



Tangerines

Director: Zaza Urushadze
Country: Estonia/Georgia
Date: 2013

A review by Dennis Harvey for *Variety*:

A small-scale, poignant and accessible anti-war statement, Georgian writer-director Zaza Urushadze's "Tangerines" spotlights regional conflict in 1992 Abkhazia, as one longtime rural resident who's refused to flee takes in two wounded fighters on opposite sides. Beautifully shot by Rein Kotov, this seriocomic miniature won the audience award and a directing prize at last year's Warsaw Film Festival, and is sure to accumulate more acclaim en route to niche international sales. Biz could be helped by the recent bump in attention to its otherwise little-noted setting: At its uppermost tip, Abkhazia is less than five miles from Winter Olympics host Sochi, but it might as well be 5,000, since the disputed territory's borders remain tightly closed.

Once ethnic/nationalistic strife commenced in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, a large local minority of Estonian extraction mostly bowed to pressure and left for their ancestral homeland. A stubborn holdout is carpenter/grandfather Ivo (Lembit Ulfsak), who's stayed behind partly to help neighbor Margus (Elmo Nüganen) harvest his annual tangerine crop. Worrying when the fighting will reach them, they don't have long to wait before it does — just outside Ivo's doorstep, there's a shootout between Georgian and Russia-backed North Caucasian forces that leaves several dead.



To avoid attracting reprisal violence, the two men bury the victims and hide their vehicles. But they can only do so much to control the animosity that moves right into Ivo's home, between temporarily bedridden survivors Ahmed (Giorgi Nakashidze) and Nika (Mikhail Meskhi). Ahmed, a Chechen mercenary, is particularly keen on avenging his fallen comrades by killing the Georgian Nika — at least once they're both ambulatory again. But the long period of forced cohabitation during recovery has its

collectively humanizing effect. While the protags can't prevent the outside world from wreaking further havoc, they gradually grow connected to each other in ways that transcend geographic, ethnic and religious divides.

With nearly five-decade screen veteran Ulfsak setting the wry, soulful tenor, "Tangerines" balances humor and seriousness in deft fashion, its delicacy abetted by all thespians and design contributions — a sole exception being the rather bombastic power ballad running over the final credits. Shot in the western Georgia region of Guria, the film, with its gorgeous landscapes, further underlines the pointlessness of organized human bloodshed in the larger context of nature's bounty.

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