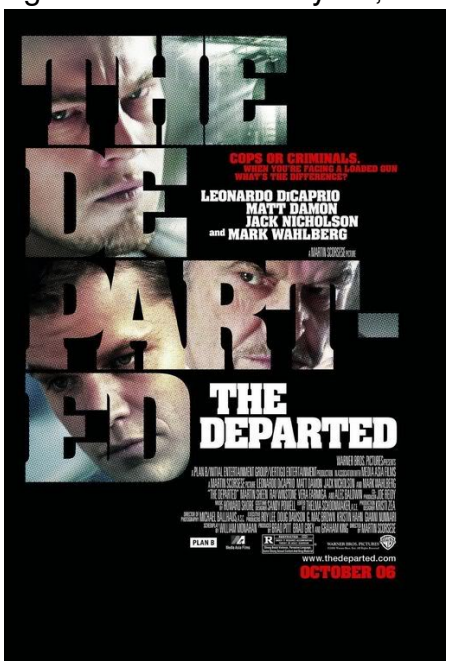
In the Friday night spot we usually reserve for "The Crystal Ball", Mitch delivers a year in review piece instead for us tonight, as nothing of note hits the theaters this weekend. Mitch takes a look back at the year in movies, highlighting the best and worst new movies from 2006. Mitch has done great work for us all year, and this piece is no different. Thanks for everything in 2006 Mitch!!!



As we draw to the end of the first year of The Cleveland Fan, what better time to look back on the past year…and try to suppress the body's natural gag reflex. OK, there were quite a few decent movies released in 2006, but it was often a case of needing to dig through tons and tons of garbage to find them.

So without further ado, let's all hold our noses and take a retrospective view of the last twelve months.

A quick explanation: I'm only listing movies that were released in 2006 that I actually saw. If not, my "Worst Of" list would probably be filled with slasher flicks, "Basic Instinct 2", "Little Man", and "The Fountain". That's just too easy.

Top Ten movies of 2006:

1. The Departed. Martin Scorsese will hopefully finally receive his long overdue Oscar for

Best Director for this gritty, violent, and superb mob drama that featured incredible acting from Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Jack Nicholson, and Mark Wahlberg.

2. World Trade Center. Nicolas Cage and Michael Pena excelled as the Port Authority police officers who were the last two people rescued from the rubble in Oliver Stones superbly touching tale of good emerging from the ashes of evil on 9/11.

3. Casino Royale. Catching the over-the-top “Die Another Day” on Spike the other day once again proved to me how great this rebooting of the James Bond; 007 franchise really was. Intelligent script not bogged down with gimmicks, and the best Bond since Sean Connery in Daniel Craig.

4. Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan. Easily the funniest movie in years. Sacha Baron Cohen combines “Candid Camera”, “Punk’d”, and “Blazing Saddles” in his biting satire of prejudice and social norms.

5. Inside Man. One of only two movies from the first half of the year to make my list. Denzel Washington and Clive Owen play cat-n-mouse in this smartly scripted movie from Spike Lee. One of the few ‘caper movies’ that are still enjoyable on a second viewing.

6. We Are Marshall. Respectful depiction of the tragedy that wiped out the Marshall University football team, and the Herculean effort it took to honor those that died by putting another team back on the field.

7. V for Vendetta. Highly unappreciated cautionary tale of the dangers of Totalitarianism. Hugo Weaving was excellent in a difficult role as the man behind the mask molding a splendid Natalie Portman into his protégé as they spark a rebellion.

8. Flags of Our Fathers. Said to be the lesser of the two Clint Eastwood Iwo Jima films, this one looks unblinking at the good and the bad from the American side. Ryan Phillippe surprised me with his performance as the brave navy corpsman who became a reluctant hero.

9. Rocky Balboa. Great sendoff of a movie icon (I'm talking about the character, not Stallone). Much more in tone with the first movie, focusing on characters rather than buffoonish action sequences (In other words, no Hulk Hogan or Mr. T).

10. Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby. This one is in spite of myself. I so much wanted to hate this movie, but Will Ferrell actually gets the spoofing of NASCAR and its fans down to a hilarious science.

NOTE: I fully expect this list to change somewhat as more movies that have only been released in limited areas in 2006 become available for viewing even in my (red)neck of the woods. From the buzz, I would fully expect to find at least two more for this list from "Letters From Iwo Jima", "Little Children", "Notes on a Scandal", "Miss Potter" or "Children of Men". But I'll talk more about them when it comes time to cover the Academy Awards.

Bottom Five Movies of 2006.

5. Mission Impossible 3. Just stick a fork in this stupid, stupid franchise. Dumb script, idiotic stunts, and the typically horrible acting from Tom Cruise that has become his forte as of late.

4. Babel. Boorrrrinnnnggg. An attempt to emulate the critical success of "Crash" by making another movie with overlapping storylines, in this case they aren't really connected except by the thinnest of strings. Over two hours watching people you couldn't care less about.

3. Click. Why did I expect to watch an Adam Sandler and see anything other than a juvenile performance and a script aimed at nine year old boys everywhere? Sandler and Ben Stiller just need to stop doing movies. Period.

2. The Prestige. Dreadful movie concerning two men more interested in harming the other than banging Scarlett Johansson…which shows what losers they are. Then it totally jumps the tracks at the end with a 'where the hell did THAT come from?' science-fiction ending.

1. Lady in the Water. M. Night Shyamalan's ego reaches Brian Billick proportions in this idiotically convoluted tale. I've made up better, more plausible stories after drinking 10 shots of tequila and a half case of beer.

Box Office Bombs of the Year

1. Poseidon. Net loss (domestic gross box office minus budget) - $99,500,000. The boat isn't the only thing that sunk

2. Flushed Away. Net loss - $82,000,000. What an appropriate title.

3. Miami Vice. Net loss - $71,500,000. Spend some of that $135M budget on a script writer next time, Michael Mann.

4. Basic Instinct 2. Net loss - $64,000,000. Wow…none of us saw THIS happening, did we?

5. All the King's Men. Net loss - $47,750,000. Wonder if Sean Penn had to hock his Oscar to help cover the costs of this stinker?

Winner of the Year: Leonardo DiCaprio. Formerly considered a light-weight by most critics

and fans, Little Leo grew up, and put his name on the top of the “A-List” with bravura performances in “The Departed” and “Blood Diamond”.

Loser of the Year: Hugh Jackman. It isn’t often that someone NOT named Nicolas Cage can appear in so many rotten movies in one year. “X-Men 3”, “The Prestige”, “The Fountain”, and the lead voice in “Flushed Away”. Someone needs to fire his agent, manager, or whoever it is that keeps giving him guidance on which roles to accept.

Guilty Pleasure of the Year: “Eight Below”. Paul Walker still can’t act, but the dogs make this movie impossible to dislike.

Over-rated Film of the Year: “Little Miss Sunshine”. Not a bad movie, and many great bits, but nowhere near the “masterpiece” many critics touted it to be.

Upon Further Review: What the hell was I thinking giving “Poseidon” and “Snakes On a Plane” 2½ footballs? Note to self: Don’t sniff glue before going to see rotten Summer ‘Blockbusters’. “Poseidon” deserved a one, and SOaP maybe a 1½, getting the extra half point just for Samuel L. Jackson’s classic line.

Have a Happy New Year, and see ya’ in the popcorn line next year!