



A very dedicated competitor from the annual American Crossword Puzzle Tournament.

Wordplay

At the recent Toronto Hot Docs documentary film festival, *Wordplay* was, despite a lot of positive word-of-mouth, at the bottom of my list of films to see. Let's face it: a movie about crossword puzzles? And the people who make them? It might make an interesting *New Yorker* piece, but it doesn't sound awfully cinematic.

Having since seen *Wordplay*, the debut effort from filmmaker Patrick Creadon, I can say that if nothing else it proves that an interesting and entertaining documentary on just about any subject can be made given the right skills. Creadon structures his film around two things that doubtless helped him raise financing: a famous personality and a competition. Will Shortz may not be a household name, but if a hit film can be made from the National Public Radio series *A Prairie Home Companion* then why not one featuring the guy who does the popular puzzle segment on NPR's Sunday morning show? Shortz is also the crossword editor of the *New York Times*, which allows him to speak with authority on what makes a good puzzle and to introduce us to some of the more successful "constructors," as those who make puzzles are called. Creadon pads this out with amusing interviews featuring such self-identified puzzle addicts as Jon Stewart, the Indigo Girls, Ken Burns, New York Yankees pitcher Mike Mussina and Bill Clinton, who makes a strong case for the application of puzzle-solving skills to political life.

The second half of *Wordplay* follows the 28th Annual American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, which is held in Stamford, Connecticut every winter. That this may be one of the most entertaining ways to spend one's time in Stamford in the dead of winter I won't argue. As gripping cinema, not so much, though Creadon does his best to involve us in the personalities of the top contenders for the title. They fortunately take it all with tongue in cheek: One winner speaks of being able to put down her snarky boyfriend, when he made fun of her passion, by asking her what he was the best in the country at. And, at the risk of sounding like an NPR-listening snob, you have to somewhat like a movie whose climax depends on your knowing who Emile Zola was.

—m. faust

Click

Here's a premise that we can all relate to: Wouldn't it be great to be able to control everything around you instead of everything always controlling you? *Click* stars Adam Sandler as an overworked corporate architect (I know, but just overlook that for the time being) who is finding it impossible to meet both the demands of his overbearing boss and the needs of his family. Salvation comes in the form of a universal remote control that merits its name: he can use it to pause, fast forward and rewind everything around him, adjust the volume, change the colors, even translate other languages.

I'm sure everyone reading this can think of about a zillion ways such a gizmo would come in handy. Unfortunately our hero only manages to think up about three, and the one he favors most doesn't make any sense: Rather than put the world around him on pause while he catches up with his work, he fast-forwards his way through onerous chores. The drawback, which he (unlike the audience) never sees coming, is that this causes him to miss large chunks of his own life. This culminates in a shamelessly overwrought climax in which the film desperately wants to become a modern version of *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Sandler's traditional audience will doubtless be satiated by the sprinkling of dog-humping and fart jokes. They probably also won't care that in Sandlerville there are only two kinds of women, bikini models and trolls. As for those hoping for something more adult from the man responsible for more bad movies than anyone else currently working (along with his own output, he has produced pretty much the entire cinematic outputs of Rob Schneider and David Spade), I can only ask: What the hell were you thinking?

—m. faust

The Devil Wears Prada

As the editor of a Manhattan-based fashion magazine (think *Vogue*) so powerful that the merest pursing of her lips can send entire fall lines to the dumpster, Meryl Streep pulls off a performance with one simple tactic: She never varies her voice from a monotone or raises it above a whisper. She strides through her offices ignoring her staff and muttering to herself that she doesn't understand why it's so hard to get the simplest things done, and she's a hoot.

But this isn't the kind of character you can build a feature film around, at least not one that you want to make millions of dollars. And so *The Devil Wears Prada* stars Anne Hathaway as an idealistic journalism school graduate who wants to write about real things like underpaid janitors. She lucks into a job with Streep that she is determined to keep for a year as a stepping stone to better things. This means, however, that she not only has to endure smirks about being the "smart fat girl" (she's a size six in a world where her peers brag about how long they can go without eating) but that she also has to pretend that high fashion is something of value to the world at large.

Prada is aimed squarely at the audiences who loved Hathaway in *The Princess Diary* films but who are now old enough to want something a little more adult. Despite the presence of a live-in (and clearly non-platonic) boyfriend, though, Hathaway is still playing a princess determined to triumph through virtue and what Lou Grant famously identified in Mary Richards on the first episode of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as "spunk." Older viewers—those above, say, 22—can enjoy both Streep and the bitchiness of co-star Stanley Tucci, as the magazine's art director, whose wardrobe seems to consist primarily of Spike Jones' castoffs. But they won't be able to take any of it seriously: That's reserved for younger viewers, who will learn otherwise soon enough.

—m. faust

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