

Eastwood's dimensions caught 'In the Line of Fire'

by Jared Dean
Variety writer

Hitchcock once said, "Your movie can only be as good to the extent that your villain is bad." If this were the basis in which we could judge Clint Eastwood's "In the Line of Fire," then the film would win every award the movie rating academy could conceive. The brilliance of the film lies not in the over-used cliché acting of one Mr. Clint "I just won an academy award for a film that didn't deserve" Eastwood, but the chilling performance of villainous of Mr. John "The viewing public at large hasn't discovered me yet because I'm such a quiet, yet powerful actor" Malkovich. This man is pure genius, period.

The plot? Who cares. Just watching Malkovich torment Eastwood on screen is worth any storyline. The catalyst they chose for this feature is this: Frank Horrigan (Eastwood) is a Secret Service agent, and Mitch Leary (Malkovich) is a professional assassin. Horrigan was assigned to JFK on that fateful day back in '63, and obviously failed. Even though he wasn't actually present when JFK stopped the bullet, he still feels obligations of responsibility. So what does he do? Why Horrigan risks the life of the president once again, 30 years later, by insisting that his tired-old-washed-up ass should be assigned to protect the president instead of neglecting him. Horrigan can't even whistle without getting winded, and add to that the cold he catches which hurls him into a fit of delirium, the president isn't even safe passing Horrigan in the hall.

Horrigan is more than just your typical Secret Service agent though, he's almost a "has been". Try replacing Secret Service agent with washed up cowboy, and the similarities are unforgiving. Everybody, but everybody is familiar with this used-to-be-advocate for victims rights "Dirty Harry," turned washed up actor. Ok maybe I'm being unforgiving, but so be it. I didn't say the movie was bad, just better than good. If it wasn't for Malkovich, the film title would be "In the Whine of Smoke."

The way Leary torments Horrigan is psychologically brilliant. You look forward to phone calls and disguised encounters between Leary and Horrigan. You beg for Leary to be on the screen every scene, indeed he does spend a great deal of the movie in the line of the camera. The villain part of Leary is very believable, and one feels sympathetic in Leary's reasoning for wanting to knock-off the big man. But I shan't give away such an important plot twist, the only plot twist, because that my friend would be unethical.

LED ZEPPELINS

Stephen King novels are known for their life-like descriptions, mounting tension and sheer terror. Dating back to *Carrie*, movie-goers have been subjected to a seemingly never-ending rollercoaster of big-screen adaptations. The latest release, *Needful Things*, can be counted as one of King's dives.

In this tale, the quaint New England town of Castle Rock is torn asunder by no less than the devil himself, who opens a mysterious curio shop under the guise of Leland Gaunt (Max Von Sydow). As the townspeople visit his shop one by one, he offers them artifacts, needful things which he promises will fulfill their deepest desires.

But there's a catch. The devil requires a diabolical in exchange for the item.

As most of the town falls under the sway of Gaunt, the result is not so much horror as silliness. The film is occasionally humorous, but never becomes what it sets out to be—suspenseful.

The fact that the Prince of Darkness has had trouble finding decent gigs lately is made clear in one scene where Sheriff Alan Pangborn (Ed Harris) stumbles across a pile of news clippings belonging to Gaunt/Satan. The headlines spell out the greatest atrocities of the 20th century such as "Hitler invades Austria" and culminating in, "Two killed in Castle Rock."

Robin Hood: Men in Tights. Not Monty Python funny, not Princess Bride

THE REBEL YELL

funny, *Three Amigo* funny, *Naked Gun* funny, or even *History of the World* funny. It just wasn't funny.

Men in Tights could've been (should've been) what movie-goers had been patiently waiting for a decent Robin Hood since Costner's horrific English accent of last year's *Prince of Thieves*. Cary Elwes promised he was the Robin Hood with the English accent. Ultimately, he didn't make the difference.

The epic moniker of Mel Brooks (who plays a cameo monk role) flashed impres-

sively and repeatedly in the opening credits. Fed to the teeth with Brooks' inane slapstick, the guy next to me offered, "I think you have to live in a trailer court to appreciate this stuff." (I grew up in a trailer court. It didn't help.)

While the occasional line or sequence promised a snicker of hope (i.e., Achoo's Malcom impersonation), a meaningful Men-in-Tights comic momentum never gets off the ground. It wasn't even a swing and a miss.

Throughout *Men in Tights*, comedian Richard

Lewis looked as though he either couldn't remember his lines, or just wasn't comfortable with a camera in his face (note the mole-in-motion). His comic delivery bites, and his acting is worse.

Cary Elwes was even more disappointing. With biggies like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the legitimately funny *Princess Bride*, Elwes has no excuse. Maybe it didn't turn out the way he thought it would. It was a paycheck, right?

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