

# 'I Spy' something not so funny



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Eddie Murphy and Owen Wilson star in "I Spy," now playing at Tinseltown.

by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
staff writer

\*1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

"I Spy" is a scary movie. Just picture our national security resting in the hands of a blundering jackass with a massive inferiority complex and the self-confidence of a high school freshman. Then team that man up with a professional athlete whose job requires him to be punched repeatedly in the head.

No, it's not a satire of the state of U.S. Intelligence. Instead, "I Spy" is a pa-

thetic attempt at an espionage flick with more attention paid to its inept comedy than the disastrously unbelievable plot.

After the Switchblade, a secret invisible fighter plane, is stolen from the United States, the Bureau of National Security's No. 2 agent Alexander Payne is selected for the recovery mission. The plane, however, lies in the hands of Gundars, an evil European boxer promoter. In order to get into Gundars' secure facility, Payne must team up with the arrogant middle-weight boxing champion Kelly Robinson.

Robinson is set to fight the European champion in Gundars' Hungarian

abode, but the fight is just a front for the auction of the stealth bomber. With every terrorist and dictator in the world bidding on the undetectable fighter plane, Robinson and Payne must prevent the sale before a major U.S. city becomes a smoking hole in the ground.

I'm not one to criticize film for being unbelievable. Cinema, after all, is the land where 10 automatic weapons can't shoot one guy at close range. In the case of "I Spy," I feel obligated to do so. While it's true the espionage genre isn't known for its grounded plots, there's still a line between jokingly over-the-top and absurdly distorted.

In the James Bond films, there's an expectation of the implausible. Who would really expect a spy to use bungee jumping as a legitimate means of escape? At least the Bond films recognize just how far-fetched some action can be. "I Spy" tries to hide its senselessness under a mask of stale comedy.

Three things especially irk me about

this film's obvious humor-first take on the spy movie. First, Owen Wilson's character comes of as a ham-fisted knucklehead who wouldn't be able to pass for mall security, let alone U.S. Intelligence. He's more concerned with showing off his cool toys than actually solving the case. The only thing that makes him less appealing is my second big gripe.

Robinson, a boxer with absolutely no training, is quicker on his feet than Alexander Payne, the real spy, ever is. Robinson is able to put a tracking device on Gundars, while Payne sits off to the side, scratching his head. Robinson's getaways are cleaner, and his ambition is stronger. If he wasn't so incredibly irritating, he might have been a worthwhile hero, which leads me to complaint No. 3.

Robinson is loud; so loud, in fact, that everyone at Gundars party or at the public baths or just on the streets of Hungary would be able to tell precise details of the "top secret" mission if asked. And there are only so many times cars can explode in the streets of Budapest before people start to ask questions.

Still, the worst part of this entire film is the complete lack of chemistry between its two stars. Owen Wilson and Eddie Murphy work together awkwardly, at best. Wilson's dim Western personality is constantly clashing Murphy's flashy Vegas persona. The only time Wilson and Murphy seem to click is when they are kicking each other in the crotch.

I did laugh a couple times, but when I say a couple, I literally mean two times. A pair of good one-liners doesn't hide the fact that this film was too overblown to even be considered entertaining. When it comes to espionage films, "I Spy" isn't "Austin Powers" or "XXX" or even "Austin Powers." Especially since it tries and fails to be so much like all three.

# Eminem wins by a 'Mile'

by Desson Howe  
The Washington Post

Stardom is the closest thing to sainthood in this secular society. And it's fascinating to watch Eminem finesse his own in "8 Mile." He doesn't do a thing wrong, and he does a lot of things right. So does the movie.

What makes Eminem (real name Marshall Mathers) important, apart from being the best-selling rapper in America, is his crossover impact.

He sends out so many conflicting racial, sexual and moral signals, it's enough to make klansmen, gays, liberals, soccer moms and conservatives form a brand-new party. He's the hot potato of the month, but that month has already lasted three years.

In "8 Mile," directed by Curtis Hanson, Eminem plays a down and out Detroit rapper named Jimmy "Rabbit" Smith Jr., who's just moved into his mom's (Kim Basinger) trailer in the depressed 8 Mile district.

Rabbit, a withdrawn individual who's nice to his much-younger kid sister and hangs with his homeboys at rapper clubs, has a single, all-consuming dream: to make it as a performer.

He's got a gift for improvised street rapping—in which two people face off and compete to insult the other with better poetry. And he's in constant, conceptual production: earphones on, penciling rap couplets and triplets, as he rides the bus or hangs in the street.

But he's stage-struck when it comes to performing onstage instead of the street. And he can't afford to buy studio time to make a demo tape.

Money's tight in this world of trailers, soup kitchens and burned out buildings. Rabbit and his "dogs" (including Mekhi Phifer and Omar Benson Miller), are full of schemes and dreams. But they're heading nowhere, slow.

