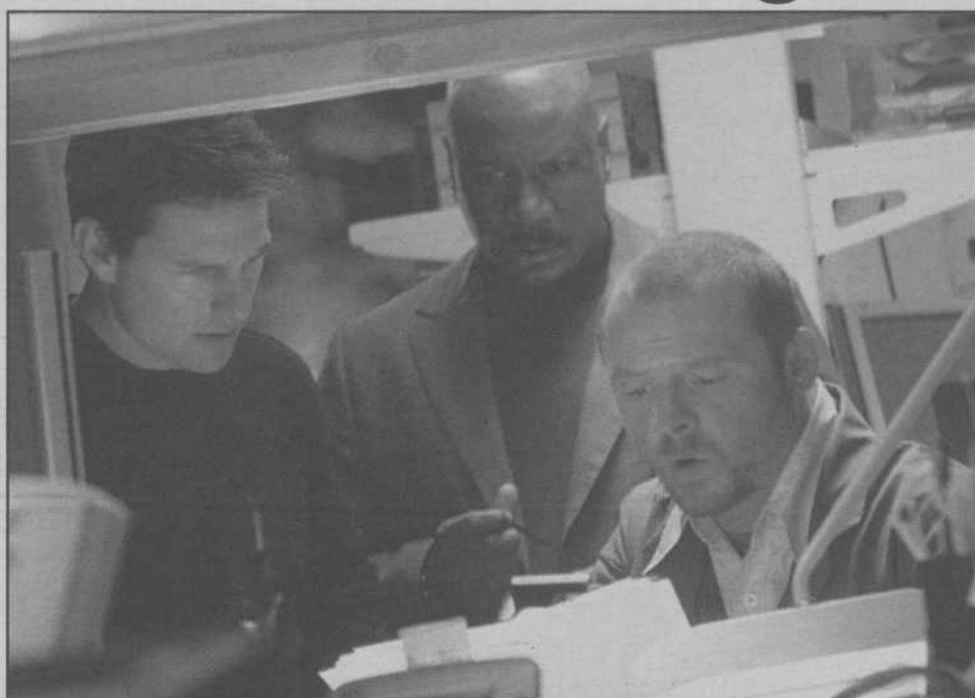


All-star team turbocharges latest 'Mission'

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

In the wake of the success of the "Mission: Impossible" franchise, many might have forgotten that the films are based on a classic television series which enjoyed an eight-year run between 1966 and 1973. Each episode opened with a memorable scene featuring the head of the IM Force leafing through a top secret dossier as he listened to his latest assignment on a self-destructing audiotape which began with the trademark phrase, "Good morning, Mr. Phelps."

Phelps would then hand-pick a team of agents to assist him in executing a carefully coordinated, covert operation designed to infiltrate the targeted organization and to complete the task without ever drawing any attention. The first two installments of the movie version only paid lip-service to the original's "team" and "anonymity" concerns, opting instead for a Tom Cruise vehicle which presented his character, Ethan Hunt, as a virtual one-man operation while relying on eye-popping special ef-



Tom Cruise, left, and Ving Rhames, middle, star the "Mission Impossible III" blockbuster.

fects to dramatize high-impact scenarios which were the opposite of subtle.

Those nostalgic for the TV show, however, will be happy to hear that "MI III" is not only the best but the most faithful of the screen adaptations to date. Although it remains action-oriented, some major concessions have been made in terms of character and plot development.

J.J. Abrams makes a praiseworthy feature film directorial debut after having made a name for himself on the small screen at the helm of episodes of "Lost," "Alias" and "Felicity." In fact, the executives at Paramount were sufficiently impressed with his credentials to trust him with \$150 million, the biggest budget ever bestowed upon a first-time director.

And J.J. does not disappoint. The wunderkind surrounded Cruise with a talented cast, starting with Ving Rhames, who enjoys an expanded role as Luther Stickell, Ethan's buddy and tech expert. The rest of the members of the IM team are new, namely, jack-of-all-trades Zhen (Maggie Q), and getaway driver, pilot, boat captain Declan (Jonathan Rhys Meyers). Michelle

Monaghan plays Julia, Ethan's clueless fiancée who has no idea what his real line of work is, while Lawrence Fishburne appears as John Brassel, his irascible boss.

