

DVD Select: 'Shooter' is up there among great paranoia films

by Robert_J_Hawkins

This much we know from movies like "The Yards," "Four Brothers," "The Departed" and now "Shooter" (Paramount, 3 1/2 stars): Don't ever cross Mark Wahlberg. Because he will hunt you down with a vengeance.

'SHOOTER - Mark Wahlberg stars as sniper Bobby Lee Swagger in the drama 'Shooter.' CNS Photo courtesy of Kimberley French. "Shooter" is vintage vengeance.

Wahlberg is Bob Lee Swagger, a Marine marksman who is extremely good at his craft, and poorly used by questionable operators within the American government - and within the shadow government of contractors. He opts out and heads for the Wyoming wilderness.

Like Rambo, his government calls him back to duty, to help prevent the assassination of the president. At least, they seem like the government.

Swagger has been set up. Now everyone wants his hide. Kind of like his Doppler Matt Damon in "The Bourne Supremacy."

DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin

Here we shift into the pure adrenaline rush of the original "The Fugitive" except there's no one of the stature of Tommy Lee Jones chasing him. Just some FBI desk jockeys who spend much time covering their butts from higher ups.

Swagger picks up two allies in his fight to clear his name - Sarah Fenn (Kate Mara), the widow of his former spotter, and Nick Memphis (Michael Pena), a rookie FBI agent.

Arrayed against him are the amoral Col. Isaac Johnson (a raspy Danny Glover) and the corrupt Sen. Meachum (Ned Beatty) and a small army of para-government forces.

And, man, do they put on a good show. Naturally, Col. Johnson and his arrogant henchmen completely underestimate the staying power of Bob Lee Swagger, a man betrayed. Their colleagues pay with their lives.

Only a Mel Gibson or Bruce Willis can truly appreciate the way Bob Lee plows through the body count, piling up low-end bad guys as he works his way to the top of the pyramid.

A great movie for conspiracy freaks and shadow government nuts, it pours validity into all sorts of theories about who is really - no, I mean "really" - running the government.

The DVD offers a feature-length commentary track by director Antoine Fuqua, a making-of feature and some deleted scenes.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Black Snake Moan" (Paramount, 3 stars) Yeah, yeah, there's about 40 pounds of chains wrapped around a half-naked Christina Ricci and Samuel L. Jackson is a big sweaty God-fearing black man in this Southern gothic from Craig Brewer ("Hustle & Flow").

And, yeah, the promotion is as titillating as a B movie from the 1950s. But looks are deceiving. This is a far better movie than the hype suggests. Jackson, as Lazarus, a broken blues musician and Ricci as Rae, a sexual addict, both have demons badly in need of exorcism. When Rae shows up in Lazarus's front yard unconscious and clearly abused, he decides to cure the girl. "God put you in my path," says Lazarus, "and I aim to cure you of your wickedness." Along the way, both do a little healing. This is a most unusual movie and not for everyone, especially if anything I said so far makes you squeamish. Just know that Jackson and Ricci are both outstanding and even Justin Timberlake as Rae's loving Army-bound boyfriend does a fine job. On the fence? Take a chance. You might be pleasantly surprised.

"Pride" (Lionsgate, 2 1/2 stars) Based somewhat on the true story of Jim Ellis (Terrence Howard), a college-educated African-American and former competitive swimmer who revives an abandoned Philadelphia Department of Recreation swimming pool and turns a bunch of inner-city kids into a competitive swim team that actually goes on to win a state title. Along the way he has to battle the city, developers, greed, indifference, racism and violence. And he has to convince the kids that winning, in and out of the pool, is worth it. The noble story of Ellis and his team gets the full Hollywood treatment, which means it pulls at your emotions in achingly obvious and annoying ways.

"Standing Still" (Genius Productions, 2 1/2 stars) I guess every generation needs this story and needs to make it their own. A loose collection of friends gather together a few years after college for 1. a funeral, 2. a wedding, 3. a birthday, or 4. to mark a special event that changed their lives and bonded them forever. In this case it is the wedding of Elise (Amy Adams) and Michael (Adam Garcia). "Standing Still" may have a familiar story line but it boasts a fine ensemble of actors including Adams and Garcia as well as James Van Der Beek, Ethan Embry, Mena Suvari, Colin Hanks and Lauren German. The comedy and melodrama make an awkward fit, but over all it is an entertaining 90 minutes.

"Uncle P" (New Line, not reviewed) Hip hop stars Master P and his son L'il Romeo team up for this family comedy about a multi-millionaire rapper who becomes the guardian of his sister's three kids.

Also available: a Romeo-Juliet tale unfolds in "A Tale of Two Pizzas"; terrorism and the precious-stone trade mingle in the Italian film "The Stone Merchant"; an ersatz slasher-horror serial killer allows a documentary crew to chart his rise in the horrifically weird "Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon"; love crosses the north-south boundary in "The Last Confederate: The Story of Robert Adam" (previously called "Strike the Tent").

IT CAME FROM TV

First season of the comedy-mystery series "Psych"; season five of San Francisco's quirkiest detective "Monk"; 30 episodes from the ancient kid show "Bozo, The World's Most Famous Clown: Collection No. 1"; laugh with them in "Mystery Science Theater 3000 Collection, Volume 11"; G-o-l-l-y, Sarge, it is season two of "Gomer Pyle, USMC"; golly, Sergeant, it is season four of "Reno 911!"; the reality TV series "Film School"; and finally, nine episodes from the swinging 1969-71 variety show "This Is Tom Jones."

Disney drains one more DVD from its gusher "High School Musical" - this one is a recap of the 42-city concert tour which itself was a recap of the "High School Musical" TV hit. Oh, yeah, it is called "Disney's High School Musical: The Concert Extreme Access Pass." If you can't get enough of Corbin Bleu, Monique Coleman, Ashley Tisdale, etc., this is your lucky day.

"Wedding Wars" (Sony) A made-for-TV romantic comedy in which a gay wedding planner (John Stamos) triggers a strike by all of America's gays until same-sex marriages are recognized by his governor.

FROM THE VAULTS

Warner Brothers goes to camp for the summer with the debut of the first four volumes of "Cult Camp Classics" - a collection of cheap and trashy B movies. Divvied up into categories, the volumes are:

Sci-Fi Thrillers: "Attack of the 50 Foot Woman" (1958), "Queen of Outer Space" (1958) and "The Giant Behemoth" (1958).

Women in Peril: "The Big Cube" (1968), "Caged" (1950) and "Trog" (1969).

Terrorized Travelers: "Hot Rods to Hell" (1966); "Skyjacked" (1972); and "Zero Hour!" (1957).

Historical Epics: "The Colossus of Rhodes" (1961); "Land of the Pharaohs" (1955) and "The Prodigal" (1955).

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