

Odd couple excels in crooked cop crime thriller

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Jack Mosley (Bruce Willis) is an aging, depressed detective with a drinking problem. Eddie Bunker (Mos Def) is a trash-talking, petty criminal with marbles in his mouth who has spent about half of his life mumbling to himself behind bars while dreaming about opening his own bakery.

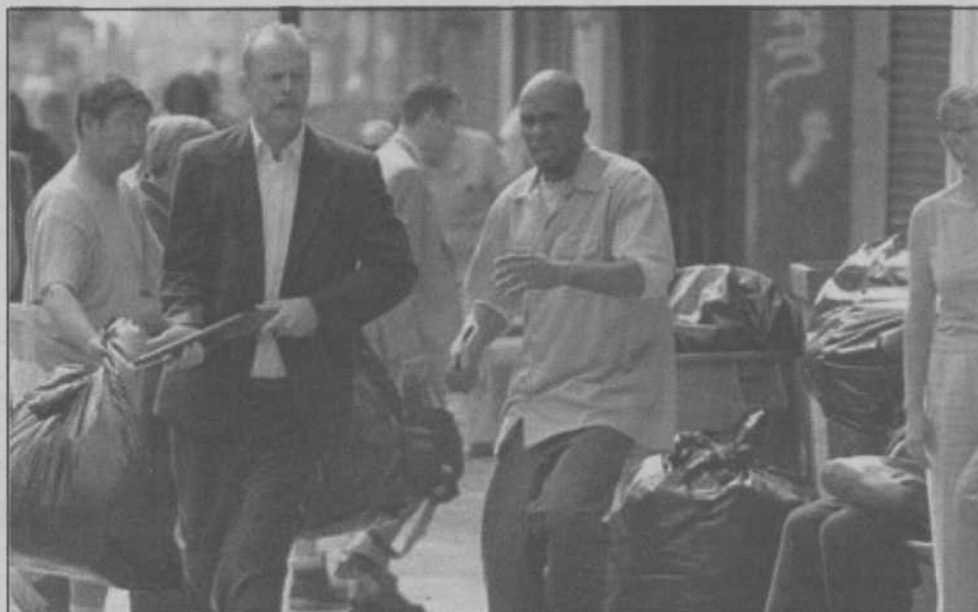
So, with nothing in common, there's not much reason for the grizzled NYPD veteran and the career perp to expect to meet, let alone land on the same side of the law.

Yet, that's exactly what happens the fateful morning their paths do cross when Jack is ordered to escort Eddie from jail to the courthouse just 16 blocks away in lower Manhattan.

What should have amounted to an uneventful, brief car ride turns into a thrill-a-minute chase after the alcoholic cop decides to make a brief detour to a liquor store, for he emerges from the establishment only to find a hit man with a gun cocked at the head of his prisoner.

Quick on the draw, Jack shoots the assassin first, jumps in the driver's seat and starts careening across Chinatown pumping Eddie with questions to learn why anybody might want him dead. Turns out, he's scheduled to testify in less than two hours in a case against a half-dozen crooked cops.

Next, when Jack calls for



Bruce Willis, left, and rapperactor Mos Def make for an odd but effective acting tandem.

backup, his former partner, Frank (David Morse), makes it clear that the entire department wants this key prosecution witness wasted. Confronting an ethical crisis, Jack must decide whether to look the other way or try to break the proverbial Blue Wall of Silence.

Of course, he opts for the latter, which means he and his charge must run a gauntlet of the most corrupt, immoral and bloodthirsty officers imaginable. The splatter which ensues in the daunting escape is the essence of "16 Blocks," a high-impact action flick from directed by Richard Donner ("Lethal Weapon" 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Ordinarily, the success or failure of a claustrophobic, odd-couple caper like this turns on the chemistry between the leads who have to spend the entire picture on

top of each other. However, this flick's pressurized plotline is simply too urgent to allow for much in the way of downtime for the two to develop any intimacy. Nonetheless, both Bruce Willis and Mos Def, though playing simplistically drawn, almost cartoonish archetypes, manage to enhance their slight characters with enough endearing qualities and off-beat idiosyncrasies to sway the audience to empathize with their plight.

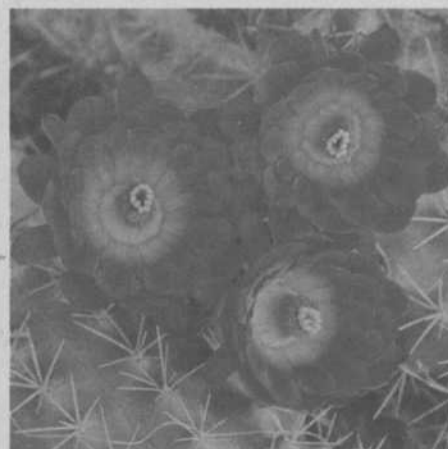
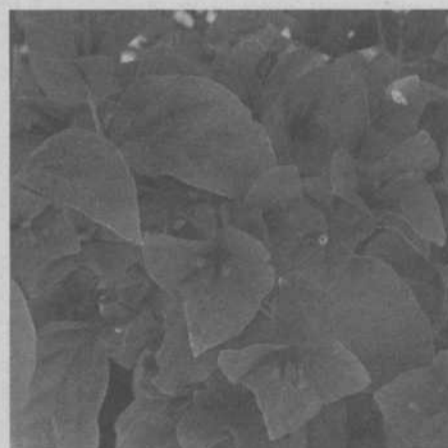
Meanwhile, like your typical computer game, wave after wave of ghoulish adversaries arrive to be eluded,

dealt with, or dispatched, soulless demons devoid of a conscience. Pound-for-pound, "16 Blocks" provides the most pressure-cooked pyrotechnics, fisticuffs, gunplay, car crashes, back alley dashes and fire escape leaps ever crammed into a cinematic chase lasting less than a mile.

Hollywood's concession to anti-establishment video games like "Grand Theft Auto," only sans joystick, and larger than life.

Excellent (3.5 stars). Rated PG-13 for violence, profanity, and scenes of intense action.

GRASS ISN'T ALWAYS GREENER.



Book Review

(Continued from Page 8)

Fitzgerald and Sarah Bobrow-Williams; employment, Urban League President Marc Morial; ecology, Clark University Sociology Professor Dr. Robert Bullard Ph.D.; and Internet access, publisher-editor Tyrone Taborn.

Despite this diversity of contributors, "The Covenant" maintains a similar tone throughout, because each of the entries follows the same format. First, there's an introductory essay in which the problem area is identified. Then, there's a statement of general facts supported by statistics. Finally, solutions are shared under the headings, "What the Community Can Do," "What Every Individual Can Do," "What Works Now," and "What Every Leader and Elected Official Can Do."

Besides all of the above, the book features a "Call to Action" by Princeton Professor Cornel West, an "Afterword" by author/publisher Haki Madhubuti (formerly Don L. Lee), and "A Statement of Purpose" by children's advocate Marian Wright Edelman Esq., who indicts the criminal justice system as a new form of slavery.

As a whole, "The Covenant with Black America" amounts to an exhaustive, encyclopedic assault on the litany of woes presently plaguing African-Americans. What makes this treatise unique is the plethora of practical guidance it provides in terms of the undoing the persisting inequalities. In advocating evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary solutions, this inclusive, optimistic opus ought to inspire anyone who reads it to get involved personally and to lend their talents to the eradication of the seemingly intractable impediments to Black progress.

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