

## Get Off His Lawn: "Gran Torino," "The Unborn," and "Bride Wars"

Written by Mike Schulz

Monday, 12 January 2009 09:48

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### **GRAN TORINO**

As much as I love *Unforgiven*, *Million Dollar Baby*, and *Bronco Billy*, I'll admit that I've never been a huge Clint Eastwood fan. (Don't remember

*Bronco Billy*

? The 12-year-old in me will never

*forget*

it.)

*Gran Torino*

, however,

is something truly special, a simple - though not simple-

*minded*

- and straightforward melodrama that succeeds as both a heartfelt meditation on aging

*and*

an exhilarating crowd-pleaser, and Clint is so thrillingly, spectacularly

*Clint*

in his latest directorial offering that it's likely his performance won't just please fans, but ensnare a batch of new ones. After catching the movie in Chicagoland during the holidays, I saw it again this past weekend both for the sheer enjoyment of the experience and to see if

*Gran Torino*

is really as good as I remembered. It is. (I also wanted to hear lines I originally missed through our raucous audience laughter, but no luck - the cackles were just as loud this time around.

Maybe on a third viewing.)

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Great as it is, though, the movie isn't perfect, and its flaws are easily identifiable (if mostly insignificant) ones. *Gran Torino* finds Eastwood playing Korean War veteran Walt Kowalski, a fierce, mean-spirited bigot who becomes the unintentional savior to the Hmong neighbors in his Michigan suburb, and for a while it seems that the role may *too* well-tailored to its star. Nick Schenk's screenplay, while biting and frequently hysterical, is filled with the sorts of declarative lines that make obvious what was already more than apparent - after Walt's steely will begins to soften, Eastwood is actually forced to growl into the mirror, "You have more in common with these gooks than you do your own family!" - and its narrative arc will be familiar to anyone with even a passing awareness of the Dirty Harry series. (Violence, retaliation, repeat.) And, admittedly, it takes a while to adjust to the cheerfully eager non-acting of the Asian actors - principally Bee Vang and Ashney Her - cast in major supporting roles. Some bloggers have posited that Eastwood deliberately cast nonprofessionals opposite himself to make his own presence loom larger in comparison, and during several crucial scenes here, it's a tough theory to argue against.

Tough, but not impossible, because regardless of whom he's performing with, Eastwood is *majestically* present in *Gran Torino*

. His direction of the piece is expectedly assured and effective - he can infuse even basic one-shots of a whirling fan or a freezer's ascent up a staircase with threat and danger - but as an actor, he might be more alert, polished, and inventive here than ever before on-screen. Looking almost impossibly fit for a man in his late 70s, Eastwood is a subtle yet fall-down-funny comedian in the movie's opening hour, scoring with perfectly cadenced spite and shockingly off-color, and unapologetic, racial epithets. (Shrewd entertainer that he is, Eastwood - who's supremely good at making himself the butt of his own jokes - ensures that you laugh rather than wince at Walt's remarks.)

But after the story takes its inevitable, tragic turn, the performer's natural stoicism reveals itself, instead, to be a defense against deep emotionalism, and both Eastwood and the film itself begin to radiate an almost mythic grandeur; the movie turns out to be not just about Walt, but about all of the reflexively violent, Walt-like characters Eastwood ever played. *Gran Torino* is an extraordinarily entertaining movie that morphs into an extraordinarily moving one, and if, as Eastwood has suggested, Walt Kowalski winds up being his final starring role on-screen, it would be nearly impossible to ask for a more fitting and inspiring cinematic epitaph.

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**BRIDE WARS** is a film about a bride who is being kidnapped by a man who is trying to get her to marry him. The film is a comedy and is based on the book by Elizabeth Gilbert. The film is a sequel to the 2004 film "The Hot Chick" and is directed by David W. Frank. The film is a comedy and is based on the book by Elizabeth Gilbert. The film is a sequel to the 2004 film "The Hot Chick" and is directed by David W. Frank.