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MOVIE
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Roger
Ebert's
Movie
Yearbook
2012

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This book is dedicated to Robert Zonka, 1928–1985. God
love ya.

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Introduction

The dominant trend in the past twelve months was the ascendancy of 3-D. My views on the process are well known and briefly summarized: It is an unnecessary distraction, inflicts a dim picture upon us, and is a marketing gimmick. Only a process such as true IMAX seems capable of projecting a strong enough beam to handle it. Since the illusion of three dimensions exists already in 2-D, calling attention to the visual plane is a mistake.

In the year since the last *Yearbook*, almost every weekend has featured a 3-D movie, all of them action pictures, many aimed at children or superhero fans. Thus far no serious drama except *Avatar* and very few live-action comedies have used the process, possibly because directors feel it would be a distraction in that genre. In the first half of 2011, a backlash began to take form, with a majority of customers for many movies choosing the cheaper alternative of 2-D.

This is good news. It is encouraging to me because, as a movie lover, I hope anyone who buys a ticket enjoys themselves. This is entirely apart from whether I personally admire a movie; all of my reviews are subjective and intended only to express my opinion, not dictate anyone else's. I must say that as my weekly routine of screenings comes to require at least one weekly

annoyance with the 3-D glasses, the pleasure with which I always begin watching a film has been diminished; I'm already displeased as I look at the studio logo.

One thing I'm learning about movies based on comic book heroes: Their fans study the sources with the devotion and intensity of Shakespearean or biblical scholars. My reviews of these films are subjected to analysis I would appreciate more if it were carried over into more challenging films. I am often lectured on having made plot mistakes, or being unfamiliar with the provenance and relationships of the characters.

This is fair enough. Since the plots of comic book movies are by definition preposterous and arbitrary, one must really care in order to follow them. In the case of a really good movie, such as *The Dark Knight*, *Iron Man*, or *Spider-Man II*, that happens effortlessly. In the case of something like *Thor* or *The Green Lantern*, frankly, my attention sometimes drifts. I don't give enough of a damn. I can no longer be absorbed in new ways of regarding loud and hyperkinetic special effects.

This feeling has reached its zenith with the second and third of the *Transformers* movies, which did not even begin with comic books but with toys. Obviously, a moviegoer who grew up with the toys has a special feeling about them, but their mythology and genealogy afflict me with profound indifference.

Is this a weakness for a movie critic? I would rather

describe it as an attribute. I am a critic who doesn't care much about Transformers. Other critics do. You take your pick. My opinion is of some interest specifically because it originates from outside the fan base.

When I write a blog entry and attract the fury of some fans, I am pleased for them that they care that much. Yet I suspect some of their anger is inspired simply because my review doesn't validate their experience. They went to the movie, they liked it, and now I have the temerity to say I didn't. Does that mean I think they were wrong? Of course not. It means I disagree. Some of these films are loved with an intensity that I suspect will evaporate over time—sometimes as quickly as a few weeks later, when the latest franchise product comes out of the chute.

Movie critics these days find themselves reviewing two kinds of films: real movies and consumer products. Sometimes these categories overlap. Often they're not even intended to. Artistic considerations take second place to marketing concerns, which grow all the more urgent as studios deplete the ranks of available superheroes. Batman, Superman, and Spider-Man, yes, certainly. But . . . the Green Hornet and his magic ring?

* * *

My sincere thanks to Dorothy O'Brien, who has been the book's valued editor at Andrews McMeel Publishing

for many years. Also to Sue Roush, my editor at Universal Uclick, and to Laura Emerick, Amanda Barrett, Mirian Dinunzio, Darel Jevens, Teresa Budasi, Thomas Conner and all the other heroes at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and Jim Emerson and the Web staff at rogerebert.com. Many others are thanked in the acknowledgments.

In autumn 2011, Grand Central published *Life Itself: A Memoir*, my autobiography. Late last year, the University of Chicago Press published *The Great Movies III*. And Andrews McMeel will follow up *I Hated, Hated, Hated This Movie* and *Your Movie Sucks* by publishing a third volume of my collected reviews of bad movies, but for now I'm keeping the title to myself.

ROGER EBERT

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My editor is Dorothy O'Brien, tireless, cheerful, all-noticing. My friend and longtime editor Donna Martin suggested the yearbook approach to the annual volume. The design is by Cameron Poulter, the typographical genius of Hyde Park.

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And special thanks and love to my wife, Chaz, who was

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three books through the press during that time, and was a
cheerleader for this one. I am so grateful to her as we once
again, relieved, enter a period of good health.

ROGER EBERT

Key to Symbols

- ★★★★ A great film
- ★★★ A good film
- ★★ Fair
- ★ Poor

G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17: Ratings of the Motion Picture Association of America

G Indicates that the movie is suitable for general audiences

PG Suitable for general audiences but parental guidance is suggested


PG-13 Recommended for viewers 13 years or above; may contain material inappropriate for younger children

R Recommended for viewers 17 or older

NC-17 Intended for adults only

141 m. Running time

2010 Year of theatrical release

 Refers to “Questions for the Movie Answer Man”

Reviews

A

Accomplices ★★★

NO MPAA RATING, 93 m., 2010

Gilbert Melki (Herve Cagan), Emmanuelle Devos (Karin Mangin), Cyril Descours (Vincent Bouvier), Ninè Meurisse (Rebecca Legendre), Joana Preiss (Esther)
Directed by Frederic Mermoud and produced by Damien Couvreur and Tonie Marshall. Screenplay by Mermoud and Pascal Arnold.

