

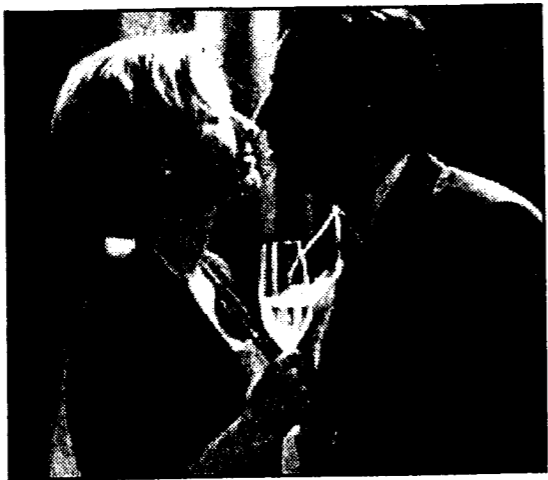
The new 'chick flick': *What men want and what women will settle for*

by Deanna Symoski

Even though there are none of the stereotypical explosions, violence or sex, *What Women Want* is a guy movie. It is the fantastical story of Mel Gibson as Nick Marshall, a chauvinistic ad executive who loses a big promotion to a newcomer, Darcy McGuire, played by Helen Hunt. Brought in to expand the firm's accounts into the female market, Darcy's ball-breaking reputation precedes her. Of course, the swaggering butt-pincher resents being passed over, and sets out to prove he's the better man for the job. Through an electrocution in his bathroom, Nick wakes up the next morning to find he can hear women's thoughts. This, he figures, is just the way to undermine Darcy and take the promotion that is rightfully his.



Mel Gibson in *What Women Want* and Tea Leoni and Nicolas Cage in *The Family Man* (Bottom).



He begins to spend a lot of time with her so he can gain her trust and ultimately use it against her. He steals her ideas while convincing her he's doing her a favor. His charm starts to appeal to her and suddenly the tough ad exec is swooning. But Nick becomes a little smitten himself. In learning her thoughts, he starts to learn about her, for the first time really paying attention to the needs of someone other than himself. He also pays more attention to the other women in his life—his teenage daughter who, as a testament to his unique parenting style, still calls him Nick.

What started out as a blow to his ego, because he could finally hear what women really thought of him, escalates into a lesson in humanity as he realizes what women really think of themselves. Nick's transformation from scoundrel to prince is supposed to make the audience swoon too, but it hardly seems satisfying. Nick is not a likable guy. Even when the sensitivity training starts, the

audience can't forget that he is ultimately still deceiving these women. Sincerity is lost in a character so concerned with personal gain that even the great metamorphosis isn't enough to salvage him.

While humorous, presumably because women can hear their own thoughts reflected on screen (the *it's funny 'cause it's true* thing), the film also manages, though inadvertently, to touch on the obvious dissonance of women's roles. Darcy isn't the beast everyone thinks she is, although

and good ol' boy mentality are so extreme that one forgets he is a suave actor and starts to think of him as the friend of your grandfather who smokes stogies and refers to women as "broads." My utter disdain for Nick simply shows, however, the infinite ability of Gibson. To make himself so reprehensible and ultimately unattractive, illustrates his subtle mastery of the twinkle in his eye.

Helen Hunt is appropriately cast as the no-nonsense business woman who struggles for the marriage of love and work. For most of the film, she is savvy with just enough self-doubt to make her real. Both admirable and believable, she weaves Darcy into the icon of working women. If only the story had ended there. Through no fault of her own, Hunt is forced to make a metamorphosis of her own at the end of the film—she goes from strong and sensible to weak and way too forgiving. By the end, women like Darcy and what they really want is for her to tell this loser to hit the road. However, Hollywood still thinks the only satisfying ending is the one that employs happily ever after, so what we end up with is a hypocritical romance that sort of lets women down and gives men the idea Darcy's better for it.

