

The Package ★★

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: Skip It

As I watched *The Package* slowly unfold, I kept waiting for the twist. A week later ... I still was waiting. *The Package* never delivered the goods.

The movie involves a conspiracy to sabotage Soviet-American peace talks aimed at ending the arms race. Gene Hackman stars as Sergeant Gallagher, an everyday Joe who unwittingly becomes a pawn in the elaborate scheme. He gets caught up in a deadly game of cat and mouse in which he must always stay one step ahead of the villains in order to foil the conspiracy and clear his name.

For a film that contains so many layers of deception and intrigue, *The Package* sure is boring, not to mention convoluted and confusing. The problem with this yawner is that it has no fun at all with its premise. The movie could have had the decency to offer us some character psychology or stylish direction, anything to compensate for its stale story line.

The characters in *The Package* play second fiddle to the plot. Hackman excels at playing all kinds of roles, but he is usually at his best playing simple, down-to-earth types. The role of Sergeant Gallagher should have been right up Hackman's al-

ley, but the screenplay gives him little, if any, freedom to embellish the character with subtle nuances. The role forces him to merely go through the motions. Hackman is just too talented to be wasting his time on such a non-character. The cast also includes Joanna Cassidy and Dennis Franz as Gallagher's allies and Tommy Lee Jones and John Heard as his enemies. The only stand-out is Jones, who plays a wickedly devious assassin.

In all fairness, *The Package* isn't quite as bleak as I've made it out to be. The movie is a thriller, and it does have its thrills. The well-crafted second act is extremely taut and tense; you can feel danger in the air. You even feel a little fearful for the characters. But by the end, the plot has careened so far out of control, that a "who cares? ... let's get this over with!" attitude prevails. The movie's ludicrous, overblown climax is the final straw: as Hackman urgently races against time to save the day, he comes across nearly every car chase cliché in the book. He gets delayed not only by a crossing train, but also by an eighteen-wheeler and a rising draw bridge. Personally, I'd rather see *The Manchurian Candidate* again.