

Spike Lee scores with *Inside Man*

Like any great heist, *Inside Man* is all sleight of hand smoothness, perpetrated by pros who are in it for the rich payday. And who can blame them? After a decade floundering as a director more known for his political views than his moviemaking, Spike Lee shows he can cash in, too. No complaints here, mind you.

Inside Man, a clockwork-perfect heist thriller, is as good as genre filmmaking gets, juiced by Lee's off-kilter style and an embarrassment of platinum performances — Denzel Washington as the possibly-corrupt New York City detective assigned to handle a bank robbery-turned-hostage drama; Clive Owen as the cagey criminal masterminding the caper; Jodie Foster as the mysterious "fixer" brought on to negotiate a settlement; and Christopher Plummer as the bank's seemingly benevolent but shadowy chairman.

All of these points intersect, naturally, like a jigsaw of shattered glass, with Washington's Keith Frazer increasingly desperate to keep from getting his fingers sliced. Or bitten off. That's thanks to Foster's Madeline White, a prim pitbull, brought on by Plummer's Arthur Case, who fears the robbers might stumble across a secret he has

stashed away in the bank's safe-deposit boxes.

Lee, working from a tightly-spun script by Russell Gewirtz, piles on the tricks and turns without getting tangled — even being so bold as to interrupt the hostage action (a no-no for most Hollywood thrillers) with a series of flashforwards that reveal Frazer and partner Bill Mitchell (the always-splendid Chiwetel Ejiofor) interviewing each of the hostages, post-crisis.

You don't have to look hard to find *Inside Man*'s inspiration — namely, the heist flicks of the 1970s. At one point, Frazer even asks Owen's Dalton Russell, "Haven't you ever seen *Dog Day Afternoon*?"

Inside Man is a lesser film — Russell's suave, intelligent thief is the product of Hollywood bunk.

And the movie, despite its skill and pedigree, never achieves the supremacy of Michael Mann's 1995 crime epic *Heat* because it's more a puzzlebox than character study.

Again, not that we're complain-

ing. In this era of nonsensical techno thrillers and slasher remakes, *Inside Man* represents old-school entertainment at its cool, crackling best.

Extras include a commentary by Lee, making-of featurettes and more than 20 minutes of deleted footage. *Prison Break*' DVD a great escape



KEVIN WILLIAMSON



Escape from Reality

Like the kinetic Kiefer Sutherland vehicle *24*, *Prison Break* sets itself up with what sounds like an impossible premise — and then pulls it off with aplomb.

As an intelligent and dynamic series geared to sophisticated audiences, and with a primo cast turning in remarkably restrained performances, *Prison Break* is now ingrained in TV pop culture.

It is about to broaden its appeal: The six-disc, widescreen DVD box set *Prison Break: Season 1* is out now.



The set contains the 22 episodes from the inaugural season. Plus there are bonus materials: optional commentaries on selected episodes, deleted scenes, alternate takes and making-of documentaries.

They include an intriguing visual history of Illinois' castle-like and now defunct Joliet Correctional Centre, a Gothic nightmare where the series shoots while state officials debate its fate.

The show's storyline is absurd: A highly educated, law-abiding citizen (Wentworth Miller) stages an armed robbery, gives himself up and is sent to prison. It is a ploy to get into the same facility where his brother (Dominic Purcell) is being held, pending his execution for a murder he claims he did not commit.

Our hero has an astonishing plan to break them both out. Part of the plan is tattooed on his body.

The show, with a pilot directed by executive producer and mainstream filmmaker Brett Ratner, works because its creators trust the audience. In the pilot, 33 minutes pass before even one minor misstep occurs — as femme co-star Robin Tunney says something aloud that we already know, putting an overwrought "Eureka!" punctuation on the plot twist.

Any TV show that takes that long to even stumble is obviously doing almost everything else right.

If you have not yet been sentenced to this show, you're on probation until you see all of Season 1 on DVD.

> BRUCE KIRKLAND

MUSIC



Led Zeppelin *The Origin of the Species* The Rolling Stones *Under Review 1962 - 1966* Sexy Intellectual | MVD

Two famous British bands. Two unofficial rockumentaries about their early years. And two vastly different results. If you want to see the difference between an average music doc and one that stands out from the crowd, compare and contrast the latest The Rolling Stones' instalment of the U.K. *Under Review* series with *Origin of the Species*, a look at the beginnings of Led Zeppelin. Or better yet, just get the Zep disc. It's got the good stuff: Ancient TV footage of a pubescent Jimmy Page playing skiffle on a British TV show; audio snippets of obscure pre-Zep tracks by the various band members; illuminating stories (supposedly it was John Entwistle, not Keith Moon who waggishly named the band); and — most impressive — a critical analysis of their first two albums, detailing all the old blues and folk songs Page more or less rewrote and then took credit for. Plus you get 20 minutes of Yardbirds history from bassist Chris Dreja. Truly eye-opening stuff. Unlike the Stones' superficial *Under Review* chapter, which basically consists of 90 minutes of old film footage you've

already seen, accompanied by stories you've already heard about how the Stones started off as a blues band and became the anti-Beatles and yadda yadda yadda. No satisfaction here.

Zeppelin: ★★★1/2
Stones: ★★1/2

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