

## **Luxury of Escapism: The Grand Budapest Hotel**

*The Grand Budapest Hotel* directed by Wes Anderson, illustrates the luxury of living in the shelter of escapism. The fictional country, Zubrowka represents a central country in Europe near the beginning of World War II. The Grand Budapest Hotel is a place of luxury and fantasy where guests can escape the realities of life in a time of death and tragedy.

The set builds the character of the Grand Budapest Hotel from its brightly colored costumes to the light pastel colors of the hotel to the whimsical music that is constantly playing in the background of the movie. A fantasy world is created in which the guests can temporarily live. The bright purple suits that the hotel staff wears helps generate the feeling of excitement as they rush around the hotel gleefully interacting with the guests. The pastel colors make the hotel appear exceptionally welcoming. Finally, the whimsical score overwhelms the audience with fantastic expectations as they are swept away in the story of this beautiful hotel.

Wes Anderson first introduces the concept of escaping the real world when the audience is first introduced to the Grand Budapest Hotel. It is sitting atop a mountain, physically isolated from general civilization with a single escalator traveling diagonally up the mountainside as the only way to reach the entrance of the hotel. The isolation is a literal example of escapism. Entering the hotel is leaving real life behind for a carefree world of luxury.

Zero Moustafa's backstory is an example of someone leaving a terrible life behind in the search of a new better life. Zero ran away from his village that was burned to the ground and where his family was murdered. He found himself at the Grand Budapest Hotel where he could start over with his new job as the hotel lobby boy. He was thrown into Mr. Gustave's illusion of

a perfect world where he was trained to be the best lobby boy, catering to the guest's unrealistic expectations and needs.

The shot that most emphasizes the escapism in the movie is the scene where Zero is showing Mr. Gustave the newspaper with the article about the death of Madame D., one of Mr. Gustave's many elderly female lovers. The shot is an overhead shot which pans down from the top of the newspaper past large articles about the oncoming war to a small article about the mysterious death of Madame D. A conscious effort is made to ignore the war which they are forced to face only at parts of the movie when Zero and Mr. Gustave are not located at the Grand Budapest Hotel.

However, when Zero and Mr. Gustave do finally return to the hotel, reality hits when Dimitri leads the "ZZ" men (clear stand-ins for Nazis) in an invasion of the hotel in order to arrest Mr. Gustave for stealing the "Boy with Apple" painting. Even though reality has temporarily broken through the fantasy world in the Grand Budapest Hotel, Mr. Gustave is quickly able to escape into another fantasy world, which he constructs while he is in jail. Mr. Gustave creates a role for himself as the unofficial concierge of the jail in which he is being held. He pushes a cart full of food past all of the cells offering "mush" to the inmates; and as in true Mr. Gustave fashion, he becomes close friends with some inmates who are planning an escape. They decide to include Mr. Gustave in their plan because of the trust that was built up between the group and Mr. Gustave. The plan was successfully executed, and Mr. Gustave escaped with the help of the group, leading him to Zero who was waiting patiently for Mr. Gustave outside of the jail.

A psychopathic man named Jopling, is hired by Dimitri. He chases Zero and Mr. Gustave with the intent of killing them both. However, Zero and Mr. Gustave are only able to escape

through a chain of Grand hotel concierges, all members of the Crossed Keys Secret Society. The unrealistic pathway that Zero and Mr. Gustave take to get home is an example of escapism.

There are two important scenes that take place in the train that directly acknowledge the war. The first train scene is near the beginning of the movie. Zero and Mr. Gustave had just left the Grand Budapest Hotel after hearing the news of Madame D.'s death. The train suddenly halts. Mr. Gustave asks, "Why are we stopping at a barley field?" At that point, the "ZZ" men barge into their passenger car demanding papers from Zero and Mr. Gustave. Mr. Gustave's papers were up to date, while Zero's were not. The men grab Zero, at which point Mr. Gustave demands, "Hands off my lobby boy!" Luckily, one of the men recognizes Mr. Gustave and decides to let Zero go out of courtesy for Mr. Gustave. This type of escape is obviously unrealistic, and plays well into Mr. Gustave's luxurious fantasy world. The second train scene is closer to the end of the movie. It is in black and white foreshadowing the fact that they were to finally experience the full force of the impending war. When the train halts again, Zero asks, "Why are we stopping at a barley field again?" However this time they were not so lucky. The "ZZ" men barge in and attack Zero. Unfortunately, in his attempt to defend Zero, Mr. Gustave is shot and killed.

The final scene cuts to old Zero Moustafa who has been narrating the story during the whole movie. The fantastical pattern of escapism throughout the movie ends when the loneliness underneath the magical world of the Grand Budapest Hotel is revealed. Zero Moustafa could not maintain the illusion of the Grand Budapest Hotel after his beloved Agatha died. In his loneliness, he did not upkeep the quality of the hotel, reflecting the feeling of loss Mr. Moustafa feels when he thinks about the Grand Budapest Hotel. The Grand Budapest Hotel is a symbolism for escapism no more.