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INSOMNIA

In Christopher Nolan's moody, atmospheric thriller *Insomnia*, based on a 1997 Norwegian film of the same name, Al Pacino plays Will Dormer, a famed Californian detective now under investigation by Internal Affairs. To escape the surrounding publicity, he and his partner (Martin Donovan) are sent to a remote Alaskan town to investigate the murder of a teenage girl, found beaten to death by a killer who apparently went to great lengths – washing her hair, trimming her fingernails – to maintain the dead girl's beauty. Dormer finds his suspect relatively early, but after he becomes the catalyst in a tragic shooting accident, Dormer is increasingly haunted by feelings of guilt and remorse – egged on by the endless Alaskan sun, which shines even at night – and finds the tables turned on him; the suspected killer (Robin Williams) has witnessed the shooting, and threatens to end Dormer's career if he is fingered as the girl's killer.

The best thing *Insomnia* has going for it is its locale. Supplanting the original's Norwegian locations for small-town Alaska proves to be an inspired choice. The film has an almost unearthly beauty that clashes marvelously with the seediness of the murder, and it provides a unique background for what should be typically rote scenarios in a cop thriller; in the film's most exciting sequence, Pacino chases Williams over a floating logjam, falls under the water, and with the dead wood continually traveling and bashing against itself, finds himself unable to surface for air. Throughout *Insomnia*, you feel Nolan's joy at staging scenes that we've seen a hundred times before but in unfamiliar territory, and almost every sequence has a jolt, major or minor, of the unexpected. Were it not for the locations, though,

Insomnia
wouldn't be much more than a well-staged, professional variant of a cop-with-ethical-dilemma picture. Unlike Nolan's previous thriller,
Memento
,
Insomnia
leaves no residue, nothing to think about after the end credits roll, and despite being a bigger production with bigger stars, it feels like a lesser work. Though the film purports to deal with moral ambiguity, it's really just a good genre exercise, entertaining while you're there, but of little import afterwards.

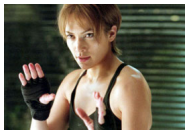
Al Pacino and Robin Williams come off well by reigning in their more bombastic impulses – Pacino refrains from shouting, for the most part, and Williams only uses his mischievous twinkle when his character is at his scariest – but Nolan and screenwriter Hillary Seitz drop the ball by making their final confrontation a typical Hollywood shoot-out; it's far more fun watching their battle of wills when Pacino and Williams *aren't* pointing firearms at one another. Nolan and Seitz also don't do enough with Hilary Swank as a novice Alaskan detective; she brings a welcome freshness to her role, but her transformation from wide-eyed innocent to gritty cop is a bit undeveloped. Yet *Insomnia* remains a fine achievement, flaws and all, and continues this year's cycle of surprisingly strong pre-summer releases.

ABOUT A BOY

Movies are capable of wonders, but try as they might, they still aren't able to prove that it's more rewarding to be a sensitive, well-meaning regular guy than it is to be a self-centered cad with loads of cash. A couple of years ago, in the treacly Christmas hit *The Family Man*, Nicolas Cage portrayed a callow, fabulously wealthy Manhattanite who, after seeing what life would be like with a home and family, acquired Deeper Values, yet Cage's vacuous yuppie was so much more entertaining than his doe-eyed Average Joe that you didn't
want
him to become a better person; gaining a soul meant losing his vivacity. Hugh Grant meets a similar fate in

About a Boy
, Paul and Chris Weitz's mostly lifeless adaptation of Nick Hornby's novel. At first, Grant's Will Freeman is an enjoyable sloth. Jobless and living off the royalties from a song his father wrote, Will's entire life is devoted to TV, music, billiards, and the fleeting attentions of a series of beautiful women; he's connected to no one, and Grant makes Will's hedonism amusing, alluring, and just a little pathetic.

Yet once Will becomes an inadvertent father figure to nerdy, 12-year-old Marcus (Nicholas Hoult), whose mother (Toni Collette) has just tried to kill herself, you can feel *About a Boy*'s sickly sentimentality creeping up on you – you can also
hear
it in the film's overbearing musical score – and you just know you're going to pay for the fun you've had with a series of Life Lessons and the grueling prospect of watching Grant attempt to better himself as a human being (which, in this case, involves Grant struggling through a public performance of "Killing Me Softly" ... how much sentimental gloop must this man subject himself to?). The Weitzes stage this progression with thudding obviousness, and while the cast is in there trying, they can't overcome the film's overriding banality; like all sitcoms posing as movies, everything rough-edged about the film – Shouldn't we be concerned about a suicidally depressed mother raising a pre-teen son all alone? – is ignored to ensure Happy Endings for all who deserve them.
About a Boy
, as bland and forgettable as its title, is summertime counter-programming that makes you long for mindless explosions in Hollywood blockbusters.


ENOUGH

For big laughs, you're better off with *Enough* than you are with *About a Boy*, but considering that the film's nominal subject is spousal abuse, that's probably not intentional. In Michael Apted's revenge melodrama, Jennifer Lopez plays a spunky waitress whose unfaithful, bullying husband (Billy Campbell) would rather see her dead than divorced, resulting in Lopez becoming a grade-A ass-kicker in the final reel. Though written and directed with all the quasi-earnestness of a Lifetime potboiler,
Enough

features one jaw-droppingly ridiculous segment after another: Campbell's "I'm a man, that's what we do" rationale for cheating on his wife; the gross inadequacy of the movie's lawyers and police officers; the meeting between Lopez and her cartoonish, moneybags father (Fred Ward); Lopez's seemingly unlimited funds after Dad sends her what looks to be a thousand dollars in cash; the insanity of Campbell's frat-boy relationship with a dirty cop (Noah Wyle). Despite a nicely understated performance by Dan Futterman as the rumpled good guy whom everyone knows Lopez ought to wind up with, everything about the movie should make audiences groan – including the forced precociousness of Lopez's young daughter – and yet many of them actually seem to be taking this tripe
seriously
. Once Lopez gets some martial-arts training and turns into Zhang Ziyi in record time, many hoot and holler during every moment of Campbell-smacking; Lopez transforms into Dirty Harriet, and the audience – the young women in the theatre, at least – goes nuts. It's terrifying to think that
Enough
might inspire teenage girls everywhere to seek out abusive husbands of their own.