

Da Vinci Code, The (2006)

R11

reviewed by
Steve Rhodes

(M1SUB1S1)

A film review by Steve Rhodes
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RATING (0 TO ****): * 1/2

(M1SUB1S5)

If you believe that any joint collaboration between Tom Hanks and Ron Howard would have to be entertaining, you'd be so wrong, as THE DA VINCI CODE, a big budget bore, proves. Running a painfully long two-and-a-half hours, it turns a page-turner of a novel into a plodding and perfunctory production. The lifeless performances are all phoned in, and the cinematography is so dull and dingy that you'll swear they forgot to clean the camera lenses.

(M3S1)

The book may not be great, but it does provide some absorbing and easy reading. The plot is convoluted and preposterous, but the book makes it seem just plausible enough to forgive its flaws. The movie, however, is baffling, boring and silly. Moreover, the more confused the audience gets, the less it cares. The big mystery about battling secret societies within the Catholic Church and about a big secret which will "shake Christianity to its very foundations" becomes increasingly ridiculous and tedious in the movie. One of the main characters is a mysterious albino monk (Paul Bettany) named Silas, who spends his all free time in self-flagellation, an activity which the movie finds so fascinating it insists we observe it again and again.

(M2S1)

Hanks plays Robert Langdon, a famous religious symbologist who is in Paris to give a lecture and sign copies of his latest best seller. In no time, he finds himself accused of murder by a corpse who had written Langdon's name in blood on the floor in one of many notes the victim left in code before he died. Audrey Tautou plays Sophie Neveu, the dead man's granddaughter. In one of the most wooden performances of his career, Jean Reno plays Bezu Fache, a grim and humorless French detective with a hidden agenda who spends most of the movie chasing Langdon.

(M3S1)

If you've read the book, as I had, or even if you haven't read it, as my wife hadn't, you'll eventually figure out most of what is going on among the various warring factions. Understanding and caring, however, are two different things.

The movie fails on just about every level possible. Only in a few nicely done musical moments, especially during the last of the film's many endings, is the movie ever briefly satisfying. At least Tom Hanks is able to keep a straight face when reciting cheesy and nonsensical dialog, such as, "This. This can't be this."

If the rest of the summer is filled with more blockbuster turkeys like THE DA VINCI CODE, the studios may need some divine intervention to save their continually sagging box office receipts.

THE DA VINCI CODE runs an excruciatingly long 2:33. It is rated PG-13 for "disturbing images, violence, some nudity, thematic material, brief drug references and sexual content" and would be acceptable for teenagers. (M4S2)

The film opens nationwide in the United States on Friday, May 19, 2006. In the Silicon Valley, it will be showing at the AMC theaters, the Century theaters and the Camera Cinemas. (M5S3)

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Da Vinci Code, The (2006)

R12

reviewed by
Sam Osborn

(M1SUB1S1)

The Da Vinci Code
reviewed by Sam Osborn of www.samseescinema.com
rating: 3 out of 4

(M1SUB1S2)

Director: Ron Howard Cast: Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou, Ian McKellan, Paul Bettany Screenplay: Akiva Goldsman (based on the novel by Dan Brown) MPAA Classification: PG-13 (disturbing images, violence, some nudity, thematic material, brief drug references and sexual content)

(M1SUB3S1)

After nearly three years of putting it off, last week I finally picked up and read The Da Vinci Code. Being the 40,000,001st person to read the book wasn't much fun, as a dozen or more people giddily peered over my shoulder, asking what page I was on and oh-so-accidentally letting the twists slip off their tongues. I figured that since all the other 40,000,000 people who've read the book will view the film adaptation in a gnawing, nit picky book-to-film comparison, I probably should too. Trying to review a film from a perspective no one in the theatre will have has never been a winning stratagem. And Dan Brown's book was fun and riling, utilizing convincing art history and extremist theology to thicken its otherwise pulpy tale. As a film, its prospects were titillating: the damned thing was pretty much written to be a movie in the first place. But when put to practice, some key elements were lost in translation. Granted, Ron Howard is a more eloquent storyteller than Dan Brown, utilizing the language of film with more agility than Brown can maneuver the English language; but the script lost something along the way: for all its length, Mr. Howard's The Da Vinci Code has lost its scholarly charm. (M1SUB1S5)

Now don't go running off thinking Hollywood's done it again; this is a respectful adaptation that constricts its creativity to stay true to the worldwide literary phenomenon. What I mean is that Akiva Goldsman's adaptation seems to rush itself in some of the wrong places.

(M1SUB1S4)

For those of you who're like me and have somehow avoided the book for the last years, here's a little synopsis: a respected curator for the Louvre is found dead with a mysterious smattering of clues surrounding his body. Symbologist and Cryptologist Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) and Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tautou) track these clues down to their historical significance, tromping around Paris and London in search of the Holy Grail, the curator's controversial secret. Going any more in depth is a waste of print-space. I was the only person who hadn't read the book anyhow.

