

Schrader Flick Brings Crane's Sinful Past Into 'Focus'

BY AARON FREEMAN
Staff Writer

The bloody corpse still steaming, Scottsdale Police Lt. Ron Dean said of Bob Crane, "The murder victim has no secrets."

Speaking in parables or specifically, Bob Crane certainly had secrets at the time of his bludgeoning death in 1978 — secrets that death ushered into the public's eye and secrets detailed in Paul Schrader's new film "Auto Focus."

Director of "American Gigolo" and "Hardcore," the male sexual psyche is securely latched to Schrader as much as his affliction for depression and deterioration, as seen in writing credits "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull."

A fixture in the '70s drug-fueled film renaissance, Schrader has little difficulty conjuring the essence, mood and spirit of mid-'60s Los Angeles encircled in a veil of easy drugs, orgy culture and cool sunglasses. And while capturing the scene and the man himself, with Greg

Kinnear mirroring Crane in an Oscar-worthy role, the story itself is beautifully simple — and quite disturbing.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Diggler, it seems, encapsulates the story of "Hogan's Heroes" star Bob Crane, whose swinging sexual exploits and obsession with videotaping his conquests constantly lurked behind his life as family man and wholesome TV star.

"Auto Focus" chronicles his obsession and fall, as well as his relationship with compatriot and video expert John "Carpy" Carpenter (Willem Dafoe). Carpenter relies on Crane to bag girls in exchange for the primitive equipment Carpy provides to fuel Crane's fetish.

The obsessions of both men slither gorgeously across the screen in Kinnear and Dafoe. Kinnear captures the charm and innocence of Crane — the blushing con man.

Handsome, desperate, deprived, unrepenting, Kinnear smirks his way into a muddy hole of failure with obsession waiting at the edges.

And Dafoe as the holy sleazeball himself — Carpenter — illustrates his fermented acting prowess, delivering his most fitting roles in years. Deep wrinkles and a

toothy smile shape the shadow behind the creature in slimy, impeccable fashion.

But while the performances drive the mind into glorious somersaults and the constant hand-held, grainy photography warps expectations and dazzles the eye, the film is ultimately unsatisfying.

Crane does not learn, repent or even really enjoy himself. Sex is the fix for a junkie of a different sort. Only in death does Crane cease his exploits. The death scene itself, hammered across the screen in a bloody spray, brutally shocks an audience accustomed to dream-like sex and gentle voices.

"Auto Focus" is an above-average bio-pic with absolutely incredible acting, photography and music but with lasting impressions that lie somewhere near impressed agony and not too far from pissed-off awe.

Admittedly, it's hard to be really happy or completely content after any film by Paul Schrader — such is the nature of his films. "Auto Focus," in particular adds all the right elements to a story that is unchangeably bleak.

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

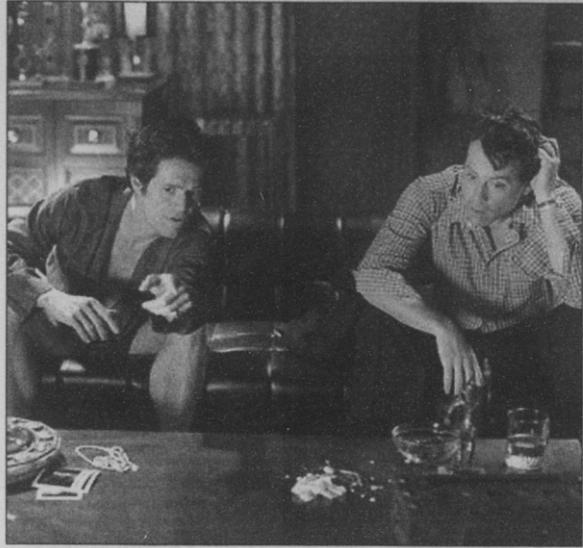


PHOTO COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

The decadent life of "Hogan's Heroes" actor Bob Crane is let out in the light as Willem Dafoe and Greg Kinnear star in the lusty "Auto Focus."

dive
recommends

By Erin Sullivan

■ "Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb" A hilarious satire about the Cold War, this film questions the authority of politicians who can destroy at the push of a button. Although it was released in 1964, you just might find some modern-day relevance.

■ "The Woman Who Walked Into Doors," Roddy Doyle Anytime a man writes this convincingly from a female point of view, he deserves some recognition.

Doyle proves he's worth all of his Booker Prize in this harrowing account of an Irish housewife who is constantly and horribly terrorized for years by her abusive, discontented husband.

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Shallow 'Spy' Recycles Old Genre Themes, Jokes 'Bowling' Blames America For Gun-Wielding Society



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA PICTURES

Owen Wilson (left) and Eddie Murphy team up to find an invisible jet in "I Spy," a predictable addition to the vacuous spy/comedy genre.

