

MOVIES

Edited by Meghan Kavanaugh



NO RESERVATIONS When an unlikely pair of teens hit the road together on a quest, it seems like the start of a standard coming-of-age story. But *Smoke Signals* is different. The first American feature film written, directed, acted and co-produced entirely by Native Americans, the 1998 indie film follows two boys who travel from their reservation to Phoenix to collect one of their fathers' remains—and the movie collected many awards after its Sundance premiere, including the fest's audience award. Catch it at the Brattle Theatre, where the film kicks off the series Through Indian Eyes: Native American Cinema on April 22. /Marlo Jappen

Reviews by Brett Michel

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE ★1/2

Not content to ruin only Superman by turning the flying Boy Scout into both a murderer and a terrible protector of the public (recall when thousands of people became collateral damage during the hourlong fight scene that leveled much of Metropolis in 2013's *Man of Steel*), Zack Snyder has entangled Batman in his revisionist madness. The director has transformed Gotham's Dark Knight into a larger-than-life cartoon, replacing Christopher Nolan and Christian Bale's beloved, quasi-realistic take on the Caped Crusader with...Ben Affleck. To be fair, Affleck doesn't cut a bad figure in Batman's cowl, nor does the returning Henry Cavill when donning the Last Son of Krypton's cape, but Snyder and his screenwriters' decision to pit the two heroes against each other in a Battle to the Death may only satisfy those who already decided they were going to love this picture when it was announced at 2013's Comic-Con. Darker than need be, both tonally and cinematographically, this fanboy's wet dream also introduces Wonder Woman (Gal Godot), tempering the testosterone with Amazonian estrogen. As for that ridiculous title, the movie doubles as the launching pad for the Justice League, DC Comics' mirror of Marvel's Avengers, so try to act surprised if more superheroes show up during this humorless film's excessive running time. (At Assembly Row, Boston Common, Fenway, Somerville and in the suburbs.)

THE DARK HORSE ★★1/2 It's easy to forget how great an actor Cliff Curtis can be. His early career found the New Zealander disappearing into character roles in wonderful films like *The Piano* and *Once Were Warriors*, but in recent years, he has been cast in lackluster Hollywood efforts like *Live Free or Die Hard* and *The Last Airbender*. The jury's still out on his TV series—AMC's *Fear the Walking Dead*—but if there's any justice, Curtis' newfound visibility will drive audiences to writer/director James Napier Robertson's *The Dark Horse*. Based on the true story of Genesis "Gen" Potini, this inspirational tale finds Curtis doing career-best work as the Maori speed-chess champion, a former prodigy who suffers from mental illness. Curtis added almost 60 pounds for his role as the hulking Gen, who is released from an institution and left in the custody of his older brother, Ariki (Wayne Hapi, a former gang member and tremendous first-time actor). Ariki is the leader of a violent street gang who's planning to initiate his teenage son, Mana (James Rolleston, star of Taika Waititi's *Boy*)—so when Gen volunteers to teach a youth chess club, he may not only be saving his own life, but also his nephew's. Familiar but stirring. (At Kendall Square.)

DEADPOOL ★1/2 Twentieth Century Fox infamously botched the on-screen introduction of fanboy favorite Deadpool in 2009's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Ryan Reynolds was cast as the right kind of sardonic personality, but Fox literally muzzled Marvel's antihero

by stitching his lips shut, a big no-no for a character known as "The Merc with a Mouth." Well, Fox has given Reynolds a second, very R-rated shot at playing the tights-wearing assassin who murders with guns and swords, allowing him to constantly break the fourth wall (a staple of his comic book incarnation) as he comments on the action. The directorial debut of former visual effects artist Tim Miller, the movie is basically two extended fight scenes, padded out with origin-oriented flashbacks narrated by former special forces operative Wade Wilson (Reynolds), a self-described "bad guy who gets paid to fuck up worse guys" on his way to becoming Deadpool. Unfortunately, as we also discover, he's probably better suited to the printed page. "I know what you're thinking," Wilson muses in voiceover, "whose balls did he have to fondle to get his own movie?" Funny, no? Since I didn't laugh once at the puerile "humor," no. (At Assembly Row, Boston Common, Fenway, Somerville and in the suburbs.)

DEMOLITION ★1/2 I hardly believed a moment of this treacle from director Jean-Marc Vallée (*Dallas Buyers Club*)—except when Chris Cooper was on screen. He plays Phil, a grief-stricken father who's just lost his daughter, Julia (Heather Lind), to a car accident, and the 64-year-old actor has clearly plumbed the depth of personal despair, drawing on the death of his own son to create a portrait that's both painful and real. Unfortunately, Cooper's not the star of this film. Instead, the focus is placed on his son-in-law, Davis (Jake Gyllenhaal). Or rather, it's placed on a series of complaint letters that Davis writes after a bag of peanut M&Ms gets stuck in a vending machine in the lobby of the hospital where his wife has just died. These letters not only allow Davis to free himself from repressed emotions, but also let the overreaching screenwriter deploy a bunch of hoary narrative devices as the story blossoms into romance and Davis draws the interest of vending machine customer service rep Karen (Naomi Watts). Talented cast, dreadful script. (At Boston Common, Kendall Square, Somerville and in the suburbs.)

EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!! ★★★★★ How do you follow up the award-winning success of a film like *Boyhood*? If you're Richard Linklater, that film's Oscar-nominated writer and director, you go back to the beginning. Returning to one of his earliest hits—1993's *Dazed and Confused*—for inspiration, the Austin-based filmmaker's "spiritual sequel" is set in 1980, a little more than four years after the earlier picture. But instead of taking place during the close of a high school year, we follow incoming college freshman and ace baseball pitcher Jake (Blake Jenner) as he moves into a house he'll be sharing with his new teammates. This motley crew of athletes (Glen Powell, Tyler Hoechlin, Ryan Guzman, Austin Amelio, Forrest Vickery, J. Quinton Johnson, Justin Street and Wyatt Russell), many of whom sport period-appropriate Burt Reynolds mustaches, can barely contain their ribbing contempt for Jake's position on the field as they haze him and the other newbies (Tanner Kalina, Temple Baker and Will Brittain). As Jake

ADVICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Submit film listings by mail to "Calendar: Movies" or by email to movies@improper.com. Include address, phone number, date, time, price, nearest T stop and a brief description. Deadline is four weeks prior to publication. Listings not accepted over the phone.