(M3S1)

The finest moments of the novel, most will admit, occurred when Langdon and Neveu sifted through their encyclopedic knowledge in search of solutions to their international, multi-millennial treasure hunt. We were educated as they whittled down the answers, introduced to stifling theories and tasty little factoids. But with the film adaptation, Mr. Howard seems to skim over the puzzling aspects of the hunt. Answers seem to simply pop into the characters heads. Oh sure, every once in a while an anagram gives them a few seconds of trouble, but Mr. Saunier's (the curator) brilliance is never properly honored. The trail he laid for the pair was intricate in the novel, laden with double entendres and charmed solutions. Goldsman's script doesn't have time for such nonsense, floating along past these magical moments of scholarly adventure and replacing them instead with other conversations lifted from the text that offer up disappointing substitutes.

Beyond this, however, I have no quibble with the project. Put simply, it's the moving picture version of the book we read, but without the clunky sentences. The best people in the business were put on this project and it certainly shows. Not only does Ron Howard prove yet again his careful command of the film medium, but the casting is also watertight. Mr. Hanks and Ms. Tautou strike the chord of off-kilter chemistry that Mr. Brown aimed for in his book, while the ghostly Silas is haunting and pathetic in the form of Paul Bettany. And yes, despite Hanks' much abused hairdo, his performance is the most respectful of all. He's just fine as Robert Langdon.

And there's no need to worry about the screenplay taking its own creative liberties. The one major change from the book is well handled and probably a better choice anyhow (it has to do with Captain Fache and Bishop Aringarosa). There are little things changed too, but only shifted to speed up Mr. Brown's otherwise sloppy action sequences. Instead of Sophie hitting the brakes and calmly driving away from the tightly guarded U.S. Embassy, she embarks on a wild, backwards car chase in the deeply congested streets of Paris. Ron Howard knows how to drive his film in these scenes, and his control of *The Da Vinci Code* is its winning token.

(M4S1)

This isn't the best adaptation *The Da Vinci Code* fanatics could've hoped for, but it's a solid flick. The eloquence Mr. Howard delivers is a vast improvement over Mr. Brown's fumbling language, while Brown's adventure is undermined by Howard's slighting of the treasure hunt. This is a fair trade, sure, but it prevents both works from achieving greatness.

Ice Age: The Meltdown (2006)

R13reviewed by
Steve RhodesM1SUB1S1

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ICE AGE: THE MELTDOWN

A film review by Steve Rhodes

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RATING (0 TO ****): ** 1/2

(M1SUB2S1)

Well kids, as your teachers preach to you each and every day, global warming is the world's biggest worry. In ICE AGE: THE MELTDOWN, we learn that they were concerned about that way back in the Ice Age. Once again, the wacky characters from the original ICE AGE are back with the fear this time being the flood that is coming since the warm climate means their ice dam will soon break. The plot, however, is basically unimportant, and this is no message movie. The whole purpose of the thin narrative is to let the characters ham it up as much as possible.

(M2S1)

As before, the scene-stealing character is Scrat, a squirrel who doesn't talk as he pursues his elusive goal, an acorn, much as Wile E. Coyote is forever chasing but not catching the Road Runner. Big chunks of ice and other obstacles keep preventing Scrat from hanging onto his acorn. And just when half of the audience has gotten up to leave, thinking that the movie is over, Scrat starts his longest and most ambitious hunt of all, as he goes after a super-sized, golden acorn in the heavenly beyond. Whenever Scrat is on the screen, the movie consistently delights young and old.

(M3S1)

The sequences without Scrat are more hit and miss. The best of these has Sid (voiced by John Leguizamo) standing in front of a hundred animals who are pint-sized versions of himself. They are planning on sacrificing him to the fire god. In this incident, which may or may not be a dream sequence, the belief is that his death will appease the god and make the earth stop heating up. The humor comes from his mistaken belief, at first, that they are actually worshipping him as some sort of god. He mugs for the crowd, which mimics his every gesture.

Queen Latifah voices a wooly mammoth named Ellie, who thinks she's a possum. The mammoth named Manfred (voiced by Ray Romano) thought that, except for himself, his species was extinct, so he is really excited to meet Ellie. The visual of her hanging upside-down in the tree with her possum "brothers" is a treat. Suffice it to say that romance will soon be in the air. (M2S1)

(M4S1)

The movie's sound, full of the low rumble from the falling and cracking ice, is quite impressive. And the songs aren't bad either, especially the "Food, Glorious Food" ditty which you'll recognize from another movie. I could have done without the bathroom humor, such as the crap balls that some animals were taking with them in

(Continued M4S1)

their journey to flee the coming flood. But the youngsters in the audience obviously liked these types of jokes.

