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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: August 13, 2010 03:06 PM

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DVDs: A Prophet the Next Godfather? Yep, it's That Good

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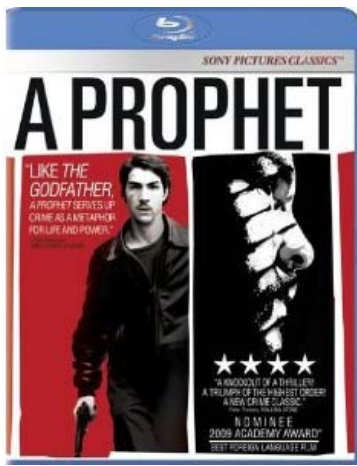
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It's been more than a year since I first saw *A Prophet* (\$38.96 BluRay or \$27.96 regular DVD; Sony Pictures Classics) at the Cannes Film Festival. Repeated viewings over a long period of time have only reinforced my first impression: This film is a masterpiece. Obviously, it won't have the same cultural impact as Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*. But it deserves the comparison. Both launched a very talented director (Jacques Audiard) into the stratosphere. Both featured star-making performances (Tahar Rahim). And both are nuanced, emotionally gripping, and above all, wildly entertaining.

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It's the story of a seemingly harmless young man sent to prison for some unknown crime. Within minutes, it seems, he's entered a horror zone where men attack and beat him with impunity. Soon, one of the strong men of the prison -- the Corsican leader Cesar (Niels Arestrup) -- is demanding our hero Malik (Rahim) kill another prisoner slated to testify in court. Malik is a mutt, of sorts, and can pass between many groups but is despised by all. The Muslims see him as Corsican, the Corsicans see him as a dirty Arab, the gypsies see him as weak, the guards don't see him at all and when he's beaten there is no one to help. Will Malik commit the murder? Will he become hardened and cruel or get eaten alive or somehow survive but maintain his humanity? That's the question that drives this engrossing and terrific film.

We know Malik is smart. He takes advantage of the prison school and learns how to read and write; he picks up Corsican just by listening to the men talk. And when he peeks into the Muslim prayer service, we wonder: Is Malik being drawn to faith or just trying to make inroads on another group that might be able to protect him? Co-writer and director Jacques Audiard has made some very good films this decade. *Read My Lips* was a fun thriller about a deaf woman partnering with her lover to pull off a crime. *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* was an unlikely remake of the cult film *Fingers* by James Toback that surpassed the original. But this film is a major leap forward. It's visually gripping, with shadowy passages interspersed throughout the film where all we see is a fuzzy glimpse of what is happening or might be happening soon. (Don't forget the title of the film is *A Prophet*.) And the score is sparsely used and very effective: At key moments, the theme overwhelms the action and transports Malik from a man going about his furtive business to a person taking charge of his destiny. You don't want to miss it.



KICK-ASS (\$39.99 BluRay; \$29.95 regular DVD; Lionsgate) -- What a loopy pleasure, highlighted by the unexpected casting of Brit Aaron Johnson as a nerdy would-be superhero and genuine discovery Chloe Grace Moretz who does indeed kick ass as the real deal. As the R rating makes clear, this is not for kiddies because the violence is real and shocking, a point driven home by having much of it instigated by a foul-mouthed little girl. Based on a comic book I haven't read, it features Johnson as a kid who wonders why no one has ever tried to be a caped crusader. His one venture becomes a YouTube sensation, which quickly makes him a target for real bad guys. Moretz is the daughter of Nicolas Cage (doing a wicked send-up of Adam West), a man obsessed with vengeance who has trained her to become a killing machine. It all has far more emotional heft than the costumes and goofy masks might indicate, though it's never so serious that the inherent nuttiness gets overshadowed. An oddball treat.

