

FORCE MAJEURE

SWEDEN 2014, 120 MIN

RUBEN ÖSTLUND



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In Ruben Östlund's sharp-edged marital drama *Force Majeure*, a young Swedish family – mom, dad, two grade school age kids – begin their skiing vacation in an Alpine resort in typical holiday high spirits. The first day on the slopes, they pause to have their pictures taken en famille by a tourist photographer, as if to acquire tangible evidence of their sentimental solidarity and joy at outdoorsy togetherness.

Then, on the vacation's second day, something extraordinary happens. They are having lunch at the resort's rooftop restaurant when, just after their food has been served, they hear a loud report from the mountain above them, and snow begins to topple down the slopes.

Östlund has said the film was inspired by an incident in which a Swedish couple, friends of his, went on vacation to Latin America. They were having dinner when gunmen burst into the restaurant and began firing. Rather than protecting his wife, the husband dove for cover.

Taking the idea of a sudden upset of familial normality as his dramatic kernel, Östlund fashions an examination of marital upset that's beautifully written, sometimes quite funny, and plotted with a kind of forensic exactitude. Unlike American movies, where our identification with one character or another would likely be imposed from the outset, *Force Majeure* stands back from its couple, allowing us to inspect the characters from a discreet distance and draw our own conclusions.

The film has a real feeling of cultural currency, which sometimes comes through in small details that can seem more resonant in thinking back on them. For instance, the two people the main couple share that "godawful dinner" with are a young American guy and an older Swedish woman who's picked him up that morning. In introducing the guy, the woman says he's told her he's "very religious." He replies that he said no such thing, only that he's "not an atheist."

Beyond another example of a man and a woman narrating the same incident differently, this moment reminds us that *Force Majeure* is a Swedish film belonging to the era after Ingmar Bergman's "silence of God." With no deity to blame for that avalanche – an "act of God" to some—the humans in this tale are left to fend for themselves.

A prize-winner at Cannes this year, and easily one of the most impressive European dramas of late, *Force Majeure* is assured and finely calibrated on every level, with especially expert, nuanced performances by its leads. Östlund's cool, distanced style—the camera often follows characters from behind with fluid motions, or gazes down from a height at the ski slopes or the hotel's interiors—has been compared to that of Michael Haneke, though the adjective "Kubrickian" might also be applied: Though less horrific (or final) than that of *The Shining*, the alpine marital ordeal chronicled here is no less striking.

Godfrey Cheshire, Rogerebert

WRITING CREDITS: Ruben Östlund **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Fredrik Wenzel **MUSIC:** Ola Fløttum

CAST: Tomas Johannes Kuhnke | Ebba Lisa Loven Kongsli | Harry Vincent Wettergren | Vera Clara Wettergren

VOTING FOR *Wild Tales* A67 | B16 | C5 | D1 | E1 | Rating 90.8% | Attendance 95

Our next screening | **Duke of Burgundy** | Tuesday 5 January 2016. 8.00pm

'...filthy and fraught – with genuine emotion...'