Most of the film's enjoyment comes from the sight gags, but there are a few bits of good dialog. My favorite came in the advice from the buzzards who were circling over the long line of escaping animals. "Do not leave your children unattended," the buzzards warned ominously. "Unattended children will be eaten."

ICE AGE: THE MELTDOWN runs 1:30. It is rated PG for "some mild language and innuendo" and would be acceptable for all ages. (M4S2)

My nephew William, age 11, and my niece Liana, age 9, both liked the movie. William's favorite part came when the possum went flying through the air, and Liana liked it best when Manfred used karate on the attacking fish.

The film opens nationwide in the United States on Friday, March 31, 2006. In the Silicon Valley, it will be showing at the AMC theaters, the Century theaters and the Camera Cinemas. (M5S3)

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Ice Age: The Meltdown (2006)

R14

reviewed by
Johnny Betts

(M1SUB1S1)

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Check out the Movie Mark for more reviews (with captioned pictures!) and movie entertainment:

<http://www.themoviemark.com> (M5S1)

Ice Age: The Meltdown
<http://www.themoviemark.com/moviereviews/iceage2.asp>

PLOT (M1SUB1S4)

All the ice from the Ice Age is melting and a bunch of talking, animated prehistoric animals have to survive. Oh, and a squirrel named Scratt continues his effort to get the nut he so desires. A sequel to a CGI movie that I never saw ensues.

JOHNNY'S TAKE

(M1SUB1S5)

Ice Age: The Meltdown is a perfect example of the kind of movie I hate to review. No matter what I say, it's going to make approximately \$1 billion on opening weekend, so what's the point? Plus, a lot of my readers are guys who are only interested in movies where at least 42 people get shot or Adam Sandler talks in a funny voice and makes sounds that have no grammatical basis. The day they go to see Ice Age: The Meltdown is the day Rob Schneider gets nominated for an Oscar, which would most likely also be the day I vow to stop watching movies completely.

So writing this review is nothing more than an exercise in futility. If you enjoyed the original then you'll go see this follow-up no matter how harsh I am. If you hated the original then even my softest, most poetic words would be hard-pressed to convince you this was worth your time or money. So you know what? Go with your gut on this one; I really don't care either way.

(M1SUB3S1)

I never saw Ice Age so I can't compare the two. All I know is that this installment, while cute and pleasant enough, has no real "wow" factor. Sure, it looks nice and is fairly harmless, but it tries just a little too hard to cater to the smallest of children while leaving most adults a little alienated. The problem is that the writers at Pixar have mastered the fine art of being clever enough to appeal equally to both children and adults (think Toy Story and The Incredibles). Everybody else (yes, this means you, Ice Age) is just a distant contender with a flair for pretty graphics rather than sharp storytelling.

(M3S1)

I heard somebody on the radio refer to Ice Age 2 as "better than Toy Story." As Teaspoon Hunter might say, "Cow pies." Not even close. You can sell that some place else, Sam Cain, because Emma ain't buyin' it (sorry, a little Young Riders (buy the DVD!) reference for you).

(M1SUB3S1)

Now if I had been hired to work on the movie then I would've titled it Ice Age: The Final Countdown. At the end of the movie CGI versions of the members of Europe would have shown up and all the prehistoric animals would have jammed to their undeserved hit The Final Countdown. That would've been some sweet action, and you know it. Just picture CGI versions of the bandmates' bad 80s hairdos. Talk about a missed opportunity.

(M3S1)

THE GIST

(M4S1)

Ice Age: The Meltdown didn't exactly knock my socks off but it didn't insult my intelligence either. See it if you want. Or don't. Doesn't matter to me.

Rating: 2.75 (out of 5)

Johnny Betts

The Movie Mark

<http://www.themoviemark.com> -

(M5S3)

(M5S1)

Cars (2006)

R15reviewed by
David N. ButterworthM1SUB1S1

CARS

A film review by David N. Butterworth

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*** (out of *****)

(M1SUB1S3)

"Cars" might not necessarily be "the first great movie of the summer" but it's certainly the first Pixar Studios production since Memorial Day and definitely the best animated film of the season thus far (and not simply because Hayao Miyazaki hasn't spirited away any feature-length masterpieces since "Howl's Moving Castle" (2004) and Richard Linklater's "A Scanner Darkly" has yet to see the light of day).

No, "Cars" follows "The Incredibles" and "Finding Nemo" in Pixar's widening gyre of Pixilated Products That Sell, each successive offering clearly out to outperform its classy predecessor. I loved "Nemo," finding it beautifully crafted and indelibly cast, not to mention easy to watch (and quote) over and over again on DVD. I was more lukewarm about "The Incredibles" but there's no denying that some parts of that film--a lot of parts, actually--were... well, incredible.

