

Dr. Ed's Movie Reviews 2006

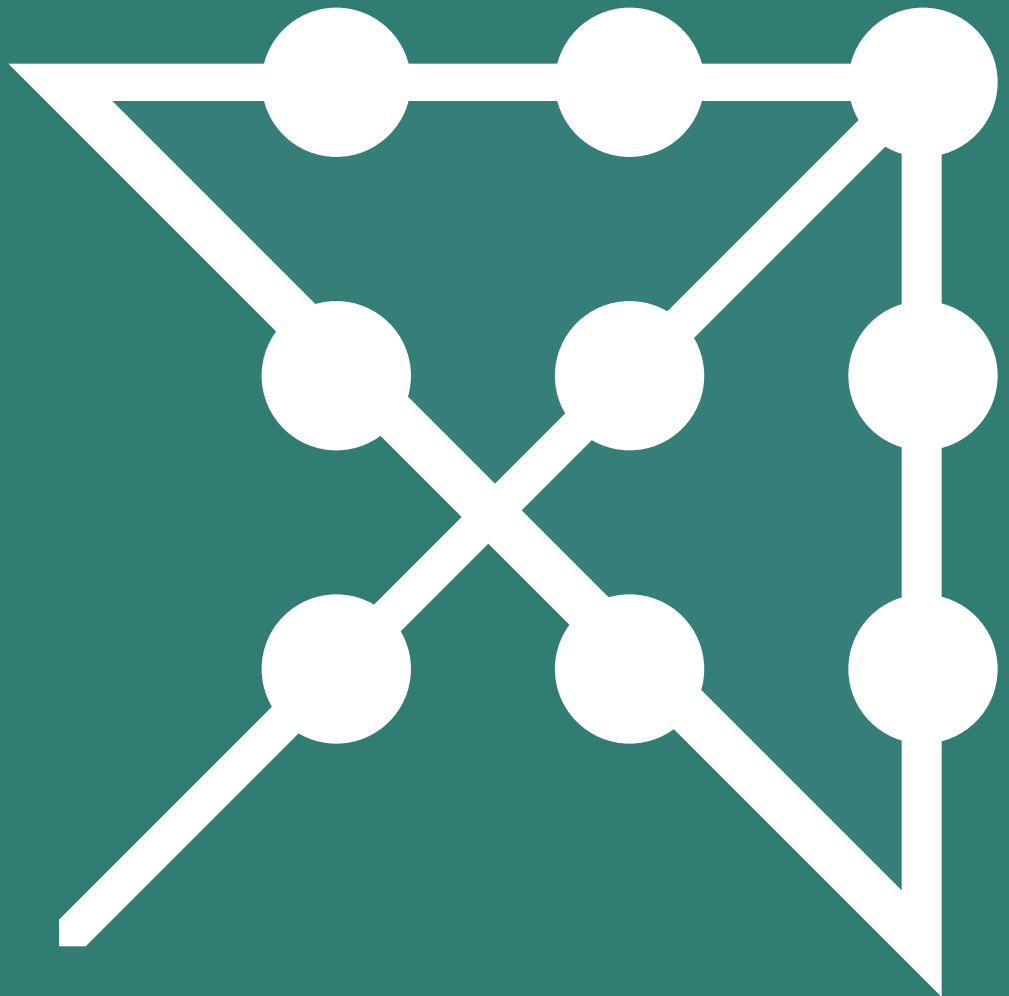
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thinking outside the box

A History of Violence (+) isn't boring, and it is violent. It is a bit too predictable.

Akeelah and the Bee (+++) is a feel-good movie. It's about an 11 year-old girl from an LA ghetto who aspires to win the national spelling bee. It's a bit like "Rocky," though Sylvester Stallone can barely speak English let alone spell "concierge." (Akeelah actually misspelled this word in the movie, but was judged correct.) Keke Palmer, who plays the little girl, and Laurence Fishburne, who plays her coach, are true champions.

All the Kings Men (-) is really awful as the entire cast of great actors' talents are wasted on a really poorly directed and edited remake of a classic. Sean Penn overacts. James Gandolfini seems like he walked onto the wrong set.

Babel (+++) is one of the most intense and gripping movies I have ever seen. It is like the globalization of "Crash," another excellent and gripping movie about how we humans are so interconnected with both good and bad consequences.

Borat (- - -) WARNING: Do not see "Borat." Do not let your kids see it. It is among the worst and most tasteless movies of all times!

Casino Royale (++) is actually one of the better 007 movies. Daniel Craig plays James Bond better than all the previous actors with the exception of Sean Connery, of course. I also liked that this latest Bond movie was faster paced, better written, and just more entertaining than some of the last few double-O spy thrillers, which were on the boring side and tended to be caricatures of the franchise. This one was more of an homage to Ian Fleming's immortal good guy protecting us from all those evildoers out there. The Bush administration just replaced Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld with former spy Robert Gates. Let's hope he is from the Bond school.

Deja Vu (--) would have been worse without Denzel Washington in the lead role. It is beyond far-fetched. The high tech hocus pocus is out of focus along with the plot.

Firewall (- - -) with Harrison Ford is a really dull and badly directed action movie. I didn't like anything about it, though the GPS collar on the family dog is kinda cool. Mr. Ford is getting too old to fight those young, blond bad guys with their foreign accents.

Flags of Our Fathers (++) shows that war is hell. Clint Eastwood's directing is outstanding. So is the cast. The Battle of Iwo Jima, a small island about 670 miles from Japan, was fought during February and March of 1945. About 22,000 Japanese troops were entrenched on the island, and only 1,083 survived. The United States lost a total of 6,821 men in the battle for the island and its two airfields. This gruesome toll undoubtedly is one of the reasons that President Truman decided to drop a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, on August 6, 1945, and another one on Nagasaki three days later, resulting in yet another horrible death toll of more than 200,000 Japanese civilians.

