

# Reviews

## 'Lean on Me' portrays principal's true story of high school's reform

**"Lean On Me"**  
Starring Morgan Freeman  
Directed by John G. Avildsen  
Rated PG-13  
\*\*\*½

By Shane Hall

### REVIEWER

The story of the triumphant underdog has been a recurring theme in the films of director John G. Avildsen.

In "Rocky," for example, we saw a small-time fighter go up against the world champion and get a shot at boxing fame. In "The Karate Kid," a teenage boy struggles against a group of bullies to become the local amateur karate champ. We see both of these characters as heroes.

"Lean On Me," the latest from Avildsen, deals with a real-life hero: high school principal Joe Clark.

Clark took a New Jersey high school that was rated the worst in the state and managed to turn it into a

success story. Clark, known to patrol the school corridors with a baseball bat and a megaphone, was a controversial figure, particularly for his decision to lock the school doors from the inside to keep drug dealers out.

Clark, however, got results. When he arrived, only 30 percent of the school's students could pass the minimum basic skills test.

Under Clark, the percentage of passing students improved considerably.

"Lean On Me," now playing at Cinema Three in College Station, is a wonderful film that tells Clark's story.

At the beginning, we see Eastside High School before Clark's arrival: graffiti covers the walls, fights are in every corridor, drug dealers run the place and the teachers are afraid to intervene.

An appropriate piece of music for these scenes, Guns 'n' Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle" blares in the

background. Joe Clark arrives and immediately makes it clear who is running the school: he is. He starts by expelling all known drug dealers and troublemakers in the school.

Swaggering through the school hallways like a Marine Corps drill instructor, Clark enforces strict discipline.

He not only makes sure students get to class, he breaks up fights and even requires students to learn the school song and sing it on demand.

Clark's toughness wins him the students' respect. More important, however, is that the students find self-esteem.

We see Clark as a caring educator who becomes involved when students have a problem, whatever it may be. The students admire Clark because he sees them as people, not as hopeless nobodies from the wrong side of the tracks.

But Clark's unorthodox ways win him plenty of enemies. His nemesis is a woman who seeks

greater political power and uses her influence to pressure the governor into lowering the boom on Clark.

Morgan Freeman is incredible and dominates the screen as Joe Clark. He is in nearly every scene and makes the most of every one of them. Freeman's portrayal shows Clark to be a complex man.

However, Freeman does not present a man without fault.

There are scenes of Clark berating teachers for failure to care about students. In another scene, he fires one just for arguing with him.

It takes his vice principal to point out to him that he is attacking his own side.

The film goes on to show Clark's arrest for violating fire codes by chaining the school doors. A school board hearing about his fitness to serve as principal follows.

But ultimately, Clark emerges as the hero. "Lean On Me" is a feel-good movie, but it's one that is moving and intelligently made.

## Austin novelist's book better suited for teens, not adult romance fans

**"The Boyfriend School"**  
By Sarah Bird  
Doubleday  
By S. Hoechstetter

### REVIEWER

Few things in this world are black and white. That is why it is hard to give a clear opinion on "The Boyfriend School" by Austin novelist Sarah Bird (Doubleday).

On the one hand, the book is set in Austin so it is fun to read about and recognize names of clubs, stores, roads and other landmarks that most people go to when in Austin.

The story is told from Gretchen Griner's point of view. She is an aspiring young photojournalist. She lives in a rented house that is falling apart. Her editor, who is also her boyfriend-at-his-convenience, owes her money for assignments she completed months before.

Without the money, she has to dodge her landlord because she can't pay the rent. She lives on Cup-a-Soup because it is all she can afford.

She drives an unairconditioned 1973 Delta '88 that continues to cough and sputter after she takes the key out of the ignition. Gretchen Griner is a realistic character leading a less than extraordinary life.

Editor/boyfriend Peter Overton Treadwell III (a.k.a. Trout) assigns her to do a photo essay of a romance novel writers convention. Gretchen learns, much to her surprise, that the polyester-clad women at the convention are interesting and successful people.

**This is a good book to read during spring break because no brainpower is required and any interruptions (such as falling asleep in the sun or receiving a phone call) will not be begrudged. This book CAN be put down.**

She becomes friends with them and decides to try her luck at writing her own "pastel porn" novel. Somewhere in there, of course, she lives her own "real-life" romance novel.

On the other hand, the story is so simple, so trite that it is hard to believe it was written for adults and not adolescents. Maybe it is Bird's way of satirizing the romance novels that the plot revolves around, but if that was her intention, she must not have heard of the term "overkill."

The language is overexaggerated and metaphored to death.

The plot is a predictable twist on "Cinderella" that does not leave much of an impression on the reader.

