

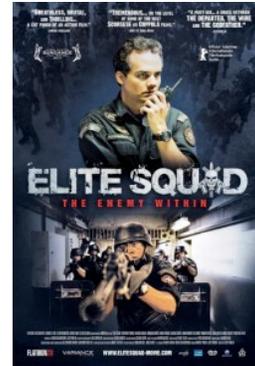
Forbes

Why The Academy Should Give An Oscar To 'Elite Squad 2'

11/09/2011 by Anderson Antunes

The Academy Award was originally conceived in the late 1920s by MGM studio boss Louis Mayer to help the film industry improve its artistic image. Today, it's constantly accused of being more motivated by marketing than quality and for rewarding formulaic blockbusters instead of original art films. It's time to go back to the basics.

Based on that premise, the Academy should award top honors to the Brazilian Martin Scorsese-style crime drama "[Elite Squad 2: The Enemy Within](#)," which is being released in the U.S. next Friday.



A sequel of the 2007 hit "Elite Squad," directed by Jose Padilha, "Elite Squad 2" is regarded as a powerful interpretation of Brazil's complex security issues, especially in Rio de Janeiro, where the story is set. In the first movie, we are introduced to Captain Nascimento, a police officer with a self-righteous approach to crime-fighting, often torturing and even murdering drug lords in his almost personal struggle against organized crime in the "favelas," or shanty towns.

Much to Padilha's surprise, Nascimento, who was originally intended to be an anti-hero, ended up becoming a role model for many Brazilians, who looked up to his unlawful, enthusiastic, but yet efficient way of dealing with crime. Truth be told, that's something they didn't see coming from politicians. The sequel takes place 13 years after the events of the first movie, and the same dilemma persists. This time around, however, Nascimento, now a Lieutenant Colonel, is amongst those in charge of the "sistema," getting caught in bloody political disputes involving the authorities and paramilitary groups known as "militias," gangs formed of current and former policemen, firemen, soldiers, security guards and supported, in several cases, by all of the spheres of public power. As the title of the sequel indicates, the enemy, now, is different. And more dangerous.

"Elite Squad 2: The Enemy Within," was inspired by Rio's congressman Marcelo Freixo's efforts to end the dominance of the city's militias. Freixo's crusade against organized crime began in 2006, when he decided to expose the militias, which provide favelas with basic services like gas, water, cable television and alternative transportation. Meanwhile, they also charge "protection money" from residents. In spite of that, the militias have also received support from some unlikely places. The former mayor of Rio, the outspoken and opportunistic Cesar Maia, has declared that the militias are "the lesser of two evils" and a type of "community self-defense" against the drug traffickers.

Rio's current mayor, Eduardo Paes, agrees. He defended the militias on national television, suggesting that in places where the state has lost its authority, the militias "provide the population with peace." The problem is the state has nearly no authority in these areas, with approximately 45% of Rio's favelas under the control of drug lords, while 50% are run by the militias and only 5% are controlled by the state government through its Pacification Program (UPP), according to a survey by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

The probe led by Freixo investigated over 1,000 people, with 500 of them ending up behind bars, including another congressman, who was sent to prison in 2007 for his involvement with the militias. His final report

put forward 58 recommendations to combat the problem, but many have yet to be implemented. “My investigation was seriously delayed because there were a lot of interested parties,” Freixo told reporters recently. “We put a lot of people in prison, which was important as it weakened the militias. But we need to hit them financially. A single one of the 170 militias investigated, now totalling 300, was making \$97,000 a day. That’s a lot of money. Above all, it is a business. ”

Unfortunately, Freixo’s work has been compromised earlier this month, when he announced his decision of fleeing Brazil with his family after an escalation of threats to his life. Some militias are offering as much as R\$ 400.000,00 (\$230,000) for his head. Freixo lives surrounded by bodyguards, among other measures for his personal protection. His currently location remains unknown, and he sees it as the price he is paying for merely doing his job.

The combination of a reality that’s being debated in depth throughout society, plus a good plot, a great cast and the conviction that “ makes it tough to dismiss,” as [put it by Village Voice’s film critic Mark Holcomb](#), is what ultimately makes “Elite Squad 2: The Enemy Within” a great movie. Praised equally by the press as it has been by the audiences, the movie is already the all-time largest box office ticket seller and highest-grossing film in Brazil, where it earned around \$63 million under a budget of \$9.5 million. It is also Brazil’s entry into the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film this year.

One of those cases when reality and fiction begin to merge, “Elite Squad 2” is both artistically and socially relevant like no other movie has recently been, and it has caused tremendous impact in the lives of many people, especially that of Marcelo Freixo.

Hopefully, the Academy will recognize it.