The romance here is an insincere remake of Bogey and Bacall with the smokescreen of a Sinatra soundtrack. If director Nancy Meyers really knew what women want, she'd understand that it wasn't a film about a ruthless ladykiller who can lie, cheat and steal his way to the top and still get the girl he clobbered to get there. Like the story itself, the film appears to celebrate women, but all the while dismisses them in an attempt to lure men. In this day and age, that is just plain insulting.

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Horses suffers from unstable direction

by Deanna Symoski
a&e editor

An epic is a sweeping landscape, a tumultuous era, and a passionate story. Well, two out of three ain't bad, unless it's *All The Pretty Horses*, and then it's just plain awful. The remake of Cormac McCarthy's acclaimed 1992 novel of the same name butchers the plot, mangles the imagery and destroys the characters so much that the only question left is "why?"

The story focuses on John Grady Cole, played by Matt Damon, and Henry Thomas as Lacey Rawlins. When Cole's ranch is sold, the two friends escape the Texas turmoil of 1949 and embark on an adventure south of the border, hoping to sign on at a rich, Mexican ranch. The horseback journey is riddled with rough weather, but the true disturbance is Jimmy Blevins, played by Lucas Black. The troubled runaway, gripping his horse and gun, hooks up with the travelers as they head across the Rio Grande.

It is the pinnacle event on the other side of the river that sets the story into motion, however. Blevins' horse is spooked off during a thunderstorm and captured by a ranch owner in Mexico. When he tries to retrieve what is rightfully his, the group is separated and

the two friends continue on to find work in their newfound Heaven.

The boys are picked up by a wealthy rancher with a love of horses. Cole's own expertise hastens his journey into the good life, and gives him the opportunity to meet Alejandra, the owner's beautiful daughter played by Penelope Cruz. The two fall in love, but are forbidden to be together, so when word of an American boy's capture for murder makes its way to the ranch, Cole and Rawlins are immediately fingered as accomplices and sent to prison.

Now who wouldn't want to see this movie? Certainly I would, but unfortunately this is not the movie I saw. The movie I saw was the fast-food version of the sweeping McCarthy tale.

Why Billy Bob Thornton chose to disillusion a perfectly willing audience with strange, even Tarantino-esque, shots of horses implies something about the sketchiness of the plot. Obviously those were his artsy portrayals of scenes in McCarthy's book, although they add nothing to an already uncertain piece of filmmaking. The symbolism of the horse lays somewhere in the title and at the end, but so much story is abandoned that what is left only contributes to mass confusion.

In fact nothing about the film serves

to move the plot—not the shallow characters, and certainly not the dialogue, used sparsely and taken conspicuously right off McCarthy's page. Instead, *the look* is employed to take the place of essential communication, at least between Cole and Alejandra. Beyond a few pieces of pointless banter, the two spend most of the film looking at each other. She is supposed to be exotic and dangerous; he is supposed to be loyal and honorable, but together they are nothing more than silhouettes of McCarthy's originals. Even their passionate love is a mystery, since the audience is given no grounds on which to base it. The film here, as it does in many places, tells the story rather than shows it. We don't know why he loves her, or what's more, why he risks his life to be with her. We just know that he does, and that's not enough.

The love story contends with the most superficial relationship, but indeed all the relationships under Thornton's misdirection become nothing more than absent background. Cole and Lacey, best friends for years, speak like forced acquaintances at best and seem to recede in the face of danger not into their friendship, but into themselves. Alejandra and her father, allegedly very close, lack any bond at

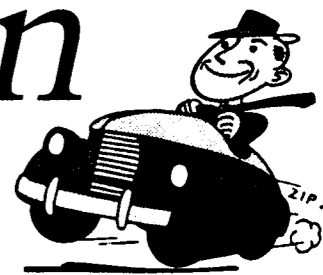
all. ~~She says she~~ broke her father's heart by being with Cole, but the audience is never given the opportunity to see why she cares. There is no drive for passion or despair, or for any emotion in between.

In fact, the whole film is exactly that—emotionless. Except for an optimistic performance from Damon, who, to be fair, is given the most opportunity for range in this compressed film, the acting is as lifeless as the script. Combined, these detriments make for an all around disappointing film, about which I can find no compliments. Not even the music was satisfying, as a frenetic mariachi blend served only to further frustrate an already hostile crowd.