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Bird's writing is not completely

**Sarah Bird . . . creates a vivid picture of the random, artsy, late-night and crazy lifestyle that seems to be the stereotypical way of life for young people in Austin.**

worthless, however. She does a good job of making the reader feel the intense heat of an Austin summer that continues into late October. She also creates a vivid picture of the random, artsy, late-night and crazy lifestyle that seems to be the stereotypical way of life for young people in Austin.

The book does have some humorous lines and scenarios. For example, one night Gretchen is at her author friend Lizzie's house for dinner. Jellyfish is served as the main course. George Winston is played at full volume on the stereo. The family is kind of strange.

Lizzie tries to set Gretchen up with her computer-geek brother, Gus Kubiak, who has just successfully completed chemotherapy for leukemia. He is recovering, but he is not exactly Tom Selleck.

Gus does not have an electrifying personality, but he is head over heels in love with Gretchen. She is flattered by the attention and realizes that her current relationship with Trout is not healthy. However, she has to draw the line at Gus's Hush Puppies.

Gretchen defines her ideal man as "some impossible combination of the mind of William Buckley, the looks of Mel Gibson, the cash flow of Malcolm Forbes, and the sex drive of Java Man."

Neither Trout nor Gus fits her description, so Gretchen creates her own superman in her novel. Meanwhile, someone dangerously close to the superman ideal enters her life.

Bird's use of satire and humor could have been so much more effective if she had not simply recreated the formula of the watered-down romance novel. It is insulting to the intelligence—like a romance—but it lacks the spice of "pastel pornography," if you know what I mean.

## Book chronicles reporter's view of America

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**AMERICA OBSERVED**  
By Alistair Cooke  
Knopf

Alistair Cooke probably is better known to Americans for his television appearances than for his reportage. A pity, since he is a fine observer and writer. This has been rectified, however, with the appearance of "America Observed."

The book was published to mark the distinguished Briton's 80th birthday and contains a variety of pieces Cooke says were filed as daily dispatches to the *Manchester Guardian* between 1946 and 1972, when he retired as the paper's chief American correspondent. It also contains several pieces from other sources that carry Cooke's views of the American scene into 1985.

The first, dated Dec. 24, 1946, is a description by Cooke of how Christmas is celebrated in America, especially in New York City, and observes wryly that because the country is so large it has different time zones which are "mostly a nuisance, but at Christmas and New Year it gives revellers, by the magic of radio, the chance to get drunk four times over."

In 1951, Cooke wrote a piece on The New Yorker magazine. His terse article does an excellent job of summing up the periodical's birth and surprising growth, as well as giving a witty word picture of founder Harold Ross, a man of "writhing perfectionism."

A 1962 piece tells of Marilyn Monroe, who was found dead in her Hollywood home. "(She was) only a physical mile or two, but a social universe away, from the place where she was born," he wrote. Cooke pities her, calling her "a baffled, honest girl forever haunted by the nightmare of herself, 60 feet tall and naked before a howling mob."

"Bedlam in Chicago" (Sept. 5, 1968) is a devastating report on the Democratic presidential convention in Chicago in which "stupefied millions (of TV viewers watched) a Chicago police force gone berserk in front of the biggest hotel in the world."

The book contains more than 50 other fine reports.

## Fairgrounds plays like a record stuck on the same boring song

**Fairgrounds**  
Little America  
Geffen Records

By S. Hoechstetter

### REVIEWER

I am still trying to slap myself awake after listening to Little America's *Fairgrounds*.

I think it provided me with the best rest I have had all semester, which is one of the few positive things about this band and their album.

The album is (yawn) predictable and most of the songs sound the same. There is no oomph, pizzazz or fireworks here.

In fact, this album has so little spark that I doubt if *Fairgrounds* could even start a forest fire in a drought in the middle of August.

I tried to make Little America sound big by turning up the volume. It only put the neighbors down the hall to sleep.

I tried listening to it at a different time of day. I wasted a lot of time trying to chase the sandman away when I should have been studying or listening to some good music.

Little America is obviously trying to corner the nostalgic and patriotic market. Consider their name and album title.

The album jacket has three photos of these pretty boys trying desperately hard to look bad in leather jackets with American flag patches on them. They only look like their Levi's are a few sizes too small. A good descriptive phrase for this look might be John Cougar wanna-be.

Lead singer Mike Magris's voice is not bad, but sometimes it sounds like he is trying to make it sound hoarse and deeper than it really is.

Maybe with some decent instrumentals, Magris could support himself as a singer.

The other members of the band sing backup for him. They repeat almost every line he sings in three part harmony and end up sounding like the Beach Boys instead of bad boys.

The music all sounds the same. I doubt if drummer Custer (is this his last stand?) even works up a sweat in most of the songs.