(M1SUB1S5)

"Cars" seems to bring a whole new newness to the genre, with eye-popping animation the likes of which we think we've seen before but probably haven't.

(M1SUB1S2)

There are automotive-inspired landscapes and scenic overlooks and the occasional waterfall that are hard to tell from the real thing; nature's majesty reimagined by an Intel chip. There are adrenaline-pumping, high-octane racetrack sequences in which speed is king; again, beautifully (and accurately) rendered images that appear unequalled. And there are the cars themselves in their many guises: sexy, sporty, and seriously stupid.

In "Cars" we can marvel at the shine of the chrome, the glint of the windshields, and the reflections in the paneling of the sleek racecars (Lightning McQueen's unveiling in the opening scene, for instance); we can marvel at the details in the detailing (Mater's buckteeth, Doc Hudson's old-time fenders, Sally's svelte headlamps); and we can marvel at the clever characterizations, making these four-wheelers living, breathing entities (here again voice work proves pivotal, from Owen Wilson as the cocky Lightning to Paul Newman as the wise Doc all the way on down to a few throwaway bits from Click and Clack, the Tappet Brothers as Rust-eze Bumper Oil sponsors).

(M2S1)

Following a three-way tie in the NASCAR-styled Piston Cup, rookie racer Lightning McQueen heads to California to face-off against rivals Chick Hicks and The King, only to stumble off the interstate and into Carburetor County's "hillbilly

(Continued M2S1)

hell" of Radiator Springs. Here he's sentenced to community service (i.e., repaving) for trashing the ghost town's main drag and while so doing the self-centered hotshot hotrod learns what it means to truly need a pit crew.

A pit crew of cars, that is, since there are no humans in the film, just sedans, coupes, vans, trucks, a scary combine harvester, and a herd of tractors as dumb as cows. The vehicles possess human traits and abilities: they have eyes and their windshields' sun visors provide the expressions, their radiator grilles effectively doubling as mouths. Tow truck Mater (voiced by Larry the Cable Guy) is the funniest; Italian tire guy Luigi (Tony Shalhoub) is the cutest; hippie Filmore (George Carlin) is the most colorful. (M3S2)

(M4S1)

While both inventive and lovely to look at "Cars" is long, perhaps too long for the younger set, and character-driven, which means the action sequences are interspersed with many lengthy, sluggishly paced scenes. But if it's (animated) kicks you want you can get 'em right here along Pixar's coolly creative Route 66.

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(M5S2)

R16

Cars (2006)

reviewed by
Steve Rhodes

CARS

A film review by Steve Rhodes

Copyright 2006 Steve Rhodes

RATING (0 TO ****): ** 1/2

(M1SUB1S1)

(M1SUB1S5)

With its fundamentally flawed concept of talking cars, you'd be best advised to just skip the movie and buy the toys. Even the best of Pixar's talent can't put a shine on this jalopy. Sure, there are several nice moments and characters, but the movie manages to be considerably upstaged by the much cuter short, ONE MAN BAND, which precedes it. CARS is far from being in racing trim, poking along at almost two hours in length. An hour-plus would have been more than enough, given the thinness of the plot. The story is not helped in the least by being bracketed by two big races, which are the most boring and least original parts of the entire production. Only in its midsection, set in the sleepy, old Route 66 town of Radiator Springs, does the film ever work.

(M2S1)

As the story opens, we meet a young racecar named Lightning McQueen (voiced by Owen Wilson), who is trying to win the famous Piston Cup. A cocky one-man-show, Lightning is going up against Chick Hicks (voiced by Michael Keaton) and The King (voiced by Richard Petty). A three-way tie forces race officials to

(Continued M2S1)

schedule an unprecedented, special three-way race for the championship. On the way to California for the big race -- in a spectacularly lit night sequence -- Lightning gets lost and ends up in Radiator Springs, a time-warped community on Route 66, a road no longer traveled.

(M3S1)

The surprise of the movie is that (almost?) the largest number of the lines go to Larry The Cable Guy as a redneck tow truck named Tow Mater, or just Mater for short. In easily the funniest sequence in the picture, Mater takes Lightning to a farmer's field for some late night tractor tipping. Everyone and everything in the movie are made from cars, and the most surprising of these are the horseflies, which are really little car flies. One of the least surprising of the jokes is that the governor of California is played in a cameo by a Hummer.

Most of voice talent proves relatively bland and wasted. As an old race car named Doc Hudson, Paul Newman lends his voice but not his talent. The animators, when they aren't trying to do what proves to be the impossible task of making cars come alive, do a marvelous job with the sets and the background settings. The rugged west has rarely looked better.

(M4S1)

In a movie filled with messages, including the need for friends and the respect for elders, safe driving is definitely not among them. Lightning and his new girlfriend Sally Carrera (voiced by Bonnie Hunt), a sexy blue Porsche, like speeding around dangerous blind curves on the wrong side of the road. Most of these episodes, however, while visually appealing, amount to just more wasted time. The movie keeps feeling like it is about to get a ticket for going too slow on the freeway.