Why Damon signed on to this probably had something to do with the potential of the film. Why the script was so poorly written may have been due to time constraints and a misunderstanding of the material. Why Billy Bob Thornton chose to dismantle a perfectly decent idea with enigmatic styling, well maybe he thought he was adding something. But of all the questions I'm left asking about this travesty of an adaptation, the one that I keep asking is why didn't any of them notice. The rest of us certainly did.

R'Erin To Go

by Erin McCarty



The Dating Game:

Reality TV makes mockery of love...and humanity

It started with on-line voyeurism, that delightful little trend that allowed starving college students to make their fortune by allowing the peeping toms of the world to view their every move over the Internet. An underground movement of sorts, voyeurism never really took off until it had hit the television. With the resurgence in the popularity of game shows, a door was opened for the emergence of reality television. Every good story needs conflict because it's downright boring without it. Solution? Introduce an objective and place obstacles in the way of that objective. What makes it interesting is how the volunteer guinea pigs react to their unusual situation.

This past summer, the world held its breath to find out which of the sixteen *Survivors* would live up to that title. "Voted off the island" became a part of the cultural vernacular as the Highlander mantra of "in the end, there can only be one" became ever more crucial to the dynamics of the show. And that one, it turned out, wormed his way to the one million through careful trickery and manipulation. The ridiculous games that were played in order to gain immunity had absolutely nothing to do with real survival, and the very notion that each player was trying to do away with the others belies the very manner by which people in such situations do survive: cooperation. As for what would happen to a lone person in such a situation, just take a look at *Castaway* to see what hard work and ingenuity would be required simply to stay alive. I suspect that Kelly Wigglsworth and Rudy Boesch are the only two who would last long on their own.

As absurd as *Survivor* was, the best is yet to come. *Survivor II*, which begins to air January 28, is set in the Australian outback. Once again there will be sixteen people split up into two teams and battling for the big prize, facing natural hardships as well as those set forth by the game. *The Mole* involves ten people, all of whom are supposed to work together to perform difficult and often dangerous tasks. The trouble here is that one of the ten is a "mole" who will attempt to sabotage each operation. Which contestants will remain for the next installment is determined by a quiz made up of questions pertaining to the mole; the player with the lowest score is out.

Arid finally, the one that puts them all to shame. *Temptation Island*, Fox's heavily advertised addition to the genre, follows four couples who claim to be committed. Fox sets out to prove them wrong by separating them and surrounding them with gorgeous members of the opposite sex. Not only do the contestants have to deal with the presence of these tempters and temptresses for two weeks, they are actually required to date them. These dates are, of course, captured on film, and the other half of the couple may then choose to view the tape as a proof of fidelity or lack thereof.

Haven't we learned anything from *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*? Love is not a game. To trivialize it by offering a husband as a game show prize or by splitting up couples and encouraging them to be unfaithful borders on the obscene. When watching budding couples destroy their love by fooling around with voluptuous women and hunky men is the supreme entertainment available on television, I don't think that speaks too highly of the networks or of us as the viewers.

Reality television is telling its viewers to throw caution to the wind and do whatever feels right or whatever is required to get ahead in life, not taking into consideration who we hurt in the process. As a commercial for *Survivor II* so aptly states, you've got to play to win and don't let your conscience get in the way. Great message we're getting here, isn't it?

Will reality television last? Frankly, I doubt it. Most of the people I know who tuned into *Survivor* with mild interest now have no interest in checking out the new offerings. They found that the episodes were largely boring, and when the contestants were doing something interesting, it wasn't anything that represented real life. No one in civilized society would dine on fried rat; no one marooned on an island would derive any benefit from standing for hours with his hand on a statue. Either way, it doesn't work.

But most important, a society in which people structure their lives around stabbing one another in the back would never survive. Thankfully for us, this is not the reality we face in our society, and I can't imagine that such a situation would be anyone's fantasy. The state of being I see when I look at the presented reality in reality television is a nightmare.

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