval museums, moored vessels of all natures, wooden carvings of half-mad cap'ns in yellow slickers with pipes and brown jugs. That's home. And being home, I've taken it for granted the way others do their skyscrapers and sports organizations. For a long time it didn't matter to me that ours is the second most expansive natural harbour in the world, or that we maintain an eighteenth-century defensive citadel that never saw combat. It was always unspectacular that we housed the single largest burial site for victims of the Titanic, or that Churchill and Hemingway both drank here. And even less striking was my awareness of a docked Flower-Class corvette near the chip trucks, called HMCS Sackville K181. I bet if I'd known all my life it's the last of its kind, I still wouldn't have cared, but now I kind of do. Maybe because Tom Hanks cares.

Good to be with you again - I hope your endurance of the great wilting civilization has allowed you some sparing weekends of reprieve. As I write this, I'm lying on a beach near Cole Harbour, surrounded by people who shared my goal of escaping the inner-city blaze. Most of them are seemingly more comfortable doing so than I've felt in a while, but my summer vacation's only just started, and perhaps I'll find my centre yet. Still, this break will only last nine days, roughly a third of what's turned out to be the average person's pandemic cooperation threshold. I realize I'm passing this judgement from a crowded beach, but I don't know, it's windy here, and anyway, I'm trying to forget The Great Wilt. In previous summers, I've been more inclined to duck from the oppressive heat by hiding out in a movie theatre, but for all the crowds, it's not windy in movie theatres. Instead I have to drive up to the shore in the daytime, and watch new releases on Apple TV+ in the evenings. It's not ideal, but if TH can handle it, so can I.

His theatrical compromise of the season comes in the form of a WWII thriller called Greyhound. Hanks doesn't just star as Captain Ernest Krause, he also adapted the screenplay from CS Forester's *The Good Shepherd* (I guess the title was in-use). From moving acceptance speeches to an acclaimed book of essays, it's been well-established the man can write nearly as well as he can act. But Greyhound doesn't feel like the humanist text we might expect from TH; it doesn't have the softness of his previous scripts. In fact, it doesn't quite feel like a piece of writing at all, but rather a series of manic visuals conveying the truth and trauma of war on the sea. Once it's understood this is the kind of movie you're getting, the tension is enough. It is, after all, a faithful narrative construct to lead your audience to root for Tom Hanks and against nazis. But my allegiances were a bit more specific given my preoccupation with the ally ship Dicky, a Canadian corvette that looked mighty familiar. As it turns out, I knew the actor and her name was Sackville. Evidently, digital effects artists visited her in my town and took surveys for her rendering in the movie Greyhound. Suddenly, I cared a lot. This war was personal.

It's difficult to predict where this film will land in the canon. It doesn't have the torment of *Saving Private Ryan* or the development of *Band of Brothers*; it doesn't have the investability of *The Hunt For Red October* or the shameless masculinity of *Con Air*. Greyhound seems to have a deliberate lack of personal attachment. The movie's single on-land scene features Krause exchanging Christmas gifts and discussions of marriage with his love Evelyn (Elisabeth Shue). She stays with him on the ship in the form of a pair of slippers, which are soon drenched in blood due to his unyielding control issues. Apart from a few fleeting Evelyn memories and humble prayers, Krause remains brashly dismissive of all conventions that remind him of his humanity. He won't sleep, he won't trade-off; he won't even eat his ham and eggs, as if food has nothing to do with his ability to keep going. This delusion is shattered when an enemy attack kills three of his men, including the ship's head chef. Despite what I'm guessing is a deeply familiar commitment to stoicism for many vets, I struggle to imagine Greyhound becoming one of anyone's faithful rewatchables. Perhaps if it got to kick off its life on a bigger screen, I'd feel differently. If nothing else, it's a moving snapshot of a point in time, with gorgeous cinematography and a lead who always keeps us safe. Plus you can polish it off in under ninety minutes and we need more movies like that.

I took a drive to the Halifax Waterfront to visit K181 on a day too gloomy for the beach. The tourism season is cancelled for obvious reasons, so it's quiet down there. Normally you can help yourself to a tour about the ship; she's outfitted with placards and uniformed mannequins. But the HMCS Sackville's website says her museum will remain closed this year. You can spot from the wharf where someone's painted Donald Duck on her cabin walls - permissively, I assume, though I can't imagine why. There was nothing so blithe about her original purposes, her history. I guess it's easy to take that for granted. It was so long ago. Someday, this new war, this global navigation of and around a hostile virus, will be but a time in history; a time to be defined but unimposed by. God willing, a one-hundred-and-fifty year old Tom Hanks will still be around to star in the movie they make about The Great Wilt. He can even play himself! And, fingers crossed, hopefully we can all go see it in theatres.

Thx!