(M4S2)

CARS runs way too long at 1:56. It is rated G and would be acceptable for all ages.

(M5S3)

The film opens nationwide in the United States on Friday, June 9, 2006. In the Silicon Valley, it will be showing at the AMC theaters, the Century theaters and the Camera Cinemas.

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Over the Hedge (2006)

R17

reviewed by
Jerry Saravia

(M1SUB1S1)

OVER THE HEDGE (2006)

Reviewed by Jerry Saravia

Viewed on May 19th, 2006

RATING: Three stars and a half

(M1SUB3S1)

I approach current animated films with trepidation. After all, I grew up with Warner Brothers and Disney cartoons and, putting it mildly, I favor the old more than the new. Still, 2004's "The Incredibles" was an amazing achievement and the best superhero movie in many moons. "Over the Hedge" is the latest from Dreamworks and what a fun time I had. It is far from greatness but any person aged 7 to 70 will enjoy it (though I suspect the tykes will enjoy it the most).

(M2S1)

In the opening sequence, a raccoon named RJ (voiced by Bruce Willis) is trying to get a bag of nacho chips from a vending machine. We know the feeling when a bag of chips get stuck in the machine and we bang the dang thing mercilessly to no avail. RJ's fruitless attempts lead to a wagon of food that belongs to a giant bear named Vincent (voiced appropriately by Nick Nolte). RJ takes the food but it ends up on the main highway and trashed to smithereens by a truck. He has to get all this food back to Vincent or else he'll be eaten. This takes RJ to a small critter family consisting of a turtle named Verne (voiced by Garry Shandling) whose tail tingles when trouble is nigh, a highly caffeinated squirrel named Hammy (voiced by Steve Carell), a skunk with a low opinion of herself named Stella (Wanda Sykes), a family of possums led by the papa possum (voiced by William Shatner) and his daughter (Avril Lavigne), and finally a porcupine family led by the father, Lou (voiced by Eugene Levy), and the mother, Penny (voiced by Catherine O'Hara). Don't expect a return of Mitch and Mickey.

(M1SUB1S3)

(M2S1)

Based on a comic strip, the plot has to do with an oversized hedge, nicknamed Steve by the critters, that has been built during the winter season, the time of their hibernation. Now the critters have no chance of getting any decent food, only some tree bark. RJ needs help to get the wagon of food back to Vincent so he hoodwinks the furry creatures into stealing food from the humans. Along the way, there are some pointed jabs at the unhealthy junk food diet, the tossing of welcome amounts of food in trash receptacles, the enormity of SUV's, THX sound systems (perhaps a little jab there at George Lucas), the fixation on modern technological devices, and much more. To top it all off, we have a hysterical and truly EVIL woman with a cell phone attached to her ear (voiced by Allison Janney) who wants those critters decimated as "inhumanely as possible." Enter the Verminator (voiced by Thomas Haden Church) whose job is to do just that, not to mention devise contraptions to trap the critters if they ever enter her backyard.

(M4S1)

"Over the Hedge" is a partly satiric tale of suburban encroachment, though it never truly dwells on the evils of suburban development. The movie seems to say that junk food and technology is evil because the humans consume both, and largely because both do a disservice to nature. But the critters enjoy both equally, including gorging on junk food and watching cable and DVD's in their own land, so I am unclear on what the message is. Perhaps it is an anti-deforestation tale but the filmmakers lose any real focus.

None of this matters in hindsight because "Over the Hedge" is dazzling to watch with some eye-opening visuals and lots of laughs. The critters are all fun personalities and, well, what can I say, Bruce Willis, William Shatner, Wanda Sykes

(Continued M4S1)

and Nick Nolte's booming voice lend greatly to the film's success. The tykes will love it and will want to see it again and again on DVD. Whatever message is delivered will surely fly over their heads.

(M5S1)

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(M5S2)

BIO on the author of this page at:
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Email me at Faust668@msn.com or at faustus_08520@yahoo.com Tired of spam? Yahoo! Mail has the best spam protection around <http://mail.yahoo.com>

Lady in the Water (2006)

R18

reviewed by (M1SUB1S1)
Michael Dequina

_Lady_in_the_Water_ (PG-13) no stars (out of ****)

(M1SUB1S5)

It would be easy to glibly dismiss M. Night Shyamalan's _Lady_in_the_Water_ as an epic trainwreck--and, indeed, it is. So let's get all of that out of the way: it's one of the most astonishing, embarrassing, misbegotten misfires from a name brand director in recent memory. While it's undoubtedly fun to hurl the invective at a work that truly deserves the abuse (and does this film ever ask--nay, *beg* for it), what is truly striking is that maybe, just maybe, this fantastical tale could have worked on screen. It's just that Shyamalan makes just about every conceivable wrong move along the way from basic conception to execution.

