



Billy Madison (Adam Sandler), the son of a hotel magnate, makes a bet that he can repeat all 12 grades of school in less than six months to win control of the family business. He is the tall one on the right.

Sandler Moves Up in the World

Billy Madison has to go back through all twelve grades again so he can inherit the family business. "Don't you think that's a little pathetic?" asks his third grade teacher. "Yes," replies Billy Madison, before the audience can get a chance. But for some reason, this is a good movie.

The film starts out with Billy (Adam Sandler of "Saturday Night Live" fame) lounging around in a pool, improvising an ode to his suntan lotion, without being very funny. It's a scary way to start a movie, and as Billy jumps out and drunkenly drives a golf cart, screaming and shouting (without being very funny), to pick up the day's delivery of nudie magazines, the audience prepares to hibernate. But then a giant penguin shows up out of nowhere, dancing and taunting him.

MITCH BENNETT

Movie Review
"Billy Madison"

B

"Is that funny?" wonders the audience. While it's probably not, it's strange enough to pull us into the next scene, where the plot unfolds. Billy's father Brian Madison (Darren McGavin) is about to give control of his Fortune 500 hotel corporation over to the evil V.P. Eric Gordon (Bradley Whitford). "But Dad," says Billy, "I thought we had this unspoken pact that you would go to work and build our future,

and I would stay home and enjoy myself and one day, you'd hand over the business, and I'd really appreciate it." So now Billy must prove to his father that he's not an idiot and is capable of running the company. After a less than touching scene in which Billy's Dad agrees to the deal, all of the characters leave Billy on a staircase, where he dances to a Culture Club song for about a minute, without being very funny. But for some reason, this is a good movie.

Then school starts, and if you can get over the premise that a 27-year-old man would be allowed in an elementary school at all, much less as a student, then you can start to really enjoy the show, which is, for some reason, a good movie.

Bridgette Wilson ("Last Action Hero"), Billy's third grade teacher/girlfriend Veronica, has a tough job. She has to be the only serious character in a stupid movie, and she tries, but always looks ridiculous. It seems like this could be, if not the end of her career, the end of her pride. By the credits, though, she has grown on us, much like the rest of the movie, for no identifiable reason. The main problem with her character is that no one can figure out why she falls for Billy, whom she originally hates. The closest I can guess is that her emotions go into a frenzy when Billy thoughtfully saves third-grader Ernie's reputation after Ernie pees his pants. Ah, love. But for

some reason, this is a good movie.

The majority of "Billy Madison" is like a really long episode of SNL, only it's often funny. This pleasant sequence of short skits involving Veronica, the different grades, graduation parties, Brian Madison, and Billy's loser buddies (Norm MacDonald and Mark Beltzman) continues until Billy reaches high school. He apologizes to a slimey nerd of a man whom he had teased during his first tenure at high school, who says it's okay, then crosses Billy off of a list entitled "People to kill." Here the sketch format turns surreal as the guy lounges back and puts on lipstick, smiling in a way that I can only describe as odd. The flavor of surrealism (or is it just stupidity?) continues to the end, and for some reason, it works.

A good way to describe the movie would not be to quote director Tamra Davis: "It never gets too goofy. That's one of things we tried to stay away from." But for some reason, this is a good movie.

Sharing the jokes would be sinful, but be aware that there are lots of them, some real winners, some original Sandler songs, and even some touching "cute kid" scenes. Sandler performs light-heartedly, and even though he's often a loud jerk, you just want to hang out with him the whole time.

Believe it or not, "Billy Madison" is a good movie.

Leonardo DiCaprio Liveness 'Dead'

Giving "The Quick and the Dead" a B- may make some people angry. Sam Raimi fans will most likely be hailing it as a new masterpiece from the king of cheese, thereby deserving an A, but people who loathe the film for its frenetic camera movement, some sketchy performances (particularly by Sharon Stone), and a wandering plot will be clamoring for no greater than an D.

I was simultaneously torn between raving about it simply on the basis of my affection for Raimi and my disappointment with the film for the same reason.

TODD GILCHRIST

Movie Review
"The Quick and the Dead"

B-

"The Quick and the Dead" is certainly not a conventional western. It stars Sharon Stone as Ellen (though usually called Lady by the townspeople), a revenge-driven cowgirl determined to pay back Herod (Gene Hackman), the dictatorial ruler of the town called Redemption, for exacting the murder of her father when she was a little girl.