Philip Seymour Hoffman, this year's Best Actor Oscar-winner (for "Capote"), might be the best of the bunch as Owen Davian, as chilling a villain as you can hope to encounter in the theater. With an understated, elegant air reminiscent of Hannibal the Cannibal, Hoffman sets a taut tone which permeates the picture via goosebump inducing threats like this one aimed at Ethan: "Do you have a wife or a girlfriend? Because I'm going to find her, and I'm going to hurt her. And then I'm going to kill you in front of her."

The movie opens with a teaser of a later scene in which the diabolical Davian flaps our otherwise unflappable protagonist, kickstarting a thrill-a-minute, globe-trotting adventure across the U.S., Europe, and Asia certain to satisfy fans of the action-packed summer blockbuster genre. In 25 words or less, the basic storyline in-

volves a threat to sell a vial of a chemical of mass destruction to the highest bidder, ostensibly terrorists of Middle East extraction.

"MI III" is laced with homages likely to remind you of some of the most riveting thrillers ever made, including "True Lies," "Silence of the Lambs" and "No Way Out." I suppose, if you're going to borrow ideas, why not borrow from the best?

Nevertheless, this gripping flick's script still stands on its own, and the plot is thickened by an assassination, a red herring, a kidnapping, a backstabbing saboteur and a host of other complications tossed in for good measure. While you're feverishly trying to connect all the dots, just remember that the easiest way to enjoy "MI: III" is to sit back and simply enjoy all the spectacular stunt work, chase scenes, f/x, pyrotechnics, gunplay and comic relief with your brain on idle and a big tub of popcorn in your lap.

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG-13 for action violence, disturbing image, and some sensuality.

Giuliani branded racist, ornery in documentary

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Rudy Giuliani was catapulted by the 9/11 catastrophe to a secular sainthood which turned the outgoing New York City Mayor into a global hero who was bestowed with countless honors ranging from being named Person of the Year by *Time* magazine to being knighted by Queen Elizabeth.

In this rush to canonize him for his handling of the attacks on the World Trade Center, the world came to forget how, for eight years, he had ruled the city with an iron-fist, bitterly dividing it along ethnic lines by implementing policies which favored Whites and the rich over minorities and the poor.

The film "Giuliani Time" doesn't so much tarnish Sir Rudy's image as simply set the record straight. It takes its title from the phrase which racist cops were reported to have chanted while ramming a broomstick up suspect Abner Louima's rectum during an interrogation in a precinct bathroom after an unwarranted arrest for a very minor matter.

Using the code words "Zero Tolerance" and "Quality of Life," Giuliani had given the NYPD the go ahead to intimidate and mistreat not only squeegee guys and the homeless, but anyone who wasn't White with such impunity and contempt. The result was a reign of terror in which minority communities were turned into police

states where trigger-happy detectives could shoot an unarmed Black man 41 times knowing that Rudy had their back and they'd get off scot-free.

In this very informative biopic, we learn that the source of Giuliani's penchant for brutality and strong-arm tactics was probably in being raised by his father, Harold, a gun-toting Mafiosi enforcer who broke kneecaps with a baseball bat for a major gambling operation in Brooklyn. His dad even served time in Sing Sing, though Rudy was never one to acknowledge being raised by a mobster.

"Giuliani Time" includes damning interviews with folks like Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew (1995-1999) who criticizes his former boss for implementing education policies which were "racist and class-biased."

Giuliani's predecessors David Dinkins and Ed Koch weigh-in, too. The latter refers to Rudy as "a combination of Pinochet and Caligula" because "he accepts no dissent and uses his power to punish."

Ralph Nader, the ACLU's Norman Siegel, Reverend Al Sharpton, Attorney Ron Kuby and a host of other luminaries pile on, taking turns to remind us of an administration which deserves to be remembered in history not for the clean-up of the Twin Towers, but for its utter lack of compassion for the impoverished and working classes.

Excellent (4 stars); Unrated.

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