(M1SUB1S4)

The basic idea is this: a sea nymph, called a "narf" (Bryce Dallas Howard), arrives in the pool of a Philadelphia apartment building on a mission to inspire a writer who will change the world. With the help of the building's superintendent Cleveland Heep (Paul Giamatti) and just about all the other tenants, the narf--named (flaming, sledgehammer symbolism alert!) "Story"--attempts to find her "vessel" and then return safely to her aquatic home of "The Blue World" without being harmed by the dangerous wolf-like creatures called "scrunts."

(M3S1)

Now, it would be easy to dismiss this basic idea, which reportedly comes from a bedtime story Shyamalan made up on-the-fly for his young daughters, as incredibly silly. But then that doesn't mean it couldn't have been adapted from the screen effectively, particularly with the originally intended target audience in mind: children. After all, who would be most willing to let the paper-preposterous mythology of narfs and scrunts wash over them at face value? But Shyamalan misses the boat by not only bypassing the kid audience or even the *family* audience but by aiming this heap of hokum squarely at adults. It's perhaps a noble intention to try to make an adult

(Continued M3S1)

audience appreciate and embrace the innocent wonder of a fairy tale, but to do so would require that ever-so-tricky balance known as magic realism--and when the former quality isn't exactly magical and the latter is hardly convincing, trouble is afoot.

Giamatti deserves special credit for doing his damndest to deliver a real performance here, but his authenticity in bringing to life the anguished, stuttering schlub that is Cleveland works against whatever spell Shyamalan tries to conjure. Cleveland, not unlike Mel Gibson's character in the director's 2002 *_Signs_*, has withdrawn from most of the world after a tragedy shattered his faith. Why, then, does he instantly buy into Story and her increasingly convoluted Blue World rules and mythology? Even better, why does *practically everybody else in the building* instantly go with it without question as well? Maybe Shyamalan intended this giant leap to read as a metaphor about how every grown-up is eager and ready to find something greater in which to believe in their mundane existence, but such a theme is clumsily conveyed at best, downright stupid at worst.

It also doesn't help that the magic of this would-be magic realist world isn't the slightest bit alluring, which would've gone a long way toward explaining why everyone in the building is immediately drawn in. Story, with her perpetually limp locks, zombie-pale skin, equally frozen visage, and droning voice to match is quite simply an incredible drag all around--she's rather creepy to look at, and the purple prose that's solemnly whispered out of her mouth is more likely to strike bone-chilling fear than foster exuberant creative inspiration. The feeling she is said to inspire, akin to "pins and needles" as the audience is told, doesn't exactly sound like a sensation that would lead anyone, much less a Chosen One (more on this doozy a little later), to craft a world- and history-changing magnum opus of art and thought. As if it weren't already difficult enough to go with the flow, according to Shyamalan's script the narf mythology derives from a Korean bedtime story--and so the bulk of the heavy, neverending exposition comes via tedious and often downright insulting scenes of a heavily-accented, skanky Korean party girl tenant (Cindy Cheung) translating her non-English-speaking mother's explanations in rough, rather offensive "Me So Horny"-level pidgin English. The talk of narfs and The Blue World are already difficult to take when delivered straight; how can we possibly take it the slightest bit seriously or have even a twinge of investment when the pertinent information is given by stereotype joke characters? Worse still, just when one thinks they have everything with the narfs and the scrunts straight, then Shyamalan introduces new wrinkles and rules to the mythology; I'm not going to even go into what the "tartutic" and "The Great Eatlon" are, or how the interpretation of cereal box images (!) comes into play. (Actually, I'm still trying to figure out how that one came about myself.) The neverending web of new convolutions--needless ones, no less, as ultimately it's still simply about trying to send the narf back home--betray what is by stated conception a kid-friendly fairy tale bedtime story. The reality may be that Shyamalan made up his bedtime tale as it went along when he first told it to his kids, but there's no good reason why a film derived from it should feel like it is.

(Continued M3S1)

But no one dare question the story Shyamalan tries to tell and how he chooses to tell it, and that such smug, self-justification finds its way into the very narrative of Lady_in_the_Water is what finally pushes the film from already overstuffed, undercooked mess to a landmark of catastrophic indulgence. The writer whose ber-profound musings will go on to inspire future world leaders and form the impetus to large-scale global sociopolitical change is played by none other than the writer-director himself. His character--no less than the third lead behind Giamatti and Howard--may not bear his own name, but he might as well, as there's no excuse to cast himself in such a large role (after all, talented South Asian actors who would've nailed this part with far more expression and empathy, such as a Saif Ali Khan or an Abhishek Bachchan, were just a phone call away) other than to make his statement blatantly clear: M. Night Shyamalan is the Vessel of Story. Doubt that at your peril--lest you meet the same fate as Farber (Bob Balaban), a fussy film and book critic whose ceaselessly cynical ways lead him to being at the wrong place at the wrong time with a scrunt. The character and Balaban's rather hilarious performance are probably the most amusing aspects of the film, but in the end one realizes that he really doesn't have much purpose in the grand scheme--other than to be proven "wrong" and pay dearly for it.