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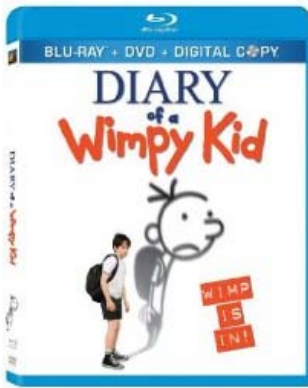
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DIARY OF A WIMPY KID (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.98 regular DVD; FOX) -- Unlike Kick-Ass, this is definitely fare for the kiddies... and no one else. Spun off from the graphic novels and quite faithful as our hero, Greg suffers through his taunting older brother (an amusing Devon Bostick from TV's DeGrassi: The Next Generation), a dorky best friend he abandons and then learns to value as one would expect and that dreaded piece of stinky cheese that lurks in the playground. Director Thor Freudenthal (what a name!) modestly hints at the movie's origins with a few brief scenes begun in an artificial background drawn in the style of Jeff Kinney's books). It's a shame he didn't push that even further since it's the only distinctive element in the movie. Otherwise, Zachary Gordon is fine as Greg, but the travails of a middle school kid follow such a familiar pattern it's hard to get caught up in them unless you're actually in middle school.



THE GHOST WRITER (\$40.99 BluRay and \$26.99 regular DVD; Summit) -- Ewan McGregor plays a ghostwriter who is hired to pen the memoirs of a Tony Blair-like former PM (Pierce Brosnan). Entering the hermetic world of this former world leader is a little like being placed under glass: McGregor soon runs out of oxygen and so can't think clearly as the PM's wife begins to flirt and details of an apparent suicide by an aide point more and more towards murder. McGregor is disillusioned! Shadowy forces are at work! If that sounds trite and dull, I've done my work. Roman Polanski's direction is competent but nothing more.



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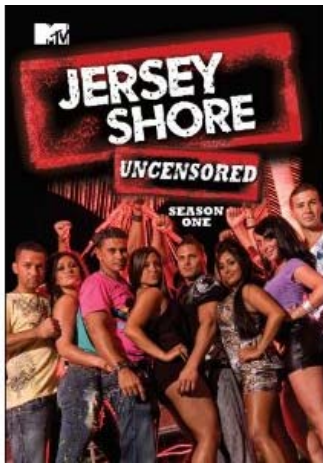
Death & Dying



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Katie Holmes



JERSEY SHORE UNCENSORED: SEASON ONE (\$19.99; Paramount) -- When President Barack Obama was on *The View*, he said he was aware that Lindsay Lohan had gone to jail but sheepishly admitted he had no clue who Snooki was. Hopefully someone on his staff has informed the President that Lohan is now out of jail and into rehab and then they placed this DVD set into his hands. The price is right but this sort of reality TV is utterly disposable: It's only worth discussing an hour or two after the show has aired. (And season two is proving just as popular as season one.) So the only reason for the DVD set is the extras: Here you get dating advice from *The Situation* along with other tips from Snooki, deleted scenes, some modest "uncensored" inclusions of curse words and derogatory gay terms and cast commentary, which amounts to witless stating of the obvious about their earlier witless actions. Not a fan, can you tell? But well-stocked with extras for those who care.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also available for free on iTunes. [Link to him on Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week.

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I am not sure I agree that Prophet will be the next GODFATHER ! I do agree that Kick-Ass is well "A Kick-Ass Movie" Diary of a Wimp Kid was a good family movie, sort of takes me back to "How To Eat Fried Worms" which my 5 1/2 and 4 year old love and have watched at least five times in the last year. <http://www.dvddealstop.com>

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**Dhampir** 12:01 AM on 8/18/2010

21 Fans

I just watched The Prophet, which I got from Netflix partly on the basis of this review, and partly because it's one of the higher rated new flicks of the type of flick I tend to like at Netflix. The next Godfather? Not even close. There's no comparison. I'll rate The Prophet 3 out of 5 stars at Netflix, which is the rating I give any movie that I consider good but no more than just good. It was too long (2 hours, 35 minutes), not nearly as violent as I anticipated (not even in the same ballpark as The Godfather and Scarface as far as criminal violence goes), and if I don't think I'd have missed out on anything if I hadn't seen it. The next Godfather, you've got to be kidding (or insane or really stoned).

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**HUFFPOST BLOGGER****Michael Giltz** 01:40 PM on 8/20/2010

59 Fans



Thanks for commenting. At least you didn't think it was a waste of your time. I don't throw comparisons around that lightly. I may be wrong, but I doubt I've compared another film to The Godfather since GoodFellas. So at least you know I'm wrong, but sincere.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**Dhampir** 02:58 PM on 8/20/2010

21 Fans

Hi Michael, It wasn't a waste of my time. I did see a parallel between the part of The Godfather Part II where Di Niro as the young Don Corleone rises to power and deals with the bullying, older Don Fanucci. The Prophet has grown on me since I saw it, BTW.