BY DUNCAN PITTMAN
Staff Writer

I spy, with my little eye, something predictable.

It's amazing that even in the 21st century, the action/comedy/buddy movie continues to sell movie tickets and buckets of popcorn.

What a concept. Let's take two guys, completely opposite in every way — especially in race — and even though they are total screw-ups, let's throw them together in an exotic location and place them in unrealistic situations. While we're at it, let's make them invincible against bullets and fire and able to undermine scores of trained international agents and have them be responsible for solving the most perilous threat to our national security.

"I Spy," the newest film of this genre, stars Owen Wilson as super agent Alex Scott and Eddie Murphy as boxing champion Kelly Robinson. They're an unlikely pair who must retrieve a missing Air Force secret weapon, an invisible stealth bomber called the Switch Blade, from the hands of Arnold Gundars (Malcolm McDowell), an illegal arms dealer in Budapest.

With the help of some funky spy equipment and a briefcase full of attitude, the motley duo team up to solve the nation's most dangerous threat.

"I Spy" was inspired by the original 1960s television show where Bill Cosby starred as a black-tennis-player-turned-sidekick to a white super spy. Although the show was groundbreaking for its era, "I Spy" the movie bares little if any resemblance to its original television version. In fact, the film barely breaks any new ground at all and succeeds only

as an entertaining film starring two popular comedians who fight the forces of international evil with hilarious, over-the-top results.

They take a cliched genre and almost make it work via each star's distinctive comedic performance and their visible chemistry.

However, the pitch for this film could literally be: "Lethal Weapon" and every other annoying male buddy film ever made meets "The Bourne Identity." The film spends far more time entertaining the viewer with explosion scenes and less time filling in several holes in the plot.

What the film lacks in innovative plot twists, however, it makes up in quality performances. Both Wilson and Murphy deliver exactly what the audience wants and expects. Murphy explodes onto the screen with his classic over-the-top, cocky attitude, while Wilson plays his white-bread, wholesome Boy Scout routine.

Their collective comedic talent works as a refreshing blend of new comedy, and maybe that's because it was obvious that the two stars spent a lot of screen time ad-libbing.

There also are some genuinely funny moments and cameos, such as Lumbergh (Gary Cole) from "Office Space" as a Steven Seagal look-alike super spy and an amusing bonding scene between Wilson and Murphy in a Hungarian sewer.

However, unless you are a die-hard Wilson or Murphy fan, I would recommend saving your money and renting one of the scores of classic action/comedy/buddy films of yesteryear available at your local video store.

You don't need to see "I Spy." Chances are, you've already seen it.

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BY ERIN SULLIVAN
Staff Writer

Michael Moore's newest documentary, "Bowling for Columbine," is enough to make you want to move to Canada.

After the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School, Moore and his crew set out to uncover the reasons why more than 11,000 Americans die from gun violence every year. From school shootings to media sensationalism to gun fanatics, Moore asks a fundamental question.

What the hell is wrong with America?

No newcomer to controversy, Moore has established himself as the unrelenting pain in conservative America's neck. As the author of the best-selling "Stupid White Men" and the creator of the 1990 documentary "Roger & Me," Moore's irreverent take on American history has raised more than a few eyebrows.

He's aggressive, he's opinionated and, more than anything, he's asking all the right questions.

From the opening scene — in which Moore opens a bank account to receive a free promotional gun — a mirror is turned on American society and its love affair with the Second Amendment.

In his home state of Michigan, Moore manages to find a large cast of gun-touting crazies who provide both frightening and hilarious accounts of America's need to arm.

The film's narrative takes many detours from the topic of gun control,

weaving together a vast spectrum of issues through interviews, newsreels and Moore's own acts of social protest.

Unquestionably biased by Moore's point of view, "Bowling for Columbine" is no objective inquiry into the state of gun control today. Instead, we get something better — the passionate, personal journey of a teenage marksman who has become completely disgusted with the way guns are treated in America.

One of the most fascinating issues Moore attempts to tackle is a distinctly American sense of paranoia. Beyond the guns, he argues that we Americans come from a peculiar history of fear. Even as murder rates drop, media coverage of violent crime rises, creating a false sense of danger in our society — one that causes us to gate our neighborhoods, alarm our homes and arm our families.

Admittedly, Moore can get far fetched at times. He directly links the KKK and the NRA and also suggests that previous media frenzy over Africanized bees is a latent manifestation of white America's racism.

It's a pill that's a little hard to swallow — but compelling nonetheless.

For all its ups and down, there's a reason "Bowling for Columbine" was the first documentary to be accepted into the Cannes Film Festival in 46 years. This is a brave, passionate film — one that deserves more local attention than it's likely to get.

By turning the camera on our society, Moore often makes us ashamed to be Americans — but he does it with the hope that there's still time for change.

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