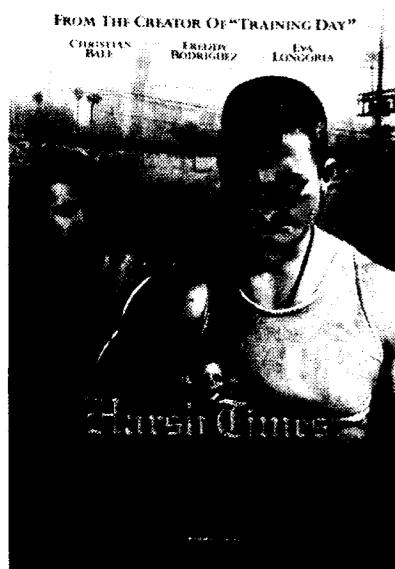


DICK'S PICKS

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Harsh Times



If you are looking for a good psychological drama you'll find it with *Harsh Times*.

The film takes place within the Los Angeles and the surrounding ganglands. Jim Davis (Christian Bale) is an ex-Army Ranger, recently discharged, looking for a job in law enforcement. Little does he know how far his resume will take him.

While running the gauntlet of paperwork Jim kills time with his best friend Mike Alvarez (Freddy Rodriguez). Mike's girlfriend Sylvia, played by Desperate Housewives Eva Longoria, is forcing him to get a job too and to stop hanging out with Jim. Instead Mike spends his days with Jim drinking, smoking, and rolling

around town visiting their old gangland friends.

Under the pressure of finally getting or losing his dream job, Jim is confronted with the gravity of his lifestyle and the choice of his career or his love for his girlfriend from Mexico.

As it all comes to a head instinct kicks in and Jim and Mike's situation becomes one of surviving, and not one of making a living.

Directed by David Ayer (*SWAT* and *Deep Blue*) and starring Christian Bale, Mike Alvarez, and Eva Longoria the film is well executed in its style.

The majority of the film takes place in Los Angeles which is perpetually cast at dawn, dusk, or night giving the feeling of every new day, and then immediately its end. The real focus of the film follows this setting, showing how each character starts each day, and what they do with that time before it is over.

The film is about the choices they make everyday and how it will affect them in the end. For the most part, the days are divided as said so most of those choices are not seen. Rather you see Jim and Mike drinking, smoking, and being "badasses." They have their goals, but seem to spend more time screwing around then following through.

The story is also a series of contradictions, which work to build the stress among characters. Jim is an ex-Army Ranger, honorably discharged, a "real American hero," (The opening sequence shows him and an assault team fighting who we would assume to be Taliban members or terrorists.) He does this

to serve his country and protect his fellow Americans, yet, a self-dubbed "soldier of the Apocalypse," for the rest of the film he carries on about kicking ass and busting heads within his own neighborhood and around the world.

He wants a job with the LAPD, but smokes marijuana, drinks while driving, and doesn't hesitate to fire a weapon in public. Mike is unemployed, living with his girlfriend Sylvia, and has apparently turned his life around from doing drugs and gang running to be with her. As the story plays out these two buddies do just about everything wrong, but never see a negative consequence.

Karma is another aspect that isn't directly referenced, but is relevant towards the end of the movie. There is only so much wrong one can do before it comes back on them as Jim and Mike learn.

I would venture to say the moral of the story pertains to "choice."

What one decides today will affect him tomorrow. By the end of the film you think if only he did this or that it would not have ended like this. It makes you question your own choices. Are you living your life for you or for others? What is more important; a career, or love? And are you, or do you, have a friend willing to do anything for you?

Sometimes slow paced it may not seem like the film is really going anywhere, but *Harsh Times* is quite unpredictable and a gripping drama.

I give this film three out of five nuts.



Borat



Ok, I would like to think that I'm a good film critic or at least a good judge of what is good and what is not good.

However, I recently went to see *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, and I left the theater with a feeling of pure emptiness.

At first I was in shock. The film took turns I never saw coming and couldn't believe Fox gave this movie the "green light," but I'm getting ahead of myself in judging the movie as a whole. Let's take it one step at a time.

Borat Sagdiyev, played by Sacha Baron Cohen, is the sixth most famous man in his country, Kazakhstan, and a leading journalist in the state-run network television.

The government of Kazakhstan wants to improve their social structure. In an attempt to do this, the government decides to send Borat to the United States. While visiting, Borat is to learn and report on American culture and way of life.

The rest of the film is constantly falling into the cultural gap as Borat speaks with feminists, sings Kazakhstan's national anthem at a rodeo, and hangs out with gang members.

This, among a series of other events, glorifies the ethnic satire Borat is a master of.

The humor really draws on the "ignorance" of Borat as he is exposed to the American way of living and how Americans respond to an over the top display of foreign customs.

The reactions of unwitting Americans range from polite tolerance to violent threats.

One such custom, which carries through the entire film, is kissing men, and only men, on the cheek when he meets them. Some men went along with it and others nearly took a swing at his head.

It is also hilarious to watch as he is constantly pushing the envelope until he gets a rise out of someone, all while acting like he has said or done nothing wrong.

So, I will admit that there are very funny bits to the film that I took particular humor in but the film as a whole was draining to sit through, and ultimately left the question of, "Why did I spend seven dollars and two hours of my life to see this?"