Accomplices coils through two stories, cutting between them as they converge, as we know they will, because the film has opened with a corpse floating in the river Seine. This body, as a flashback establishes, belongs to a boy about nineteen, and the film will watch as he meets a cute girl in a cyber café and leads her into his dangerous world. The other story involves two police inspectors, who begin with the corpse.

Sometimes when a movie cuts between parallel stories it's tiresome. Not this one. The director, Frederic Mermoud, does an interesting thing with time: As the cops are working their way back from the dead body, the other story works its way forward to the point that the body became dead. Then the stories join up and conclude in a

surprising and particularly satisfying way.

Vincent (Cyril Descours) is a hustler who meets his male clients in hotel rooms. He meets Rebecca (Nina Meurisse), likes her, gets her phone number, and they start seeing each other. He says he works in real estate—unlikely, given his scruffy appearance and the shabby mobile home he lives in. She is bourgeois but ready for the wild side, and they fall truly in love, like Bonnie and Clyde and other couples where crime is in the mix.

Vincent eventually tells Rebecca what he really does, and the way the movie charts her reaction is touchingly realistic. She learns of his world and stirs the jealousy of his pimp—or *friend*, as he considers him. It's thrilling for her to glimpse his outlaw life, and fun when they use prostitution income to pay cash for sneakers.

Herve (Gilbert Melki) and Karine (Emmanuelle Devos) are like a long-established couple, skilled in police work, functioning expertly together, sharing personal feelings. We think it's a possibility they might hook up, but the plot isn't that obvious. The film is a police procedural explaining how they begin with a nameless body and find their way back to Vincent's associates and clients. One interview, with a businesswoman who shared Vincent with her husband, is startling: The woman is forthcoming, matter-of-fact, defiant.

Without making a big deal out of it, *Accomplices* puts

several plausible murder suspects onstage, including Rebecca, who disappeared the day of Vincent's murder. It's like an Agatha Christie in which lots of people have the opportunity and the motive. But Mermoud works so close to the characters, sees them in such detail, that only later do we pull back and observe the workings of the plot.

The original English title of the film was *Partners*, and that would have been accurate. It's about two partnerships. The one is the sad, doomed story of Vincent and Rebecca, incapable of dealing with the risks they run. The other is about how Herve and Karine shy away from risks in their lonely personal lives; how police routine creates a way for them to spend most of their waking hours together without having to deal with the sleeping hours.

I appreciate the way French films, in particular, often approach their characters at eye level. There's no artificial heightening. No music pounding out emotional instruction. They're cool, curious, looking for performances with the tone of plausible life. All four of these actors are completely natural in front of the camera.

You may have seen Emmanuelle Devos in films such as *Read My Lips* (2001) or *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (2005); she's in the wonderful *L'Origin*, still unreleased, about a small-town mayor and a desperate con man. She's always attractive, never distractingly so, and comes equipped with intelligence and hidden motives. I

like actors who make me want to figure them out.

~~*Accomplices* is technically a murder mystery. But the murder is only what happens. A lot of other things could have happened, and the story plays fair with the fateful role that chance takes. You would even argue that no one is actually murdered in this movie, and that when they die it is simply the result of bad decisions.~~

Hugh Dancy (Adam Raki), Rose Byrne (Beth Buchwald), Frankie Faison (Harlan), Mark Linn Baker (Mr. Klieber), Amy Irving (Rebecca Buchwald), Peter Gallagher (Mart Buchwald). Directed by Max Mayer and produced by Leslie Urdang, Miranda de Pencier, and Dean Vanich. Screenplay by Mayer.

Adam seems to be a good catch for a young woman. He's good-looking, works as an engineer, has a big, comfy apartment, is fascinated by astronomy, and knows lots and lots of stuff. On the other hand, he has Asperger's syndrome. Beth has never met anyone like him. He behaves in social situations with an honesty that approaches cruelty and doesn't seem much aware of that.

Adam, the story of a romance involving this unlikely couple, would seem even more unlikely if Beth herself weren't self-centered. Perhaps it takes a man even less outgoing to inspire her nurturing side. At first Adam simply offends her with his baffling objectivity. Then he explains, "I have Asperger's," and she understands. If she knows the term, it's surprising she hasn't already arrived at that diagnosis.

Asperger's is sometimes described as high-functioning autism, although some argue the conditions are

not related. The syndrome produces people who can be quite intelligent and functioning, but lack ordinary social skills or insights. Adam (Hugh Dancy) does not know, for example, that when a proud young mother shows off her cute new baby, he should ooh and aah. There is not a single ooh or aah in him.

Yet he feels a perplexing attraction to Beth (Rose Byrne). He even—what's this?—experiences sexual feelings for another person for perhaps the first time in his life. Beth is touched. Adam's condition draws her out of her own self-absorption. When he faces a daunting job interview, she coaches him: "Look the other person in the eye. Seem interested. Don't go on autopilot with one of your streams of information. Look like you want the job."

In a way, she could be coaching him about how to behave toward herself. And indeed such coaching is one of the forms of therapy used with Asperger's. He responds slowly, awkwardly, with breaches of behavior that at times infuriate her. The film somehow extracts from their situation a sweet, difficult relationship, although it's a good question how she finds the will to persist.

The film complicates their story with one about Beth's parents, Rebecca and Marty (Amy Irving and Peter Gallagher). They're concerned that she broke up with a suitable young man and now brings Adam home. They're also worried by a court case charging that Marty, an accountant, misrepresented a client's books. There are

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