

The Aviator (2004)

Directed by Martin Scorsese

Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Cate Blanchett, Kate Beckinsale

Morgan Hughes-Davies

Contributor

Leonardo DiCaprio has crossed the class divide from being an impoverished Irish man seeking revenge in *Gangs of New York* to assuming role of the O.C.D. riddled businessman Howard Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio, performing competently enough). But perhaps the word businessman does not provide the most apt description of Hughes, as he treats his finances with the care and subtlety of the proverbial bull in a china shop. This point is driven home by Scorsese many times over the course of the film, sometimes in a charming light, and sometimes in an almost painful way.

The film opens with young Howard being given a bath by his mother. At the same time, she teaches her son a new word: quarantine. Unknown to both, it is a word that would shape many aspects of his life. She then reminds Howard of how “diseased” things can become: “You’re not safe.” Then Scorsese makes his first mistake by skipping ahead to Howard’s early adulthood. The fact that the director chose not to recount the most formative years of the protagonist’s life suggests either poor decision-making on the director’s part or that Scorsese never intended to make Howard a sympathetic character in the first place.

Whatever the case, the film focuses on Howard’s career and character during his “glory” days before, during,

and shortly after the Second World War. However, Howard Hughes was better known for his obsessive quest to avoid infection than for anything he and his company achieved, and plenty of screen time is devoted to his eccentricities. Scorsese treats these sequences with maturity, resisting the urge to let the violence and gratuitousness direct the film for him, though he seems uncertain as to whether he wants to depict Hughes as struggling against his disorder or accepting

it as a part of who he is.

Scorsese seems to perceive Hughes as a microcosm of the modern American businessman. For example, Hughes is shown making love to Katharine Hepburn (an

above average Cate Blanchett) in his study, and then immediately afterwards Hughes is shown inspecting a completed plane by running one hand along its surface. The message is clear: Howard’s only one true love was making money, and as such he provided a model for

today’s C.E.O. Whereas Howard Hughes was obsessed with keeping himself germ free, the obsession of today’s businessman is making money.

This could have been a great film, not on par with *Raging Bull*, but still a great film. However, Scorsese makes a few mistakes that are big enough to almost force *The Aviator* to make a crash landing. The omission of an account of Howard’s childhood made me hesitate to call this film a biopic, and as I said in the beginning, the director makes a bit much of Howard’s spending habits; plus the film does teeter dangerously on the brink of becoming dull in places.

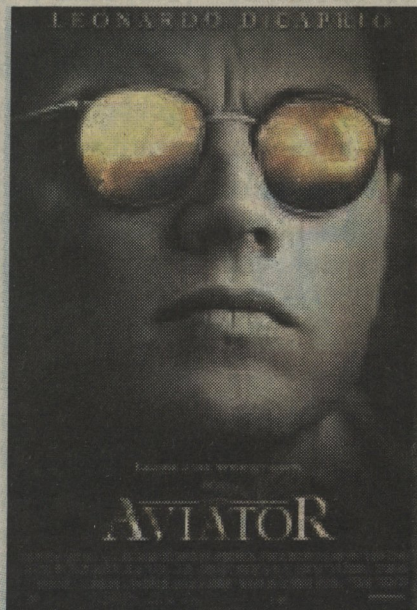
The Aviator does come with some memorable moments, though, particularly with the closing shot, which seems to be Scorsese’s specialty. I also

found the scenes involving the projector to be particularly resonant as a reminder of how Howard was never voluntarily obsessive compulsive, just the product of his upbringing. Overall, this is a valiant attempt by Scorsese to bring something special to the cinemas, but it is

ultimately sabotaged by Scorsese’s own decisions.

The Bottom Line

Good? Yes. Memorable? No.



'Enter Metallica.' DVD Review: *Some Kind of Monster*

Mark Cameron

Contributor

Metallica are the world's most prominent rock/metal band. They've sold over ninety million records and were the best selling touring band of the nineties. That's not too shabby. In early 2001, in the process of documenting the recording of their next album, *St. Anger*, their world unraveled when long-time bassist Jason Newsted bailed. Without a bass player, and faced with the prospect of recording their first cd in three years, the band enlisted therapist Phil Towe (What, Dr. Phil wasn't available?) to help them sort through their frustration of Newsted leaving and to learn how to work together as a collective unit. Metallica using a therapist? Sounds kind of weird doesn't it? I thought so too, but that's when the documentary picks up steam. Weeks into the recording of the album, band tensions boiled over and years of alcohol abuse catches up with vocalist James Hatfield who unexpectedly enters rehab, leaving guitarist Kirk Hammet, drummer, Lars Ulrich, and producer Bob Rock in limbo. No bass player, no lead singer = a screwed up band and one entertaining movie.

The conflict in *Some Kind of Monster* is like coming on the scene of an auto accident: you just can't turn your head from it. Hammet, Ulrich and Hatfield have been in this band for twenty years, yet really don't know how to communicate with one another—unless they're bitching at each other; and for guys who are supposed to represent the image of the macho metal gods, they sure are sensitive! Still, the tensions between Hatfield and Ulrich at times are very funny—here's some sample dialogue from Lars directed towards James about his frustration of recording the album: “I hear what you

Continued on page 14