

## And Here's to You, Mr. Robinson: "42" and "Scary Movie 5"

Written by Mike Schulz

Saturday, 13 April 2013 14:58

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**42**

42, writer/director Brian Helgeland's dramatization of three years in the life of baseball trailblazer Jackie Robinson, is an earnest, deliberately old-fashioned entertainment, an inspirational bio-pic made with professionalism and care but little in the way of emotional or thematic nuance – it's the very definition of what-you-see-is-what-you-get filmmaking. In three specific scenes, though, this seemingly prototypical triumph-of-the-underdog sports flick also achieves a legitimate, rousing greatness, and it's the sort of expansive and lingering greatness that makes you leave the picture feeling, with few reservations, that the movie as a whole was truly great.

Helgeland's script traces Robinson's career arc from his post-war playing for the Negro Leagues to his pennant-winning triumph with the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the first of 42's incandescent sequences takes place on the opening day of the Dodgers' 1947 season. With some attendees in the stands cheering him on and many, many others booing him, Robinson (the sensationally charismatic and soulful Chadwick Boseman) takes the plate, and is quickly walked to first base – an anticlimactic event for both fans and hecklers. But after arriving at first, Robinson, in what would become a signature move for the player, makes a lengthy sidle toward second in an attempt to steal, and at that moment, it's as though we're viewing the exact moment that the Dodgers legend was born.

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With Robinson's feet shifting back and forth and his fingers twitching – and his subtly wicked half-grin to the flummoxed pitcher all but asking, "What do you think I'm gonna do *now*?" – Helgeland and Boseman wholly convey Robinson's supreme skill and the pulse-quickening excitement he gets from the game. Yet they also express, quite beautifully, the player's subtle rebuke to the clueless, hateful bigots in the stands and on the field (and in his own dugout) by showing how Robinson maintains his dignity, and faces down his critics, through sheer dint of talent. "You can walk me," Robinson might as well be saying, "but you can't

*stop*

me," and as the man with the number-42 jersey steals second, and then

*third*

, and then crosses home plate on a teammate's base hit, the guarded but unmistakable joy evidenced in Robinson is only matched by the joy that you yourself are feeling. Composer Mark Isham's score, peppered with alternately mournful and exultant trumpet blares, frequently works too hard at evincing emotion. But in this instance,

42

's music is surprisingly subdued, and with good reason; you don't need the added prodding of a score when a full emotional spectrum is dramatized by a director and an actor with this much elegance and effectiveness.



The film's second unforgettable scene occurs when the Dodgers take on the Philadelphia Phillies, and the latter team's manager (played, in a brilliant bit of against-type casting, by Alan Tudyk) goads Robinson at the plate by hurling uninterrupted racial invective at him for the long, *long*

duration of his time there. All told, Tudyk might bark the N-word more in three minutes than *Django Unchained*

's performers did in 150, yet unlike in the Tarantino opus, you don't become inured to it: The word's repetition hits like a continual, ferocious stab to the gut. In its exploration of incendiary race relations,

42

's screenplay often lands on the side of timidity; a few too many obviously drawn rednecks mouth a few too many obviously stated sentiments. But with Tudyk's appalling manager gleefully goading Robinson, and the quietly seething and humiliated ballplayer unable to do anything about it, you feel the full force of the period's more loathsome attitudes and Robinson's seemingly impossible uphill struggle against them. The scene hurts, and hurts deeply, but it's an unforgettable one.

Happily, though, the third of 42's priceless segments is as soul-satisfyingly uplifting as the

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aforementioned one is soul-crushingly wrenching. It climaxes with the much-documented (and factually disputed) gesture that found, during a Dodgers game played in Cincinnati, shortstop Pee Wee Reese (Lucas Black, hugely deserving of a Reese bio-pic of his own) walking over to Robinson and putting his arm around the man's shoulders – a previously unprecedented public display of racial solidarity and empathy. Whether historically accurate or not, it makes for a glorious movie moment – Helgeland's consistently touching work finally becomes bawl-your-eyes-out wonderful – and one that's sentimental without being the least bit manipulative; the tears that fall are honest ones.

There are plenty of reasons to catch *42*: the sensationally enjoyable, lived-in portrayals by Nicole Beharie (spirited, forceful, and lovely as Robinson's wife Rachel), Christopher Meloni, T.R. Knight, John C. McGinley, Andre Holland, Hamish Linklater, and Harrison Ford (offering a juicy, character-actor turn as general manager Branch Rickey); the images of forced segregation presented with laudably unforced horror and heartbreak; the magnificently rendered sights and sounds of baseballs whizzing toward home plate with almost alarming velocity. (You jump in your seat when they land.) But *42* would be more-than-worthwhile viewing even if its pluses were wholly confined to its three finest sequences. It's to the audience's enormous benefit – and, for those of us expecting little more than a blandly traditional and serviceable bio-pic, enormous *relief* – that the movie gives us so many pluses beyond them.



### **SCARY MOVIE V**

I can't even fathom the sighs of relief that must have been released by the creators of *Scary Movie V*

after January's ghost story

*Mama*

opened and the film went on to become a sizable hit. Considering that this latest follow-up to 2000's original scare-flick slapstick is oftentimes a scene-for-scene parody of

*Mama*

,  
with Ashley Tisdale and Simon Rex playing caretakers to three feral children found in an

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abandoned woodland shack, wouldn't the filmmakers have been totally screwed if it wasn't? Part of me says "Definitely yes." But another part – the part that giggled with completely unanticipated frequency all throughout director Malcolm D. Lee's outing – thinks this thing would've worked just fine regardless.

As usual with grab-bag comedies of this sort, the jokes and references are hit-or-miss and a few celebrity cameos (Mike Tyson's especially) just wind up embarrassing, and the movie boasts some of the most atrocious vocal looping I've heard-slash-witnessed since Tommy Wiseau's peerlessly terrible *The Room*. But when the jokes do land, they land big-time; Lee's movie boasts more than a dozen cackle-worthy sight gags (plus one, featuring the game Charlie Sheen and Lindsay Lohan, scored to the Benny Hill theme) mocking

*Paranormal Activity*

's high-speed-video re-creations, and the overall pacing is so tight that even the weaker bits don't have time to sully the movie's lightly delirious mood. And here's something I literally never expected from the fourth sequel in what I presumed was a waning franchise:

*Scary Movie V*

is, without question, the

*fresh*

movie parody I've ever seen. The satirical nods to

*Black Swan*

and

*Inception*

and

*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*

may, by this point, come off as slightly stale (even though Lee's replications of Darren Aronofsky's images, complete with hand-held photography and cameras following closely behind the back of his leading ballerina's head, are madly inspired). But

*Mama*

isn't even available on video yet, at one point there's a quick swipe at

*Zero Dark Thirty*

, and so help me, one entire, grandly satisfying scene is a comically gory salute to

*Evil Dead ...*

not the Sam Raimi version, but the version that debuted at cineplexes

*last weekend*

.(

*Modern Family*

's Sarah Hyland is the lucky lady who gets to slit her own tongue here.) Whatever its flaws,

*Scary Movie V*

feels like the first genre parody made expressly for the Twitter generation, and it's oftentimes a wickedly funny one, to boot.

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