

Hughes Ruse: “Easy A,” “Devil,” and “Alpha & Omega”

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 19 September 2010 14:40

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EASY A

With the release of *The Town*, Ben Affleck’s directorial career, in my opinion, now boasts a two-for-two success ratio. So does Will Gluck’s, who follows last year’s hilarious (and sadly under-praised) male-cheerleader parody *Fired Up!* with the current, also hilarious ‘80s-teen-flick parody

Easy A

. It’s no doubt too soon – and maybe even too ridiculous – to ask this, but is it possible that Gluck is our long-awaited heir apparent to Christopher Guest?

A comedy about a sensible, witty high schooler named Olive (the marvelously sensible and witty Emma Stone) who fakes a reputation as a slut to augment her popularity, *Easy A*, like *Fired Up!*, doesn’t feature a single scene that you “believe” in any traditional sense. Everyone on-screen, even our heroine, is an obvious stereotype well-versed in the delivery of fast-paced, stylized wisecracks, and the plotting holds only the most tenuous grasp on “reality.” (Olive scandalizes the school with a lie about her one-night-stand with a college freshman. Seriously? In 2010?)

Yet the what-I-hesitate-to-call-genius of

Easy A –

again, as with

Fired Up!

– lies in how subtly, almost invisibly, the movie’s satirical bent reveals itself; halfway through the film, Olive discusses how she wishes life were more like a John Hughes movie, and it gradually

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dawns on us that we

are

watching a John Hughes movie.

The level-headed and virginal lead, the bitchy and sexually experienced friend, the geeky-younger-guy hanger-on, the hottie love interest, the cartoonish (and, here, Christian) bullies ... all are presented by Gluck and screenwriter Bert V. Royal with tongue firmly in cheek, creating a spoof that’s so close to the vest that it could easily be mistaken for the genuine, generic-teen-comedy article. Despite its somewhat unwise detour into actual sentimentality, *Easy A*

is a sharp and awfully funny piece of work, and bests its ’80s inspirations in one regard, at least: The adults are just as hysterical as the kids. I really liked Thomas Haden Church and Lisa Kudrow as teachers with a secretly troubled marriage, but I freaking

loved

Stanley Tucci and Patricia Clarkson as Olive’s relaxed, tolerant folks, whose every effortless exchange and shared private joke is a miracle of comic timing and chemistry. After seeing his latest, I’m not just jazzed for Will Gluck’s (and Bert V. Royal’s) next movie, but for the chance to see this one

again

, if only for Tucci’s comment to Clarkson as the family preps for DVD night: “Honey, remember that after we watch

The Bucket List

, we have to cross ‘Watch

The Bucket List

’ off our bucket list.”



DEVIL

If you’ve read my reviews of, oh, really any movie M. Night Shymalan has been associated with, you can probably imagine how much I wanted to make fun of *Devil*, the new horror film being proudly advertised as “from the mind of M. Night Shymalan.” (Cue the “Mind?

What

mind?” jokes.) With the auteur taking producing and “story by” credits but blessedly not writing

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or directing,

Devil

still appeared unbearable; its premise

–

five people are trapped in an elevator, one of whom is, ahem,

Satan

– was a howl from the start, and all but guaranteed to lead to one of those twisty, M. Night “Gotcha!” reveals that so many of us love to hate. But in truth,

Devil

isn't bad at all. Or rather, it's not bad enough to be mean-spirited toward. Written by Brian Nelson, the movie has a ponderous and pretentious Old Testament bent, and in the character of Jacob Vargas' security guard, spends far too much time moralizing and denouncing the errors of humans' ways – where's the fun in a

shame-based

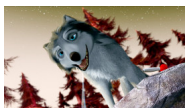
scare flick? Yet director John Erick Dowdle's offering is a surprisingly pungent, effectively claustrophobic piece of work, with continually stunning Tak Fujimoto photography and a strong central performance by Chris Messina, and it delivers a fair number of striking, memorable images. (Once Lucifer's “identity” is revealed, his human host's long stare at the camera – with eyeballs black as pitch – could easily haunt your dreams.) Running less than 80 minutes,

Devil

is a lark, but it's an impressive little lark, and proves that M. Night Shymalan isn't to be wholly written off quite yet.

Damn

it.



ALPHA & OMEGA

I'd long thought that the all-time most irritating cliché in movies was The Interrupted Wedding Scene, in which the climactic union between a pair of mismatched intendeds is broken up right before one of the characters says, “I do.” But after *Alpha & Omega*, I now see that there's something far more annoying than watching this tired narrative device transpire in a romantic comedy: watching it transpire in an

animated

romantic comedy. Of course, before this breathtakingly lazy and insipid family entertainment ever gets to its thwarted nuptials, it's already stolen elements from dozens upon dozens of other

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works: the caribou stampede from

The Lion King

; the heavenly lift-and-plunge shot from

Far & Away

; the wacky comic-relief critters from, you know, just about every animated movie ever made.

(Two of them here – a habitually nattering French-Canadian duck and goose – keep threatening to exit the film forever and keep showing up again; never before have I so longed for a shotgun at the cineplex.)

Devoid of storytelling originality and lacking one clever, or even serviceable, line of dialogue, this adventure-among-the-wolves saga is a droning, repetitive bore – in 3D! –

and features one of the most depressing end title cards in the history of cinema: “Dedicated to the memory of Dennis Hopper.” (The late actor voices one of the grouchier wolves.)

It’s a touching tribute, I suppose, but God knows Hopper deserved to be memorialized in a better movie than

this

.

For a review of *The Town*, see “[Cawps and Rawbbuhs](#) .”