Andy Logan on lead guitar has two or three combinations that he uses for the whole album.

Rhythm guitarist John Hussey and Magris on bass must get awfully bored strumming the same old thing.

All this combined produces a distinctly Americana kind of sound. That is the best description I could come up with.

Try to imagine the music that would be played in the background for an advertisement for Ford trucks

## Film 'Men' examines male attitudes

By Shane Hall

### REVIEWER

MSC Aggie Cinema's international film series continues Tuesday night at 7:30 with the German comedy, "Men." Admission is \$2.50.

"Men" stars Heiner Lauterbach as Julius Armbrust, a successful executive at an advertising agency. He drives a Maserati, has two children, lives in a large house, and has a nice cozy affair with one of the ladies at the office.

However, life is not so great for Julius when he discovers a prominent hickey on his wife Paula's neck the morning of their anniversary. She admits that she, too, has been

having an affair. Julius's ego is shattered by the revelation, so he leaves the house and takes a leave of absence from work. He spies on his wife and her lover, Stefan (Uwe Ochsenknecht), a freelance illustrator.

Stefan, a bohemian type, is the opposite of the yuppie Julius. It is Stefan's bohemian image and pride in being an outsider that draws Paula to him.

Julius begins following Stefan around town and, assuming the name "Daniel," answers Stefan's ad for a roommate. He then unfolds an elaborate scheme to win back his wife.

"Men" is directed by Doris Dorrie. Earlier films by Dorrie such as "Straight Through the Heart" explore

the way men affect women. "Men" is an examination of men themselves.

Julius and Stefan are presented here as two completely different men who have both positive and negative qualities. The scenes involving the two are the best in the film. The clever dialogue is filled with the two characters' views on women, relationships and life. It is through these scenes that we come to understand the two men.

In addition to examining men, the film also looks at the lives of affluent West Germans. It suggests that the seemingly endless demands of a career can be devastating to a romantic relationship.

"Men" is an amusing and entertaining movie that manages to be a film of substance as well.

seeing him in films such as "Once Upon A Time in the West" and the original "Death Wish." Bronson's

he exploits his tough guy typecast. The result is that often he winds up looking like a parody of himself. His performance in "Kinjite" is much the same as his work in his recent films.

The bad guys lose in this movie (no surprise), but for acting ability they win. As Duke, Fernandez gives a good performance as a creep who feels no remorse about exploiting children and for whom we feel no sympathy.

Sy Richardson, who has appeared in films such as Dennis Hopper's "Colors" and Alex Cox's "Walker," is good as Lavonne, Duke's equally nasty sidekick. Unfortunately, Richardson and Fernandez can't save this movie that offers a few exciting action scenes, but is mostly just boring.

When it does come together, "Kinjite" becomes slightly more interesting, but still nothing to go out of your way to see. The filmmakers blew some opportunities for some great moments, however.

One is a scene where the Japanese businessman, a bit of a pervert, paws Rita on a bus. Later, when the man visits Crowe to thank him for finding his kidnapped daughter, he discovers who Rita is. Rita, however, says nothing. This scene could have made for an interesting confrontation between the wealthy pervert and the overprotective father who just happens to bust child molesters and other unpleasant types.

I have always had a measure of respect for Charles Bronson ever since

## New Bronson film offers little action, many yawns

**"Kinjite: Forbidden Subjects"**  
Starring Charles Bronson  
Directed by J. Lee Thompson

By Shane Hall

### REVIEWER

"Kinjite: Forbidden Subjects" is by no means a great film, but it is better than Charles Bronson's last outing, the painfully dull "Messenger of Death." Neither is this movie one full of substance, but high art is not something we expect from the Cannon production group.

"Kinjite," now playing at Cinema Three, is basically a slow-moving thriller in which movie tough guy Bronson does virtually nothing we haven't seen him do before.

Bronson stars as Lt. Crowe, a Los Angeles vice detective. Crowe is out to kill a pimp named Duke (Juan Fernandez). Duke is a greasy-looking sleaze who, with the help of

his sidekick Lavonne (Sy Richardson), kidnaps teenage girls and forces them into prostitution.

of teenage prostitution is not exactly in good taste, but then again, it's almost impossible to deal with such a repugnant subject in a tasteful manner.

Short of showing graphic sexual scenes, the movie handles the sordid matter in an explicit fashion. Perhaps this is director J. Lee Thompson's way of making us cheer when Bronson's character does such things as forcing Duke to swallow a \$25,000 watch.

The movie takes a while to get going, however, because the main part of the story involves Crowe's assignment to find the kidnapped daughter of a wealthy Japanese businessman. This assignment, however, comes halfway into the movie.

The first half of "Kinjite" is plain confusing. The film jumps from Los Angeles where Crowe is busting

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