

Thursday, March 11, 2004

THE BATTALION

REEL CRITIQUE



PHOTO COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY FOX

Emile Hirsch (left) plays Matthew, who falls for Danielle (Elisha Cuthbert), a former porn star who moves in next door.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROTHERS STUDIOS

Ben Stiller (left) and Owen Wilson play the retro duo "Starsky & Hutch" in the remake of the 1970s television series.

"The Girl Next Door" Starring Emile Hirsch and Elisha Cuthbert 20th Century Fox Pictures

There's something about "The Girl Next Door" that manages to charm its way under your skin. Maybe it's the calculated use of fondly remembered music or the always-pleasant scenario where the loser wins, but "The Girl Next Door" manages to elevate itself above a typical teenage sex romp to become a likable movie.

Matthew (Emile Hirsch) is on the verge of his high school graduation. Although he is admitted into the college of his dreams, Matthew isn't content with his placid life of following the rules and being the student council president. Deep inside, Matthew craves adventure and excitement.

When beautiful Danielle (Elisha Cuthbert) moves in next door, Matthew finds true happiness even as he is further entangled or drawn into the seedy world of adult entertainment. Danielle is a porn star, searching for a new beginning. Unfortunately, Danielle can't escape her past. It's up to Matthew to find happiness for both himself and the girl next door.

Unfortunately, Elisha Cuthbert's presence in the movie seems to be solely for the sake of eye candy. While Cuthbert has no problem commanding men's attention, her character lacks the depth to make the audience believe Matthew would fall in love with her for anything but her looks. The film's real stand-out is Timothy Olyphant as Kelly, Danielle's adult film producer. Olyphant oozes charm throughout the movie as he openly flirts with any woman present and tries to be buddy-buddy with Matthew. That's why the revelation of his true nature comes as a shock. Mastering violent outbursts and crazy smirks, Olyphant is a great character actor.

Director Luke Greenfield ("The Animal") and cinematographer Jamie Anderson work together to deliver a great stylized film that utilizes trendy editing and in-your-face angles to build up the film's tone whenever excitement is afoot. Every scene with Olyphant's character becomes an MTV-like extravaganza of jump cuts and close-ups.

The movie's accuracy of high school life is surprisingly on the spot for a Hollywood movie. In recent films, we've seen actors in their late 20s portraying high school students without batting an eye. "The Girl Next Door" uses quite a few talented actors who are actually right out of their own high school careers.

The movie definitely won't be remembered as a groundbreaking example of solid filmmaking, but at the same time, don't be surprised if it is remembered fondly as a "cute" movie with likeable characters and a clever script.



—Robert Saucedo



—Robert Saucedo

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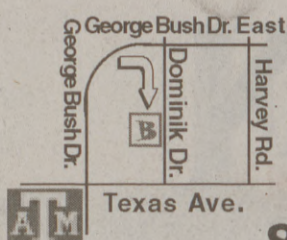
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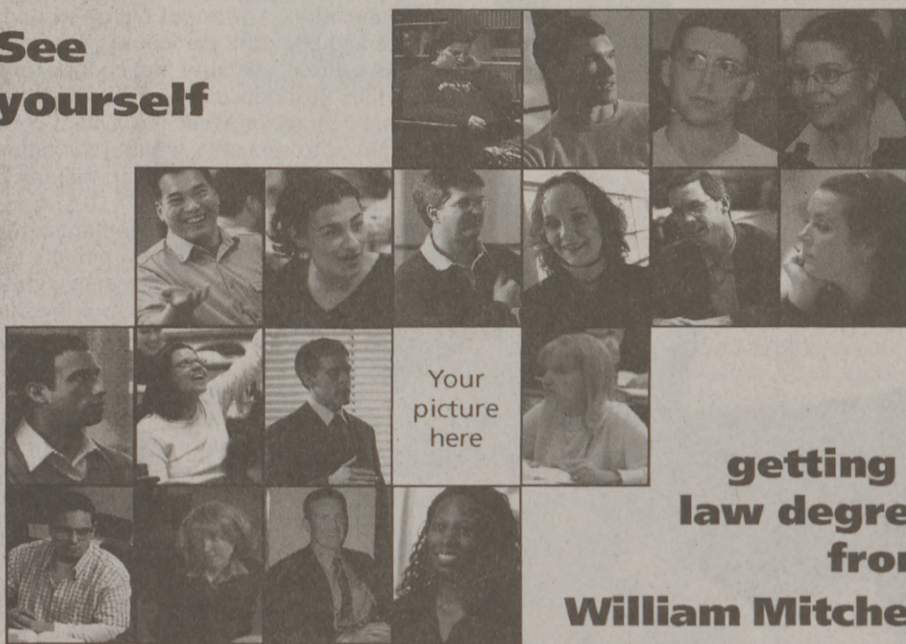


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