

Commentary...

"Hostiles": A tale of trauma from the frontier

By Jim Cornelius
Editor In Chief

"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially."

— Ernest Hemingway

Veteran cavalry sergeant Tommy Metz stands in the Montana mud, a drenching nighttime rain sluicing down on his bare head, beading in his thick, black beard. Captain Joe Blocker tells him gently to get into his tent, before he freezes.

Sgt. Metz peers to the inky sky above, his eyes blinking against the downpour. His voice is soft, dead.

"I don't feel anything."

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Sgt. Metz, like every character in Scott Cooper's Western "Hostiles," is traumatized. In his day, they called it "Soldier's Heart." Today, he would likely be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Captain Blocker, too, is traumatized. As the tale begins, on an Army outpost on the high desert of New Mexico, he coldly tells a smug and condescending *Harper's Weekly* correspondent that he has "a warbag of reasons" to hate the Indians he has spent the past 20 years fighting. He has seen friends die horribly at their hands; he describes the slaughter of fellow fighting men at the hands of Cheyenne Chief Yellow Hawk and his Dog Soldiers:

"There wasn't enough left of those poor men to fill a slop pail."

The intensity of his rage at being ordered to escort that same Chief Yellow Hawk — now "ate up with the cancer" — to Montana to die on his home ground is palpable.

Thus is set in motion a journey across a magnificent landscape into a heart of darkness. For trauma is heaped upon trauma in this bleak, sad — yet ultimately redemptive — tale that reminds us that

the conquest of the American West (and all frontiers) came at a searing cost to just about everybody.

The native peoples lost everything — land, freedom, even identity. And the men who took it from them saw and did things they could never un-see or un-do. Throughout "Hostiles," the veteran soldiers remind each other that they have killed not only warriors, but women and children, too. They are all killers, and saying "I did my job" is no salve to the moral injury that has crept into their bones as insidiously and as fatally as the cancer eating at Yellow Hawk.

And the trauma is not reserved for men. The central figure of Rosalie Quaid is a study in the worst kind of horror that can befall a woman. The sound of her gasping, keening grief makes the skin crawl. It hurts.

The violence of "Hostiles" is, by contemporary standards, not particularly graphic. But there is something in the way writer/director Cooper handles it — the implied ferocity — that makes it especially harrowing.

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"Hostiles," like all Westerns, is not really dealing in history. The verisimilitude is there; the clothing,

accouterments and weaponry are true to time and place, and I've never seen an Army outpost of the late frontier period portrayed as accurately. The film looks like a Frederick Remington painting brought to life. But "Hostiles" is dealing in Myth — not in the sense of something that is false, but in the other, grander meaning, the one that recognizes Myth as the stories a people tell to explain and culturally understand nature, history and the way humans behave.

In that, "Hostiles" tells a truth about the frontier experience. While it played out across a glorious landscape, and represented freedom and opportunity the likes of which ordinary people had not seen before in history, it was terribly, terribly hard on people's humanity.

Interpersonal conflict and violence was actually the least of it, though when it came it was often savage in the extreme. But just ordinary day-to-day living could kill you. Accident and disease took off far more pioneers and Indians than warfare ever did. A parent in that time and place would almost certainly lose at least one child, and many was the man who lost babe and wife both in the throes of childbirth.

An injury that got infected



The very good and the very bad are taken impartially. But those who do make it ... they are, indeed, strong at the broken places.

"Hostiles" is currently playing at Sisters Movie House.

SISTERS ENTERTAINMENT & EVENTS

WED...JAN. 31

Sisters High School ARTifacts Art Experience 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. \$5 or \$20 per family. Hands-on art stations, student art gallery, live entertainment & refreshments from the SHS culinary art students! For more information call SHS at 541-549-4045.

The Fly Fisher's Place Mini Festival 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. FREE slideshow on The Metolius, fly tying demo, beer, appetizers, prizes and more! For info call 541-549-3474 or go to flyfishersplace.com.

Hardtails Bar & Grill Karaoke Night! 9 p.m. Every Wednesday, no cover! For info call 541-549-6114 or go online to hardtailsoregon.com.

