

Powerful documentary captures family's descent

BY BRIAN MILLIKIN
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

In a summer of sequels, superheroes and swashbucklers, it's documentaries that have taken the flag of sheer quality and entertainment.

Bird tale "Winged Migration" wins with its awe-inspiring visuals, and the hilarious "Spellbound," which follows young contestants at the National Spelling Bee, is more amusing and suspenseful than any actual comedy released thus far this summer.

Now there's "Capturing the Friedmans," a gripping tale of a painfully emotional scandal in late-'80s Great Neck, a suburb in Long Island. The film is a powerful family drama, as moving as any fictional drama this year and probably a good deal more disturbing.

The film tells the remarkable, twisted story of the Friedman family — father Arnold, wife Elaine and children David, Seth and Jesse, all in their 20s or late teens. They live an outwardly normal life; Arnold is a retired schoolteacher who tutors their computer skills. But on a November day in 1987, police batter down their door and remain in the Friedmans' lives to this very day.

Arnold is arrested for owning child pornography, and events gradually spin out of control. Police gather several testimonies of boys

MOVIE REVIEW "CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS"

★★★★★

Arnold tutored privately, and allegations of sodomy and rape surface. Police arrest Arnold and his 19-year-old son Jesse, implicated in many testimonies. All told, the men will be charged with more than 200 counts of sodomy — but the truth of the allegations remains elusive.

Director Andrew Jarecki follows the events through frank interviews with Jesse, David, Elaine and Arnold's brother. (Arnold killed himself in prison, and Seth declined involvement). But the film's power comes from home video Jarecki remarkably was allowed to use — hours upon hours of home footage recorded by the Friedmans before, during and after their horror.

Arnold's obsession with self-documentation carried to his children, leaving us with haunting and often stunning footage. The troubled Friedmans never turned the camera off even as the family unraveled. The footage elevates the film beyond crime investigation, creating a portrait of a ravaged family and the elusive nature of truth.

Footage of Arnold and family squabbling the day before his sen-

tencing is jaw-dropping. The family creates its own insulated world, performing for the camera, and eventually that world betrays them.

The darkly fascinating film walks a tight rope, refuses to point fingers and winds up as a stark testament of human weakness and personal gravity. It's not a flattering portrait of anyone, save the Friedman children — attacked by a disturbed father, an emotionally cold mother and a rabid media and police.

In a film world where fiction reigns and explosions matter more than emotions, "Capturing the Friedmans" is like a guided missile of dark fascination and real heartbreak. In Jarecki's gut-wrenching documentary, nonfiction has far more power than any superhero.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

STAR SYSTEM

- ★ POOR
- ★★ FAIR
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★★★ EXCELLENT
- ★★★★★ CLASSIC

'Bad Boys 2' lives up to name

BY MICHAEL SULLIVAN
STAFF WRITER

"Does it go boom?" This little tidbit suffices to explain Michael Bay's childishly wicked means of validation for a film.

Bay is an auteur of the explosive, inane, mind-numbing sub-genre of action. While he has a unique talent in constantly revolving a camera around loud, sensationalized drama, his overblown formula doesn't always add up to a good action film.

"Bad Boys" was his debut, and it worked pretty well.

"Bad Boys 2" revels in debased filmmaking to the point of insanity. If you're not burned by the ridiculous plot, you will be by the constant noise of explosion, vulgarity and idiocy. Once the movie hits the two-hour mark, there's not much one can do except stare blankly into the oblivion on-screen.

One would think that with the help of the odd couple of Will Smith and Martin Lawrence from the first "Boys," this tripe would have some life. Nope. In the sequel, they're an annoying old couple whose jokes drop like the corpses falling around them. Will can't stop jawin', Martin can't stop whining and the audience can't stop groaning.

No use discussing the drawn-out plot involving Ecstasy and caricatures of drug lords, because it's all been done before. Well, action pieces involving decapitating

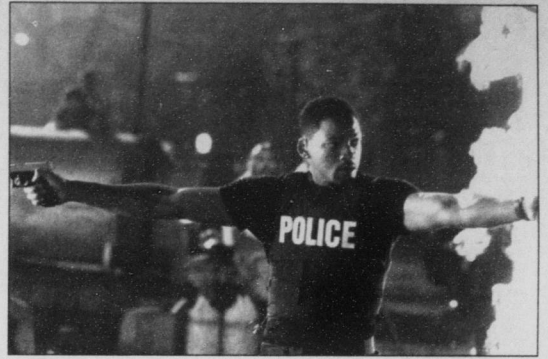


PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA PICTURES
Will Smith, as Detective Mike Lowery, fights drug crime in the hit film "Bad Boys 2." The movie was No. 1 at the U.S. box office last weekend.

MOVIE REVIEW "BAD BOYS 2"

★★★

cadavers by running over them again and again haven't been done quite like this, but who really wants to see that?

Bay lends only two good characteristics to this film — his skill in filming gunfights and chase scenes. A battle of weapons in a run-down house is a whirling tornado of gunplay. The chase scene involving a Ferrari, a tractor-trailer and a highway full of cars ranks among the summer's best.

Too bad the rest of "Boys 2" is a

barrage of repetitive week. One good example of this continuous lack of inspiration involves Lawrence's lame attempt to calm himself by repeating some Eastern chant that sounds like "woosah." It gets old real fast. (I did the same during the movie, but it still made me mad).

This movie goes "boom" like a dead body spilling its guts. Avoid it like you would a cadaver. Otherwise, you'll encourage Bay to follow the Hollywood action trend and make a trilogy.

"Woosah."

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