

## FILM REVIEW

## OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

## Character assassination

Originally a BBC mini-series, 'Edge of Darkness' suffers from its compacted Americanization for the big screen

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CATCATCH

**E**dge of Darkness is a remake of a BBC television series of the same name from 1985. The primary action has been transferred from Yorkshire to Boston, and the story necessarily sped up from five-and-a-half hours to just under two. It has Mel Gibson in his first starring role since 2002 (M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs*), and the only reason for its existence seems to be a shortage of original ideas on the part of the producers. Gibson, like the show's Cold War nuclear weapons theme, has not aged well.

Gibson plays Thomas Craven, a Boston cop of 30 years service. His daughter, Emma, (Bojana Novakovic) is killed in a drive-by shooting that initially is believed to have targeted her father. It emerges that Emma was involved in a dangerous conflict with her employers, Northmoor, a privately run nuclear facility working for the US government. Craven, in looking for answers, only finds more and more questions.

The film starts out as an atmospheric thriller, with Craven working through his relationship with his daughter (who appears to him as an apparition) as he searches for the reason why her employers killed her. But the atmosphere rapidly leaks out of the narrative as the pace of the action picks up, and by mid movie, we have Gibson in the familiar role of a father out for vengeance (*Mad Max*, *Payback*, *The Patriot*).

The original mini-series, set in the hey-day of Margaret Thatcher's prime-ministerial reign, and the controversy of the acquisition of the US-made Trident missile system, is part of a venerable tradition of British TV programs of vaguely left-wing sympathy about government corruption and big money shenanigans. The sense of conspiracy is perfectly effective for its time and place, and the series, though far from perfect, earned a massive reputation for daring to push an anti-nuke, environmental



agenda. Another in this tradition that comes easily to mind is *State of Play* (2003), which received a similar cinematic treatment in a film, released last year, that starred Russell Crowe. Both film adaptations suffer from grasping at fast action to replace an intensifying buildup of character and mood.

It is the leisurely pace, and the digressions that it allows, that made the television original so much fun. In the case of *Edge of Darkness* the brilliant part played by Joe Don Baker as Darius Jedburgh, the free-wheeling CIA agent with a tendency to philosophize about God, golf and the good life, is sorely missed. Gibson's vengeful father oeuvre is not big on humor, and in the movie treatment, the name Jedburgh has been transposed to a shadowy English fixer played by Ray Winstone, who attempts to provide a sense of intrigue to the story. Alas, this task is too much for any one man, and eventually he too resorts to shooting first and asking questions later.

Whatever one might have thought about the lefty politics of the original, it at least worked within a recognizable political context, and the mystery deepened with the involvement of various amusing cameos that poked fun at players across the political spectrum. For those with no interest in the original series, *Edge of Darkness* can be considered a perfectly adequate nuts-and-bolts conspiracy thriller,

with a strong dose of righteous indignation thrown in. It's painting by numbers, with the bad guys in dark suits, and the conniving politicians interchangeable with those featuring in any number of similar movies.

For those who want to find out what really happened, BBC Worldwide released the DVD of the original mini-series last year. It includes the whole 314 minutes of the six-part TV series, a bunch of extras, and a brilliant score by Eric Clapton and Michael Kamen. The comparison is a poke in the eye for film snobs who regard TV as a lesser art form.

## Film Notes

## EDGE OF DARKNESS

DIRECTED BY:  
MARTIN CAMPBELL

STARRING:  
MEL GIBSON (THOMAS CRAVEN),  
RAY WINSTONE (JEDBURGH),  
DANNY HUSTON (JACK BENNETT),  
BOJANA NOVAKOVIC (EMMA  
CRAVEN), SHAWN ROBERTS  
(DAVID BURNHAM)

RUNNING TIME:  
117 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:  
TODAY

9

Sock puppets. The cineplex. These two seemingly incompatible elements are brought together in *9*, a post-apocalyptic survival story — enough already with the end of the world — featuring a bunch of cute rag dolls who inhabit a world of fierce feline machines. Directed by Shane Acker, a protege of Tim Burton, *9* presents the kind of richly fantastic world that is not a million miles from his mentor's own *Alice in Wonderland*, which is currently playing at the cineplex. Highly praised as one of the more original productions in the increasingly overcrowded animation sphere, and featuring some top voiceover talent including Elijah Wood and Christopher Plummer, it nevertheless bows to the demands of conventional action flicks and the CGI magic-makers, somewhat diminishing its indie street cred.



## The Lovely Bones

This week's other major release is Peter Jackson's *The Lovely Bones*, in which the *Lord of the Rings* director melds supernatural fantasy, murder mystery and family drama into a far from seamless tale taken from Alice Sebold's best-selling 2002 novel of the same name. The presence of Saoirse Ronan, who was so brilliant in *Atonement* (2007), is submerged beneath a blanket of special effects that attempts to create a cinematic image of heaven — always a dangerous thing to do. She plays Susan Salmon, a young girl who is murdered and watches as her parents and the police search for her killer. As the search for the murderer goes nowhere, the Salmon family begins to disintegrate, under Susan's sorrowful gaze. This delicate drama does not survive Jackson's go-for-broke approach to spectacle despite its star-studded cast, which includes Rachel Weisz, Mark Wahlberg, Susan Sarandon and Stanley Tucci.



