

Film review: I want my *EDtv*!

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I want you to try something as you're sitting here reading this newspaper: take a look at the stranger sitting near you. Go ahead, he won't mind. Is he doing anything particularly interesting? Reading a book? Picking his nose? Maybe he's already looking at you. Now imagine someone took this same stranger and put him on TV. Do you think you'd watch? Do you think you'd care? Ron Howard says you would. At least that's the theory behind his new film, *EDtv*. It stars Matthew McConaughey as Ed Pekurny, a thirty-one year old video store clerk whose charming smile and southern drawl are enough to win him the role of himself in a new endeavor by True TV. In the film, the reality-based network, which is home to infomercials and home video specials, has been getting crushed by the Gardening Channel in the ratings lately and is looking to try something new. Ellen DeGeneres plays the television executive who decides to find an ordinary guy, tape his life, unedited, and run it twenty-four hours a day in hopes of reviving the networks appeal.

Apprehensive at first, Ed decides to go ahead with the project when Ray, his opportunistic brother played by Woody Harrelson, points out all the

good Ed could do with the money: namely to help Ray open a gym. And so taping begins on the morning of Day 1 as Ed slowly awakens to a bedroom full of cameras and a handful of people waiting to see what happens next.

And what happens next is pretty uneventful as Ed brushes his teeth, flexes for the cameras and checks out his own butt in his television set. It's only when Ed catches Ray cheating on his girlfriend, Shari (Jenna Elfman), that things begin to get interesting. Caught live on film Shari catches Ray, too, and when Ed visits to comfort her, his life instantly turns into a soap opera that enraptures the nation.

Now as a bona fide star, his face is plastered on the sides of buses, he's invited to the *Tonight Show*, and beautiful Elizabeth Hurley, playing a model, is a little more than smitten.

Ed doesn't have a bad gig until everybody in his life becomes fair game for the media and public alike. The newspapers begin taking polls to see if Shari is good enough for him (71% said no—talk about an ego boost!) and the execs start playing god with his life. His brother writes an aptly-titled tell-all book, his mother's sordid affairs are exposed, and his friends are appearing on television forums spinning their philosophies about the state of the world.

Trapped by an unforgiving contract, Ed realizes celebrity isn't so much fun anymore and he devises a plan to regain his life.

EDtv is wildly entertaining, but more than that, it makes the viewer reexamine his or her own idea of fame: why does it seem we all want our fifteen minutes in the spotlight, and why can any idiot with a video camera can get it?

From Puck's exodus from *The Real World* to *The World's Most Shocking Pet Surgeries*, America can't get enough of its neighbors: where they're going, what they're doing — even who they're doing it with. Reality has become the new fiction it seems, and maybe that's because lately, it's just more interesting than anything Hollywood could contrive (at least until the new *Star Wars* movie opens).

But just because some guy on *Guinness Primetime* grew his fingernails eighteen feet long, it doesn't mean he's a hero. And you wouldn't even know Monica Lewinsky's name if she hadn't done what she did, but does that make her a star? Why should she get to go to the Oscar's and not you? By tuning in, however, we make the stranger sitting across from us a celebrity, with all the perks celebrities get. To take a line from the film: "it used to be you were famous because you were special, now

you're special because you're famous."

With delightful performances from an ensemble cast, *EDtv* makes its point clearly and in a way so engaging and funny, you hardly think you're learning anything. McConaughey has a genuine smile that makes you believe Ed really is as ordinary as any of us. His turn from star-struck goofball to a nice guy who just wants to be left alone makes him all the more realistic. And it's through this change that the audience realizes just how brutal sudden fame can be — even if you are the one who chose it.

Harrelson, who usually plays the obnoxious sidekick, starts out that way here, but ends up turning in a performance a bit more substantial than usual. Elfman (better known as Dharma from *Dharma and Greg*), unfortunately gives birth to a character as irritating as all the polls say she is. The true surprise, however, is Ellen DeGeneres. Her comic timing hits perfect stride as she undertakes a role that makes you forget all about her sitcom fiasco.

At 121 minutes, *EDtv* is an hilarious film with a timely message. Go see it. You'll be amazed at what happens when actual famous people are given a script, props and a director. It sure beats a bunch of fake famous people sitting around yelling about whose turn it is to do the dishes.

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