

REEL CRITIQUE

MOVIE REVIEWS

American Beauty

Starring Kevin Spacey, Annette Bening
Directed by Sam Mendes

shatters the stigma and illusion of the "American dream" by breaking through the stereotypical bubble of suburban existence with honest emotions often hidden in everyday life. (Grade: A)

— Amanda Palm

Three Kings

Starring George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg and Ice Cube
Directed by David O. Russell

Three Kings has been attracting a lot of buzz in the weeks preceding its release. This is not surprising considering the film's trailers, stars and subject matter.

In fact, there has even been a little talk of Oscar nominations surrounding the film, and this seems surprising after viewing the film.

Three Kings is the story of a group of soldiers who journey into Iraq a few days after the end of the Gulf War. Their objective is to steal gold from a group of Iraqis, who stole it from the Kuwaitis.

Predictably, these soldiers have a crisis of faith when they see the pitiful shape of the average Iraqi. The rest of the film builds on this change of direction.

Starting with frenetic energy and literally a laugh-a-minute, this film quickly loses its spark. Written and directed by David O. Russell (*Flirting with Disaster*), this film attempts to transcend genres and become an action film, a comedy and a serious drama all rolled into one.

When the film shifts to its more serious and thought-provoking theme a little less than mid-



Thora Birch (left) and Mena Suvari co-star as teenage friends caught in a twisted family drama, in the DreamWorks film *American Beauty*.

way through, it seems to miss a gear, and much of the earlier momentum is lost.

Russell, who has proven himself as a great comedic director, fails to direct drama with the same success as humor and transforms the movie into a slower-paced, predictable shell of what it could have been.

Clooney turns in a surprisingly bland performance as Captain Archie Gates. Wahlberg and Ice Cube both deliver decent performances, considering both are musicians turned actors.

The movie's two saving graces are the offbeat, and sometimes downright sick, humor scattered throughout and the absolutely brilliant cinematography

of Newton Thomas Sigel (*The Usual Suspects*).

Using different types of film to give the movie different appearances, and through the use of excellent lensing techniques, Sigel is able to furnish the movie with some of its most memorable moments.

Three Kings is an interesting concept for a movie with some equally powerful stars. It is a shame, though, that the movie's best moments are accomplished without either of those aspects.

If there are any Oscars to be seen in this film's future, Newton Thomas Sigel deserves the only one. (Grade: B-)

— Matt McCormick

A = instant classic B = a cut above C = average
D = don't buy it F = burn in effigy

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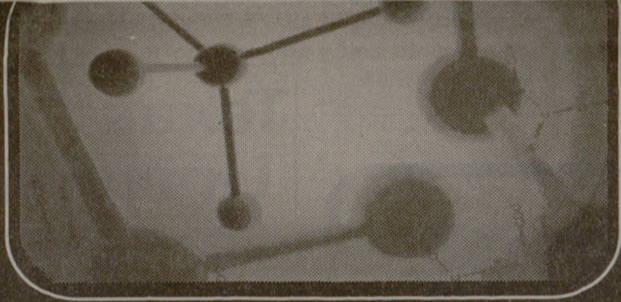
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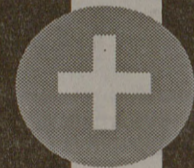
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