Hollywoodland (++) is a film noir about the mysterious death of George Reeves, who starred in the original Superman television series. Was it a suicide or not? The film doesn't provide the answer, but it does raise some questions. I would not have cast Ben Affleck in the title role. He is a bit too stiff, but then so was Reeves.

Inside Man (++) is really a fun and funny bank heist flick directed by Spike Lee. The cast led by Denzel Washington is top notch. But even better are the cast of New York City's finest ethnic characters that pop up in almost every scene.

Little Miss Sunshine (+++) is a funny and touching family road movie.

Man of the Year (-) with Robin Williams was boring. I admit I was tired and snoozed between Robin's few jokes, which were very funny. In other words, I must have slept through 80% of the movie. Perhaps the most serious idea in this movie, about a comedian who is elected President, is that programming glitches in the new electronic voting booths could elect the

wrong candidates. The Economist 10/14 notes that many states and counties have replaced their old booths with touch-screen machines, so in close races a recount would be impossible. Fortunately, more than half of America's counties have opted for optical scanners that count votes marked by hand on paper ballots.

Marie Antoinette (- -), directed by Sophia Coppola and starring Kirsten Dunst, should have been edited with a guillotine. Too much time and too many scenes were spent showing Marie and Louis XVI getting into bed and doing nothing for seven years. It was occasionally interesting (Louis' hobby was making keys) and even funny. It was a bit like a French version of "Clueless."

Match Point (- - -) was really awful. The plot was contrived. The dialogue was lame and loaded with cliches like "Either you tell your wife, or I will!" It was too slow and too long. It was filmed badly. The acting was stiff and clumsy. I don't blame the actors. They simply had really bad material to work with. I blame Woody Allen, who wrote and directed the movie. It mostly reminded me of how pretentious many of his other movies have been, but at least some of them were funny.

M:i:III (- -) is a really awful movie. I didn't want to see it and neither did my wife. Tom Cruise is just too weird, and an overrated actor. But, we had to see for ourselves that the movie was as bad as we expected. We weren't disappointed. It was really bad.

Miami Vice (+) is a fast-paced film noir. It has the feel of a ride in a Cigarette boat in the middle of the night off the Miami coast. I did enjoy watching the TV series in the 1980s. This was better.

Mrs. Henderson Presents (+) is a nice flick with another outstanding performance by outstanding actress Dame Judi Dench.

Munich (+) is Steven Spielberg's "prayer for peace." It is both entertaining and disappointing. It ends with the camera panning on the World Trade Center, implying that Israel's war against terrorists somehow led to 9/11 and that America's war against terrorism after 9/11 might only continue to escalate the violence. Spielberg seems to be saying, "Why don't we all just get along?" What planet does he live on? For a much more realistic view of the forces driving the Clash of Civilizations, see Mark Steyn, "It's the Demography, Stupid: The real reason the West is in danger of extinction." I strongly recommend you read it.

Pirates of the Caribbean (- - -) was a big hit for Disney this weekend. It was a big waste of time for me. I have yet to see a long epic movie recently that was worth the time and the money, including "King Kong," "Superman Returns," and now this one. The first "Pirates" was great fun and a wonderful opportunity for Johnny Depp to show off his comic talents. In this sequel, Johnny played a stupid caricature of the amusing caricature he played of a pirate in the previous movie. In other words, he was stale. He was also overshadowed by the grossness and creepiness of the special effects.

Scoop (+) is a classic Woody Alan comedy, which means that it is funny, with lots of good lines.

Superman Returns (- -) was a long and boring movie that required superhuman efforts to stay awake. The cast was ok, including the leading actor who looks very much like Christopher Reeve. The script was from another galaxy as evidenced by the nutty notion that people would pay Lex Luthor a fortune to buy property on his newly created continent composed of hard crystals once he flooded the United States. How do you plant crops in crystal? Lex was played by Kevin Spacey, who did a good impersonation of Gene Hackman playing Lex. Prior to WWII, Superman fought "a never-ending battle for truth and justice." It was in the autumn of 1942 that fans of his radio show heard that he was battling for "truth, justice, and the American way." That's what Christopher Reeve said he was doing in the 1978 movie. The phrase was omitted in the latest sequel. (IHT July 1-2).

Thank You For Smoking (+) is a good satire on lobbyists, politicians, and the rest of us who do what we have to do to pay the mortgage. Did you know that the chief lobbyists for tobacco, guns, and alcohol meet regularly for dinner to brag about which industry kills the most people? According to the movie, the cheese industry should also send a representative to attend the dinner. The WSJ (3/31) had a great front page story about Michael Scanlon, a press secretary to Rep. Tom DeLay. Jack Abramoff, the disgraced lobbyist, provided Mr. Scanlon with enough cash to buy a \$4.7 million oceanside mansion for his 35-year-old fiancé. He dumped her for a 24-year-old waitress. Big mistake.

The Black Dahlia (- -) is yet another film noir set in Hollywood. This movie, directed by Brian De Palma (who seems to have a thing about scarred faces), is based on a book about the most notorious unsolved murder in California history. It has some very weird characters. The cop's droning narrative seems like it was written by a script writer attempting to write a film noir. Scarlett Johansson's talents are completely wasted: What does she do all day while waiting to have dinner with her two cop friends every evening?

The Boynton Beach Club (+) is a really funny film about senior citizens living in a Florida community. It is even funnier if you go to an early showing when lots of seniors are likely to be in the audience guffawing at the jokes. This is the third really funny film released this summer. The other two are Woody Allen's "Scoop" and "Little Miss Sunshine."