## A Good Husband (Kondo wa Aisaika)

Yet another literary adaptation, this is a superior Japanese tearjerker staring Etsushi Toyokawa as Shunsuke Kitami, a formerly successful photographer who has lost his mojo, and Hiroko Yakushimaru, his long-suffering wife Sakura. Wife wants children; husband finds consolation for failing career in the arms of other women. In the tradition of Japanese soap opera wives, Sakura remains dedicated to philandering husband. Finally, something snaps, and the love she maintained for Shunsuke begins to fade. When Etsushi realizes what he has lost, it may be too late to win his wife back. Cue tissues.



## Wedding Fever in Campobello (Maria, Ihm Schmeckt's Nicht!)

Racial stereotypes jump out of the closet for this German comedy in the manner of *Meet the Parents*. Jan is planning on marrying girlfriend Sara, whose father, Antonio, is Italian. Worse yet, the wedding will take place in an Italian town with her father's numerous family members in attendance. Antonio is possessive. Jan suffers from a host of allergies. The Italians find Jan stuffy and unenthusiastic about the festivities. The hotel they are staying in provides every discomfort. Though aimed squarely at a German audience, *Wedding Fever* does boast a solid cast that should give this well-worn slapstick a bit of gloss.



## The Shock Labyrinth 3D (Senritsu Meikyū 3D)

Although it has the cachet of helmer Takashi Shimizu, who brought *The Grudge* movies into the world, *Shock Labyrinth 3D* looks too much like a gimmick to appeal to hard-core horror fans. The film's central setting is inspired by the Labyrinth of Horrors attraction at Fuji-Q High Land amusement park, a fact that does not inspire confidence. The movie follows a group of teenagers, who take a friend to an old hospital, only to discover that it's actually one big labyrinth of horrors. Lots of killing and ghostly goings on. Internet comments suggest that the main shock is how very little is achieved with 3D technology.



## FILM FESTIVAL

## Windows of opportunity

Tailor-made for the country's university students, the College Film Festival screens independent films at campuses nationwide

BY HO YI  
STAFF REPORTER

It's not easy for students from schools outside Taipei, where the majority of the country's more than 150 colleges are located, to see films that are not made in Hollywood. They may need to trek to the capital to catch a film festival or independent movie deemed unworthy for release outside the capital, where the number of art-house moviegoers is said to be prohibitively small.

Seven years ago, Lin Wen-chi (林文淇), a professor of film at National Central University (國立中央大學) in Jhongli (中壢), and Chen Te-ling (陳德齡), a then-recent graduate from the university's Department of English, built a movie theater on the university's

campus that provides students access to non-Hollywood flicks.

The pair wanted to build on the campus cinema's success.

In 2008, the university's Film Studies Center (電影文化研究室), led by Lin, and Cinema Taiwan Film (中映電影), where Chen serves as the CEO, together initiated the first College Film Festival (大學生影展), which tours the country's campuses screening independent movies.

More than 35 institutes of higher education signed up for the festival, whose year-round program screens films about subjects ranging from human rights and media ethics to gender and ethnic issues.

This year's edition, which comprises 11 movies from seven



countries, grouped under four themes, was expanded to include two new sections: world cinema and locally produced films.

The lineup includes *Waltz With*

*Bashir*, a stunning animation that revisits the 1982 Lebanon War; *A Map for Saturday*, which follows a backpacker's trek across four continents through 26 countries;

and *When You Come Down From Heaven*, a tale about a man whose job entails removing vagrants from a French city during the Christmas holidays.



This year's College Film Festival will screen 11 movies from seven countries.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CINEMA TAIWAN FILM

The festival will screen 10 Taiwanese films later this year.

Organizers make the event as flexible and inclusive as possible to accommodate different tastes and academic interests.

"For example, Taiwanese movies draw more interest from Taiwanese literature student clubs and departments of Chinese literature," Chen said. "We were surprised at the diversity of these groups and their interest in wanting to work with us. These range from the schools' libraries, general education departments or extracurricular centers."

Chen initially thought film clubs would be the most interested, he said, but many have closed down because of the widespread availability of mainstream movies

on the Internet.

"Cinema is a good way of understanding our world. We hope students can appreciate all these different movies and develop a habit of watching them," Chen said.

All the festival's screenings are free.

Colleges and universities interested in hosting the festival can contact Ms Chiang (江) at Cinema Taiwan Film, a company that founded online film magazine *Fun Screen* (放映週報) in 2005 and whose services include organizing film festivals and workshops for schools, private companies and government institutions, at (02) 2776-0542.

For more information about the festival, visit film.ncu.edu.tw/college.