Sisters Saloon Texas Hold 'Em Tournament 7 p.m. Every Wednesday! For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go online to sistersaloon.net.

THURS...FEB. 1

Sisters Saloon Karaoke Night! 9 p.m. Every Thursday, no cover! For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go to sistersaloon.net.

FRI...FEB. 2

Chops Bistro Live Music! 6 to 8 p.m. No cover! For more information call 541-549-6015.

Hardtails Bar & Grill Karaoke Night! 9 p.m. Every Friday, no cover! For info call 541-549-6114 or go online to hardtailsoregon.com.

SAT...FEB. 3

Sisters Saloon Live Music with Melanie Rose Dyer & Daniel Cooper 7 to 10 p.m. No cover! For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go to sistersaloon.net.

Cork Cellars Live Music with Cuppa Joe 7 to 9 p.m. No cover! For additional information call 541-549-2675 or go online to corkcellarswinebistro.com.

Chops Bistro Live Music! 6 to 8 p.m. No cover! For more information call 541-549-6015.

Hardtails Bar & Grill Karaoke Night! 9 p.m. Every Saturday (if no live music is scheduled), no cover! For info call 541-549-6114 or go online to hardtailsoregon.com.

SUN...FEB. 4

Hardtails Bar & Grill Annual Party for the Big Game! 1 p.m. Watch on the hi-def 7x7-ft. Jumbotron, with free Jello shots & lots of food and drink specials! Kickoff is at 3:30 p.m. For more information call 541-549-6114 or go online to hardtailsoregon.com.

Chops Bistro Live Music with Bill Keale 5 to 8 p.m. No cover! For additional information call 541-549-6015.

TUES...FEB. 6

Sisters Saloon Trivia Night 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Sign-up is at 6:15 p.m. Free, every Tuesday! For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go to sistersaloon.net.

WED...FEB. 7

Sisters Movie House Backcountry Film Festival 7 p.m. The film festival is screening in Sisters one night only! This 14th annual festival celebrates the human-powered experience! For tickets go to DiscoverYourForest.org.

The Fly Fisher's Place Mini Festival 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. FREE slideshow on The Crooked River & Euro Nymphing, fly tying demo, beer, appetizers, prizes and more! For information call 541-549-3474 or go online to flyfishersplace.com.

Hardtails Bar & Grill Karaoke Night! 9 p.m. Every Wednesday, no cover! For additional information call 541-549-6114 or go online to hardtailsoregon.com.

Sisters Saloon Texas Hold 'Em Tournament 7 p.m. Every Wednesday! For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go online to sistersaloon.net.

THURS..FEB. 8

FivePine Conference Center Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Ceremony 5:30 p.m. social hour with ceremony at 6:30 p.m. \$35 per person includes appetizers (no host drinks). RSVP by February 1 to jeri@sisterscountry.com or call 541-549-0251.

Event listings are free to advertisers. Submit items by 5 p.m. Fridays to teresa@nuggetnews.com

Sisters MOVIE HOUSE

STARTS FRIDAY
FRI., FEB. 2 – THURS., FEB. 8

Phantom Thread (R)
Fri 4:30, 7:15
Sat-Sun 1:45, 4:30, 7:15
Mon-Thurs 4:30, 7:15

Molly's Game (R)
Fri 4:00
Sat-Sun 1:15, 6:45
Mon-Thurs 4:00

Hostiles (R)
Fri 4:15, 7:00
Sat-Sun 1:30, 4:15, 7:00
Mon-Thurs 4:15, 7:00

The Shape of Water (R)
Fri 6:45
Sat-Sun 4:00; Mon 6:45
Thurs 6:45

The Post (PG-13)
Fri 5:00, 7:30
Sat-Sun 2:15, 5:00, 7:30
Mon-Thurs 5:00, 7:30

Exhibition: Hockney at Royal Academy (NR)
Tues 7:15

Movie times and titles are subject to change. Visit website or call for latest information.

WWW.SISTERSMOVIEHOUSE.COM

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