(M4S1)

Perhaps the saddest part of Lady_in_the_Water is that Shyamalan definitely a talented filmmaker. Even in some of his heretofore lesser efforts there are moments of technical brilliance; for example, the nailbiting basement/flashlight scene in Signs and a key character's plot-pivoting stabbing in The_Village. If the latter film's disastrous final third was his leap off of the cliff, then the whole of Lady_in_the_Water signifies his plunge off of the deep end. I would love to see Shyamalan work a writing collaborator who would help hone and enhance his admittedly imaginative ideas while streamlining the indulgences--or better yet, apply his craft and technique to someone else's screenplay. But then again, what the hell do I know--I'm a lowly scrunt-bait critic deigning to question the very Vessel of Story.

(M5S2)

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Lady in the Water (2006)

R19

reviewed by
Sam Osborn

M1SUB1S1

Lady in the Water
 reviewed by Sam Osborn
 rating: 2.0 out of 4

(M1SUB1S2)

Director: M. Night Shyamalan Screenplay: M. Night Shyamalan Cast: Paul Giamatti, Bryce Dallas Howard MPAA Classification: PG-13 (some frightening sequences)

(M1SUB1S5)

So I'm late to the party where critics nationwide maim the likes of M. Night Shyamalan. My tardiness, I suppose, is due to the fact that I was the one lonely critic who liked *The Village*. It was clever, I thought, and successfully brooding in style and tone. I bought into it, which is not something I can say about Shyamalan's latest picture *Lady in the Water*. The film, his seventh, lacks any of the unseen menace from *Signs* and begets almost none of the shivers from *The Sixth Sense*. There was awe to *Unbreakable* and that quiet brooding from *The Village*. *Lady in the Water* has wolves covered in grass, big monkeys and a half-naked girl. Sounds like a Michael Bay film, not something from M. Night Shyamalan.

(M1SUB1S4)

The story is easily the most far-fetched of Shyamalan's bunch. It involves a world of water and a world of land. Humans occupy the land world and have drifted farther and farther away from the world of water. But the nutty little mermaid nymphs of the water world want a reunion to bring peace back to the world of land. So out from the drain of an apartment complex's pool comes Story (Bryce Dallas Howard), scaring the daylights out of the landlord, Cleveland Heep (Paul Giamatti). Taking her under his wing and listening to her bizarre, simple sentenced tale, he learns that she is in fact from the world of water. Asking around the tenants, Cleveland finds a Chinese bedtime story that matches the Story's tale. Without giving too much away about the big monkeys and wolves covered in grass, Cleveland learns that if the right sequence of events occurs, Story could make a significant change in the human world, er...the land world in Shyamalan-speak; just as long as she doesn't get eaten by the land and water world's eternal enemy.

(M3S1)

For as complicated as it seems, *Lady in the Water* is no more complex than what it touts itself as: a bedtime story. And this is its largest problem. The issue isn't in the absurdity of Shyamalan's tale because, seriously, how many of his plots aren't absurd? No, the issue with *Lady in the Water* is that it never comes to a boil. The tale is simplistic and undercooked. There's very little mystery to be puzzled, and no twist to speak of at the end (a fact much publicized already). The great potential for menace is smeared clear over with the large helping of anti-climactic encounters with the wolf creatures and the naked mermaid-thing, Story, is so boring that she makes the drones from *The Village* look as nutty as circus freaks. It's a clever idea--bringing a bedtime story to the unimpressive realities of middle-class apartment life--but only if the bedtime story can invoke some real excitement. Shyamalan holds the thrills at bay to make room for slower, more profound material. Problem is, profundity never figures in to *Lady in the Water*. Shyamalan hints at a deeper meaning, showing images of war and disenchantment with the current state of international politics. He even lays a significant element of the bedtime story in the hands of world-weariness, but in the end refuses to let his theme materialize. All we're left with is that silly bedtime story, sans thrill factor.

(M3S2)

The only card truly played is that of Paul Giamatti's. Time and again he's proven his acting bones without Academy recognition (and he won't be getting any here), but Mr. Giamatti is an incredible, really incredible actor. Shyamalan is no stranger to strong characters, especially the downtrodden middle-aged man, and his work with Giamatti's character, Cleveland Heep, is a shining star among ashes for Lady in the Water. Giamatti's co-star, Bryce Dallas Howard, hardly deserves mention since her role could be played by a nine year old. Droning lines with wide eyes was never difficult, so needless to say, the talented Ms. Howard does fine. Supporting work by Jeffrey Wright, Sarita Choudhury, and Shyamalan himself are all quite good, too.

