

+ *Splinter Reviews*

Spartan

There's something I find exciting about going to see a David Mamet film on the big screen. I think it has something to do with the anticipation of going to see a film that I know will be completely different than any of the other films playing in the cineplex. With *Spartan*, this expectation was fulfilled in spades: it is a film full of terse dialogue and little to no explication. Despite these narrative omissions, the film still manages to be driven solely by plot. What makes this exercise in diegetic brevity interesting is how Mamet's bare-bones storytelling really allows for character development. Without showing us any scenes of internal conflict or reflection, Mamet shows us a marked transformation in Val Kilmer's FBI agent. Kilmer's subtle change of actions is enough to signal his shift from innocuous secret service "goto man" to empowered man with conscience and agency.

-Dylan Reibling

David Mamet has no personality. He is celebrated for his snappy dialogue and carefully constructed narratives but when is he going to tone-down the macho charade and deal with a recognizable human emotion? Not yet. *Spartan* is a well-crafted but painfully unimaginative film. The off-putting "humour" of Mamet's previous two films (*State & Maine* and *Heist*) is thankfully absent and Kilmer's performance is pleasantly bizarre but, other than that, the film has no pulse. Competent but mediocre.

-Jonathan Doyle

Starsky and Hutch

When it comes to satisfying what would presumably be his core audience (mostly young people expecting wall-to-wall laughs), director Todd Phillips has become a bit of a tease at delivering the goods. With *Starsky And Hutch*, like *Old School* before it, Phillips is interested in creating characters that are consistently likeable, rather than a movie which is consistently funny and, as a result, his films end up grossing far less than one would expect from fairly high budgeted, ensemble star-vehicles. That is not to say that *Starsky And Hutch* isn't full of laughs. It is, especially after the thankless task of setting up the film's tried and true plot is completed during the film's first reel. As well, again like *Old School* before it, I have a feeling that multiple viewings of this film will probably lead to new laughs that one doesn't even notice the first time around.

-Jason Woloski

Todd Phillips seems satisfied to be the John Landis of his generation. He has no ambition whatsoever. And that's probably a good thing. He has a unique command of the disposable comedy and a rare affection for that genre's demented characters. Unlike earlier Stiller/Wilson collaboration, *Zoolander*, this film's performances are grounded in reality. Stiller plays it completely straight and, although Owen Wilson's too-cool-for-school routine is wearing a little thin, this is a thoroughly enjoyable, well-crafted comedy.

-Jonathan Doyle

Cheaper By the Dozen

It is shocking that a film that stars Steve Martin and Bonnie Hunt can be this terribly unfunny. It is also shocking that this film is even worse than *Bringing Down The House*. There was a time when Steve Martin made some of the funniest and smartest movies in Hollywood but it seems that time has long since past.

-Collin Smith

Falling Angels

While this film fetishizes Canadian nostalgia, Smith never allows this obsession to overrun the painfully intimate portrayal of three sisters coming of age in the nuclear age. The art director paints every frame with 60s era paraphernalia, while the sound editor serenades us with clips of Front Page Challenge and This Hour has Seven Days. However, it is how successfully the filmmakers draw such complete pictures of each disparate and flawed member of this suburban Canadian family that makes this film a real treasure for any era.

-Collin Smith

The Fog of War

It's stunning how timely this film is, let alone how incredibly, innovatively well-crafted. *The Fog Of War* does something almost impossible and that is it allows the viewer to truly empathize and understand the logic of something as insane as war by plucking the mind of an architect of war, former Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. To hear him explain what Japan endured prior to their atomic apocalypse is just one moment of many more that will render you speechless before the final credits roll.

-Friedrich Mayr

Goodbye, Lenin!

In this mother's day card of a movie, a young German man does everything he can to protect his mother, who has recently awoken from a six month coma, from suffering shock over finding out that the Berlin wall has come down and that capitalism is running amok in a unified Germany. While the sentiment and story are sweet, the premise never really convinces and the humour often feels forced. This narrative flaw unfortunately distracts the viewer from the loving detail paid to German social and cultural developments of the past 10 years and the intimate pain of a family torn apart.

-Collin Smith

Hidalgo

A gun-toting cowboy defeats an axis of eevile A-rabs. Art imitating life? Perhaps, but Joe Johnston's film is a classic instance of style guiding content. Cinematographer Shelley Johnston's carefully-timed visual 'moves,' in tandem with Viggo's consistent likeability, carry this otherwise muddled piece to the finish line. When I got home, I smothered my dog Butler in a huge hug.

-Colin Burnett

Jack Paradise (Les Nuits De Montréal)

More jazz than film, this biopic doesn't tell much of a story but it brings the music of the man to joyful life. Paradise's story is told as remembrances and therefore the narrative is disjointed but, like his music, quite spellbinding. Noël does what he can with an obviously limited budget by creatively tripping through images, colours, and emotions as any good jazz man would. This riff is light on substance but punctuated by moments of musical brilliance.

-Collin Smith

The Ladykillers

Nobody who has seen the trailer for this film wants to see it but, surprise surprise, the trailer has nothing to do with the film. It's not as mean-spirited or hyperactive as you might expect. In fact, after the massive disappointment of last year's *Intolerable Cruelty*, this is a minor return to form for the Coen brothers. Their flamboyant visual style is back, as is their warped existential worldview. As usual, they rely too heavily on tiresome ethnic stereotypes (if this stuff was funny, I wouldn't mind, but it's not) but they've clearly put more care into this than their previous film. In the end, this "Tom Hanks vehicle" is as dark and absurd as anything else the Coen brothers have done. The final scene is cat-tastic.

-Jonathan Doyle

Osama

The story of a little girl in Taliban controlled Afghanistan who pretends to be a boy to survive, but she isn't the only one pretending. Everyone in this movie is hidden under some disguise necessary for survival. This modest production is rich in emotion and texture but suffers from a lack of joy. Disappointingly, even the most sympathetic characters are so devoid of hope that it is difficult to identify with them. Consequently, the audience is kept at arms length from the humanity of

the characters, unable to empathize, left only to bear witness to the tragedies presented.

-Collin Smith

The Passion of the Christ

Fanaticism has no reins—so why are people shocked?

The Holocaust did happen. Sorry, Mel, Sr.

The last shot is too Sunday school.

Did you spot the extra wearing a Timex?

-Colin Burnett

Twisted

One of the worst reviewed films of the year is, in fact, a moderately enjoyable black comedy disguised as a thriller. Ashley Judd plays a cop who appreciates casual sex, heavy drinking, and physically abusing men. When her sex partners start dropping like flies, Judd fears that she's the culprit and is forgetting the murders due to her alcohol abuse. I swear that's the plot. For a real movie. This isn't Philip Kaufman's (*The Right Stuff*, *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being*) crowning achievement but it's not a complete waste of time either. If for no other reason, see it for Andy Garcia's hilarious Martin Sheenesque screaming attacks.

-Jonathan Doyle

The Wild Dogs

Unfortunately, more attention was paid to Thom Fitzgerald's other 2003 film, *The Event*, which was clunky, schmaltzy, and awkward. Dogs is the true masterpiece. It's a biting examination of western imperialism, exploitation, and desperation. It's also a celebration of spirit, which never reduces its subjects with condescension.

-Collin Smith

Hellboy

A "red monkey"-looking superhero with a soft spot for cats, cigars, and milk and cookies saves the world from laughable, octopus-like Nazi-gods by blowing them to smithereens with grenades. Hohum. One wonders if this lame, self-deprecating humour works better on the page of a comic book than it does on the silver screen.

-Jay Poulton