It's coming. You know it's coming: the Eminem Show. But scriptwriter Scott Silver and director Hanson (who made the handsome, snappy "L.A. Confidential" and "The Wonder Boys") do something ingenious: They make you wait. Jimmy takes his time emerging, like a slow-developing butterfly with a mic. And while you wait, the mystique works on you. Or that's the idea.

As Jimmy, Eminem has a simple but deadly effective MO: keep up that hood. Obscure the face. Duck into that well-known headgear. Hide inside himself. Sainthood is in the eye of the beholder. And there's nothing like a shroud to induce wild, giddy speculation.

His presence is the movie's point. Who or what is @ he? To some, he's the anti-Vanilla Ice. And there's little question that he can rap with the best of them.

To others, well, he's Elvis, or some rap version thereof. Sure, he's Jimmy, but look closely at those contours to the nose. Those curled but sensual lips. The shyness, boyishness and lack of pretentiousness. If that ain't Elvis, Jimmy's his third cousin. And in "8 Mile," there's more than one passing comment about Presley to carry this little message along.

Racial politics is surprisingly, and refreshingly, unremarkable in this movie. There are insults in the form of rap satire, but there's no sense of a divided America. This is about the rise of a pop star, plain and simple.

The real deal—and the movie's greatest fun—is in the rap contests. They are extraordinary displays of verbal agility, with frenzied reactions from the audience; these shows suggest, in some analog way, the relationship between Shakespearean plays and the 16th-century audiences that came out to watch them. Applause in these affairs isn't for displays of physical strength or the amount of one's gold, but the richness of wit. And there's no question, by these hip-hop standards, Eminem has the mustard. He raps with the best of them. And, give or take a few doh! misjudgments (most of them having to do with Kim Basinger's purple-prose performance as Jimmy's drunken, impoverished mother living with an abusive boyfriend), this movie works as great as it ever could.

8 MILE, playing at Tinseltown (R, 118 minutes) contains obscenity, violence and drug use.

# Every second counts on '24'

by Rachel Lyon  
staff writer

"Tick, tick, tick." Time is not on your side, when you're counter-terrorism agent Jack Bauer. Another day, another national security crisis for the man who always seems to just have one of those days. And this day is no exception.

Fox's action drama, "24," returned for its second season Tuesday and promises to be more intense, more compelling, and more shocking than last season.

Returning is federal agent Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland), still emotionally distraught over the shooting death of his pregnant wife at the very end of last season. Okay, let us backtrack for one moment for those who were off the clock last season: Bauer, the top agent in the government's Counter-Terrorism Unit was called in to thwart an assassination attempt on presidential candidate, Sen. David Palmer. Those same people also were responsible for the kidnapping Bauer's wife and daughter, which only added to the urgency. Long story short, not a happy ending for Jack. Although he saved Palmer and his daughter, he lost his wife, caught up in a shooting fray in the closing minutes of last year's final hour.

So, it's no surprise that the man isn't Mr. Happy at the beginning of this season. But 16 months since his first very bad day, now President Palmer needs him again. This time, the threat is



PHOTO FROM SALON.COM

Kiefer Sutherland returns for another season of "24" on FOX-66.

much more pressing, and more topical for the times. Bauer was informed that a nuclear bomb was sent to go off somewhere in Los Angeles that day. Time to get back to work.

Although this season presents more of a "do or die" situation for Bauer, key elements from last year are incorporated. "Twenty-Four" is still presented in 24 episodes, each being one

hour of time. The clock at the bottom of the screen keeps time for the viewer. Much of the supporting cast returned, including Bauer's teenage daughter, Kim, who USA Today described as "teenager you'd most like to slap." Also making a return later this year is Nina. Last year, she appeared to be Jack's most trusted ally.

But never assume anything is cred-

ible on "24." In the most shocking moments of last season, Nina angered viewers after she became responsible for the death of Bauer's wife.

However, one different element this year involves public sensitivity. Last year, post-9/11 jitters affected what was in the script, but this season the writers of "24" "couldn't take on viewers' terrorism fears more directly if it had Osama bin Laden chasing Bauer while swinging a big bag of anthrax." Sutherland agrees, "Terrorism is what our show was dealing with long before September 11<sup>th</sup>. It's terribly unfortunate that what [was] designed as a fantasy world became horrifically close to the world's reality now."

And while Bauer is busy saving the world from terrorism, he also rescued the actor that portrays him. Kiefer Sutherland's career was not only resurrected, but his lead role in "24" could be considered the paramount of his career. The buzz surrounding the drama and it's star was displayed with Sutherland's Golden Globe for Best Actor, and a handful of Emmy nominations, including Best Drama.

While many critics believe that this season could be the real breakout year for "24," the co-creators, Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran promise to keep the twists and turns coming in hopes to keep building their audience. Fox's "24" airs Tuesdays at 9 p.m., but you can't miss one moment of the made for tv thriller, because as the show's motto goes, "Every second counts."

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