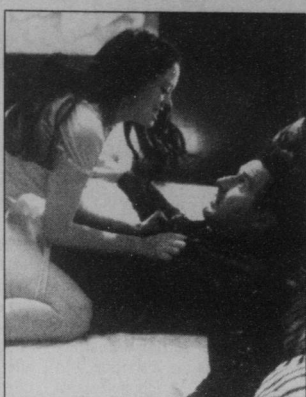


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All-Star Cast Drives Complex 'Black and White'

By DAVE POVILL Staff Writer

In 'Black and White,' writer-director James Toback examines certain white people's obsession with hip-hop culture.

Actually, Toback does much more than that, creating a fascinating, if somewhat complicated story that really examines the universal human struggle for identity.

Film-critic speech aside, the movie is really amazing. With all its flaws, of which there are a few, 'Black and White' still comes off as a freshly sharp piece of work.

The movie has come under consider-

able criticism for its winding, fragment-ed, convoluted story. In all honesty, the movie is not hard to follow at all until the last five minutes.

Admittedly, those last five minutes throw you for some serious loops. But anyone who has trouble following the main story is probably sleeping or just can't get past the white characters' painful attempts at speaking "Ebonics."

What may confuse you is the sheer number of characters, who all smack of eerie familiarity. At times, it seems as though the entire world has been cast in this movie.

Critical roles are played by Oli "Power" Grant and Corey "Raekwon" Woods of Wu-Tang, Bijou Philips, Robert Downey Jr., Brooke Shields, Ben Stiller, Elijah Wood, Jared Leto, Marla Maples, Claudia Schiffer and even Mike

Tyson, just to name a few.

Essentially, the plot looks something like this. Rich Bowers (Grant) is a thug-turned-rapper who is trying to ditch his criminal ways and make it legitimately. His friend Dean (Houston) is a college basketball player who gets blackmailed by Luke (Stiller) into ratting on Rich. Meanwhile, Charlie (Philips) and her gang of privileged upper-crust white teen groupies hang all over Rich and his crew while filmmaker Sam (Shields) makes a documentary about them and Sam's gay husband (Downey Jr.) fawns over every man within a 20-mile radius. So maybe it is a little bit complicated. But it's all woven together intricately, although somewhat unrealistically.

What's more, with this hodgepodge of actors and non-actors, Toback manages to get many stellar performances.

Robert Downey Jr., for one, is wonderful, even as he's getting smacked around by Mike Tyson, who plays himself impressively as a tormented soul just trying to stay out of jail (although that probably wasn't much of a stretch for him).

Toback also plays around with the camera, at times making the film look like a Hype Williams video, then switching to a Hitchcock-esque technique.

The film's only major flaw is the ending, which obviously can't be discussed in too much detail, albeit to say it was a bit of a cop-out.

Beyond that, "Black and White" is an incredibly fun joyride through the world of hip hop that even manages to carry with it a message.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Intensity Fizzles Down At End of 'Engagement'

By LINDSEY ZUCKERMAN Staff Writer

In like a lion, out like a lamb. At least that is how "Rules of Engagement" works. While the film's early scenes in Vietnam and modern-day Yemen depict intense battles, the film eventually fades to a sedate, lackluster ending.

Although "Rules of Engagement" has some definite flaws, it also provokes interesting thoughts about the fine line between right and wrong in the heat of battle. Starring Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel L. Jackson, the film follows the aftermath of a mission gone wrong.

The film begins in a 1968 battle in Vietnam, where Terry Childers (Jackson) saves Hays Hodges (Jones). The movie then moves to the present, where Col. Childers goes to Yemen to protect an embassy. When the protest outside the embassy turns violent and three Marines die in action, he orders his men to open fire on the crowd.

To avoid a diplomatic crisis, the U.S. government charges Childers with the murder of the 83 Yemen men, women and children killed during the incident. The rest of the film follows the events surrounding Childers' court martial, where his old friend Col. Hodges defends him.

The plot of the film fails to tackle many of the underlying emotional issues. Childers' single-minded dedication to the Marine Corps, the National Security Advisor's cover-up and the bond between Childers and Hodges could all have produced fodder for a film with more emotional depth.

Nevertheless, the interesting ethical issues, impassioned acting and powerful

imagery make the film entertaining, even if not profound.

Both Jones and Jackson lend the film subtlety and passion as actors. The mundane script could have made both main characters come off as cardboard stoics, but the men's acting talent saves the film from this failure. Jones imbues his character with an underlying sadness for his shortcomings as a soldier and lawyer without seeming pathetic. Jackson's steely gaze and powerful voice suggest the seething anger his wronged character feels.

The not-so-subtle imagery of the film contributes to its impact. In the bloody moments after the Vietnam and Yemen battle scenes and the overwhelming sound of flies buzzing suggests death and gore. This unsettling noise reminds how vulgar death can be. A severely injured Yemen girl seen multiple times during the film serves as a symbol of the havoc Childers caused.

The biggest failing of the film is its unimpassioned ending. The courtroom battle, while intriguing, does not possess the same intensity as the rest of the film. When the court martial ends, "Oh" is a more likely reaction than "Wow."

"Rules of Engagement" is no "A Few Good Men" or "Platoon." But even without the consistent drama of these other films, "Rules of Engagement" entertains with its talented cast and thought-provoking issues.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Driver, Duchovny Make 'Return' Sappy but Satisfying

By FERRIS MORRISON Staff Writer

Alright ladies, the fantasy has finally come to life - David Duchovny in construction gear!

Well, maybe not the whole fantasy, but Duchovny does don a construction helmet in his latest movie, "Return to Me."

Starring opposite Minnie Driver, Duchovny plays Bob Rueland, a contractor who loses his wife in a car accident. After a year of mourning, he finally meets Grace Briggs (Driver), a waitress and heart transplant recipient. Little do they know that Briggs received the heart of Rueland's deceased wife.

Director and writer Bonnie Hunt filled her screenplay with witty humor and comical scenarios that kept the audience laughing out loud.

Although she has had numerous acting roles in films such as "The Green Mile," "Kissing a Fool" and "Random Hearts," "Return to Me" marks Hunt's first significant film direction. Hunt also plays Grace's friend and confidante.

Driver, as always, plays her role with charm and grace. While it's a little hard to believe that a heart transplant recipient could be so spunky, Driver lights up the screen as a woman that doesn't seem to have a single character flaw.

Girls, don't bother trying to get your boyfriends to go to this one. You'll enjoy it more if you can watch it with your girlfriends, drooling over Duchovny and swooning over a clever love story.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

MOVIE REVIEW "Rules of Engagement"



MOVIE REVIEW "Return to Me"



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15 SA JUNIOR BROWN** (\$15)
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