Herod, who brought order ("Not law," he insists) to Redemption, holds an annual quick-draw contest to weed out all of those persons who might possibly be able to wrest control of the town from him. Ellen enters, along with Herod, his son, Kid (Leonardo DiCaprio), and an outlaw-turned-preacher named Cort (Russell Crowe) whom Herod's men captured.

As the contest progresses, these four characters defeat their opponents with skill, grace, and panache. In flashback we learn of Ellen's motives to kill Herod, as well as Cort's past and the Kid's reasons for entering the contest.

These stories are executed with admirable skill, never slipping into expository conversations but using them to bond the characters together.

The rest of the story, however, makes you feel conscious that you're watching a movie, thereby losing any of the resonance the film has.

I'm not sure if I should fault Sam Raimi or not. Raimi directed such cult classics as "Evil Dead 1" and "2," "Army Of Darkness," and "Darkman," which was fairly successful, and he is well known for his strange angles, P.O.V. shots, and superfast pacing.

In "The Quick and the Dead," however, he seems...restrained. Whether he's trying to outgrow these adolescent techniques or he faced pressure from the studio, Raimi didn't seem to know what he wanted.

The scenes that remind of his earlier classics are priceless, including a P.O.V. shot through someone's head and a shot of a shadow which features the bullet hole of it's owner.

He didn't speed up any of the shots like he usually does, usually for comic effect or to make the not-so-special effects look more real, and this makes the film seem almost slow.



Leonardo DiCaprio stars as the cocky gunslinger Kid, who is the son of Redemption's Mayor Herod (Gene Hackman), in "The Quick and the Dead."

"The real person to blame in the film is Sharon Stone. Until this point, I've withheld judgment on her acting because I haven't seen her in anything that tested her ability (or lack thereof)."

Still, his radical montage sequences and depth-of-focus shifts almost compensate for these shortcomings.

The real person to blame in the film is Sharon Stone. Until this point, I've withheld judgment on her acting because I haven't seen her in anything that I believe tested her ability (or lack thereof).

With "The Quick and the Dead," I realize that she can't bring anything more to a role than steeley, pensive looks and a husky voice that will melt butter.

The problem with her performance is that the lines aren't to be played straight. Bruce Campbell, who starred in the Evil Dead films, played up the cheesiness of lines like "Come get some," and Stone's playing the lines straight loses the campiness that previously endeared Raimi's films to audiences.

The film could have been campier and it would have been much more enjoyable; instead, it seems cheesy in a takes-itself-too-seriously way.

The other performances in the film are great. Gene Hackman, who did this character once already in "Unforgiven," mails in his evil, omnipotent mayor of Redemp-

tion. He seems so comfortable killing, taxing, and generally abusing the townspeople, you would think he were the same way in real life.

Russell Crowe's previous credits include an Australian film named "Romper Stomper," in which he starred as a skinhead. Here, with a very full head of hair, Crowe does his best to make a one-dimensional character realistic and likeable. He is successful, even though his character doesn't do a whole lot more than lie in the street or get beat up.

The actor who truly shines in this film is Leonardo DiCaprio. I give Stone credit for pushing to hire him as the cocky, wild Kid. His very presence on the screen makes you smile, and his bravado in the face of immense odds makes you feel brave even as you pity him.

We learn about halfway into the film that he's seeking recognition as Herod's son, and respect for being the fastest draw in the west.

Leonardo, who was nominated for an Oscar for his performance in the much-overlooked "What's Eating Gilbert Grape," brings all of Kid's brash youthfulness as well as his insecurities easily to the screen.

He is the only character you feel anything for, but the audience can easily identify with a person who obviously puts on an ostentatious front in order to compensate for an inner lack of confidence.

People have suggested that he is next in line as heir to River Phoenix's throne; I can't think of anyone who is more qualified.

We're destined to see some great work from him, if these films have been any indication, and I hope he finds roles which suit his incredibly in-depth acting.

If you are a Raimi fan, I imagine you will like this movie; if not, I can't predict. It will be interesting to see how successful the film is, because it denies convention even as it reaches for it.

See it for yourself, if for no other reason than the combination of DiCaprio and Raimi, and find out whether "The Quick and the Dead" is the kind of action film people other than myself like.

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