(M4S1)

And so it isn't the acting that's Lady in the Water's problem; nor is it the camera work or pacing or direction. For M. Night Shyamalan has already proven that he's a swell director with the talent to sometimes be great. But Shyamalan is an easy target for us critics and it seems he's fed up with it. Lady in the Water is a film that shows him floundering with his career and wanting to be or make something different. He even creates a film critic character, Mr. Leeds (Bill Irwin), just so he can kill him off in the most theatric manner his film will allow. It's a show of frustration and zany vendetta. But the man's typical formula of the scare-and-twist movie is changed as well, looking for something the same but, as usual, fundamentally different. He even acts a major role in the film, a role that has prophetic importance. Shyamalan seems to be reaching for something beyond scary movies, something he's hinted at before but hadn't lunged for. Well, he's lunged for the profound and found only a couple scraps of shredded paper. With his next project, he'll have to choose a direction. We'll just have to wait and see. But if it's the mass of critics hating his films that's bothering him, somebody should remind him that Alfred Hitchcock, surely one of his role models, didn't find critical welcome until about 1968, forty years after his career started.

-www.samseescinema.com - (M5S1)

Miami Vice (2006)

R20

reviewed by
Steve Rhodes

(M1SUB1S1)

MIAMI VICE

A film review by Steve Rhodes

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RATING (0 TO ****): 1/2

(M1SUB1S5)

Zzzzzz. Utterly lifeless, MIAMI VICE is a film to be endured rather than enjoyed. And it's as cinematically appealing as an old, washed out videotape. Think of it as the anti-"CSI Miami," which bursts with lush colors and crisp images. In contrast, MIAMI VICE is just flat ugly, which might be tolerable if the script and acting weren't so incredibly boring.

(M3S1)

Writer and director Michael Mann succeeds, as he did in ALI, only in wasting our time -- and lots of it in this two-hour-plus turkey.

Even if Colin Farrell and Jamie Foxx are called Det. James 'Sonny' Crockett and Det. Ricardo Tubbs, the characters are as generic a pair of buddy cops as they come. In this emotionfree drama and actionless actioner, the acting is as bland as it comes, with the characters looking so stoic that they could be statues. It's also devoid of any much needed humor, taking itself way too seriously.

Remember how much fun the TV series was? Well, this movie is as dull and dreary as the television show was enjoyable. This plodding movie is filled with one meaningless scene after another. They throw in numerous sex scenes, but these unerotic moments are perfunctory and brief. If sex is really this boring, abstinence would be a much bigger hit in the world.

The lines are mumbled and whispered, so that most of them become unintelligible. This is likely a good thing, since the dialog one does hear is pretty awful. As Isabella, the story's love interest, Gong Li manages to completely garble almost everything that comes out of her mouth.

The plot is actually simple, but the movie makes it ridiculously complicated. Crockett and Tubbs go undercover for the FBI because the feds have a mole in their midst. The promised tracking down of the mole is one of many parts of the storyline which is started and promptly abandoned. The group that our fearless duo tries to bust is a ring so large that half of mankind appears to be in it. This Equal Opportunity gang, with every ethnic group represented, is into everything but trading fake Bennie Babies over EBay. Name a drug or a gun, and they're dealing it.

This obvious candidate for worst-of-the-year lists moves at a snail's pace. The ending action set piece is a disaster, leaving viewers unsure about who is shooting whom. But compared to the rest of the picture, it is the only part with any energy in it. Most of the movie will have viewers waiting for it to finally get started. Only in this ending firefight does the movie even come close to getting in gear. Although a lot of people die in the film, nothing is more dead than the movie itself.

(M3S3)

"Leave now. Time is luck," Isabella tells Sonny, repeating her favorite Chinese fortune. "You should just get out," he replies to her in agreement. You should take their advice if you accidentally purchase a ticket to see the movie. Walk out. No, run out. Go home. Watch any episode of the old TV show, and you'll have ten -- nay, a thousand -- times more fun.

(M4S2)

MIAMI VICE runs 2:12. It is rated R for "strong violence, language and some sexual content" and would be acceptable for teenagers.

(M5S3)

Giving it just 1/2 of a *, my son Jeffrey, age 17, said the movie was absolutely horrible. He complained that there was no depth to the characters and almost no

(Continued M5S3)

action in the movie. He thought it was in bad need of better dialog, more music, decent acting and a script that made sense.

The film opens nationwide in the United States on Friday, July 28, 2006. In the Silicon Valley, it will be showing at the AMC theaters, the Century theaters and the Camera Cinemas.

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