Much like the Jackass films, Borat would work better as a compilation

of skits and candid interactions with unsuspecting Americans.

The problem is a love story subplot that is dramatized way too much for the film. Rather, Borat is over dramatic and it takes a lot away from the funny parts of the movie.

That combined with scenes of an excessively crude nature (That I can not describe due to good taste) are disturbing at best.

I felt it really ruined the movie, and makes the rest of it unwatchable in one sitting.

Like I said before, I believe I am a fair critic and a good judge of movie quality. This is where I seem to fail in my impression of the film.

Most critics and audiences seemed to enjoy Borat and it has brought in over twenty-six million dollars in the United States.

Some reviews have come back saying it is one of the funniest films of the year and I admit that the film has very funny parts.

Overall I cannot say this is a good movie, it may just be another part of the cultural gap the film emphasizes, but I would not recommend seeing this film in the theaters.

Wait for the DVD, rent it one time, laugh at the good stuff and skip anything you would find disturbing, then never see it again.

I give *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* one nut, purely for comedic value of the film.



Mighty Mega Man returns yet again for adventure

By **OLIVER EISLER**
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Mega Man: Maverick Hunter X is a dream come true for the hardened X fan; well, possibly. In terms of game mechanics, virtually nothing is changed from the classic X. You still run, jump, shoot, wall climb and dash (once you get the upgrade for it) your way through 13 stages.

The eight primary stages conclude with a boss fight against a Maverick ex-Hunter, and upon victory you receive a new weapon from him, Standard Mega Man fare.

Hidden in the eight main stages are also power-up items and upgrade capsules which help increase your skill and power. Getting some power-ups and weapons is helpful or even vital toward getting other power-ups.

The main stages are for the most part copied directly, the first three Sigma stages are extremely different. I was a bit surprised in the first stage that,

after passing the initial opening, I was going underwater instead of jumping up floating platforms (though that portion does come in a later stage).

Although some parts of stages will seem familiar, the three stages in all are without a doubt highly rearranged, and with some surprising obstacles to boot.

While the gameplay of Maverick Hunter X is about the same as before, graphics and audio are where the game's redesign really kicks in. As you've surely seen, all of the game graphics have been redone in vibrant 3D, though it still keeps a side-scrolling point of view.

All of the stages are sharp and colorful, and show a great deal of depth. There are also a number of neat details, like the cars on the freeway in the background of the opening stage, and the ominous clouds gliding along in the first Sigma stage.

All of the boss characters and stage enemies have also been redesigned in appearance at least a little, making them look a little



Photo courtesy of Google Images

In the latest version of Mega Man, Maverick Hunter X, gamers are treated to classic Mega Man game play with revamped graphics.

more mechanical and futuristic, or in some cases just flat-out cool.

Without revealing much, I will say that the game's final boss looks much more impressive and

fearsome than it did before.

The game also features a wide degree of voice acting, including dialogue scenes with all the major boss characters. These are done very nicely and give an added degree of personality to each character.

Of course, this is all based on the Japanese language edition. What little I've heard with the English speaking version sounds pretty good too.

Finally, there's an addition of traditional 2-D animated cut scenes, which fans of the X series have loved since their use in X4. There aren't many, aside from the Capcom logo and opening movie, there are really only two cut scenes for the game's beginning and ending.

Of course, there's also another major movie in the game, but that will be discussed a little later.

Probably the biggest additional feature in Maverick Hunter X is

the ability to play as Vile, one of the game's antagonists, once you've completed the game as X once. Vile has access to twelve of the game's thirteen stages with a "what-if" type alternate story line. Going out on his own, the over-the-top Vile doesn't seem to want to side with either the Maverick Hunters or Sigma's rebellion against humanity. Instead he boasts he will be the one to change the future. Unfortunately, things get a bit tough when you make enemies out of everyone, but we'll let Vile figure that out on his own.

Aside from the inclusion of Vile's game mode, there is also a little extra thrown in by Capcom. The other most notable bonus, which is also received after beating the game once as X, is an animated short called "The Day of Sigma."

It's about as a typical half hour television show, without the commercials. This fantastically animated short depicts a deal of the game's pre-story, mostly surrounding Sigma's strike against

humanity and the inception of his rebellion. It's pretty action-packed, and if left unaltered in the western release, it could possibly garner Maverick Hunter X an ESRB rating of at least E 10+, although it's really no more violent than anything in Mega Man X4.

The polish from the original Mega Man X is present as well. You can still affect the layout of some stages by beating other stages, certain enemies will still laugh at you when they hurt you (and you can hear them now, too), and the infamous "fifth capsule" is also still present in the game. And Dr. Light is still dressed that way.

Maverick Hunter X is a magnificently made game, and a great homage to the Mega Man X series.

Its beautiful 3-D rendered graphics, high quality sound and tight action gameplay are great for new players to the series, and yet many elements are handled in traditional means, which just enough altered to give something for long time X players to do without alienating them.

THANKSGIVING

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TO SOLVE: Each row, column and 3x3 block must contain the numbers 1 to 9 without any duplicates.

For the correct answers, please visit us in the Capital Times office, E-121 Olmsted.