Also, I regretted my tone immediately after posting my first comment (but there's no way to edit or delete comments once posted and I didn't bother to preview it and think about what I wrote before posting) and I apologize to you for it. I mean that sincerely, and do know that you are sincere in your review. Thanks for replying to my kind of mean-spirited post!

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**aaaarrggg** 02:22 PM on 8/15/2010

13 Fans

Just a quick note; My wife read this review and went out and rented 'A Prophet'

As soon as the homosexual references (about 5 minutes in) started she turned it off.

I watched a little more after she went to sleep and thought the violence was a little too much...

If your into that stuff this might be for you, If not you will waste your dollar at the red box and your

time.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 10:32 AM on 8/16/2010
59 Fans



It's always a good idea to check out the ratings for a film and other descriptions to see if it's right for you. Movies I recommend to my mom I don't always recommend to my dad. Movies I recommend to my born again Christian friend who loves movies will sometimes come with the caveat "not for your wife." Like The Godfather, A Prophet is very violent. There is no sex in the film whatsoever -- unless you count the threat of rape -- either gay or straight, nor are there gay characters of any note. Your wife might like Toy Story 3 but not like the more coolly intellectual Inception (both among the best of the year). Scott Pilgrim Vs The World will surely appeal mostly to kids who grew up immersed in video games, etc. Glancing at my review again, I think I made clear this is a very violent film -- prison films usually are. But at the very least she deserves credit for being adventurous -- not everyone would even try to watch a French prison film. Hopefully she'll keep that spirit and just be a little more proactive in avoiding the movies with violence or themes she doesn't care for.

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aaaarrggg 10:51 AM on 8/17/2010

13 Fans

Thanks for the reply. She really did base her rental strictly on the headline of your article, not the content. The other two factors were the 'religious title' and the 4 stars on the advertisement for the film. She didn't even know it was a 'prison' film!

She turned it off as soon as the guy said he would give hash for a B J... I guess that's all the sexual content she could stand! (poor me:())

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Chaling 09:05 AM on 8/15/2010

49 Fans

I was fortunate enough to recently see big screen at the local indie house cinema both The Ghost Writer and A Prophet. The way movies are meant to be seen.

and will say, say what you want about Roman Polanski's legal issues, The Ghost Writer can only be defined as 'now THAT is movie making'. Very suspenseful and well-done. I walked out with the "Well, that was a rare treat" attitude. Don't get that from most movies nowadays.

Now A Prophet, enjoyed it immensely as well, but it is basically a violent prison movie that happens to involve an Arab youth in a French prison and not sure about The Godfather thing, I read the book and saw the movies, and quite frankly, did not think they were all that. Yeah, I know, historically they are supposed to be TheGreatest, but I did not get that feeling while watching them, in fact, possibly as a result of reading the book beforehand, I was extremely bored in the later movies.

but yes, A Prophet is highly recommended, agreed.

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mamacat 01:25 PM on 8/14/2010

562 Fans

Thanks for the info!!!! Will look for the movie.

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Rozanna 11:57 AM on 8/14/2010


159 Fans

Thanks for the recommendation. I'll check out A Prophet.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER



mommadona 11:23 PM on 8/13/2010
735 Fans 



No films for thinking adults, I see....

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TheBaffler 04:32 AM on 8/14/2010
261 Fans



Did you miss the review of The Prophet above?

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PelePele10 08:35 PM on 8/13/2010
70 Fans

Saw Audiard's 'A Prophet' in London and it was brilliant. A wonderful modern look at organized crime through the aggressive and divisive prison grounds of France. With immigration and hostility towards and amongst foreigners it was wonderful lens with which to view crime, punishment and the elusive grasp of redemption. This film along with the engaging 'I've Loved You for so Long' and Steve McQueen's 'Hunger' make for restoring the urgency of going to the movies and seeing film. I thought the cinema was dying an agonizing death of mediocrity and devoid of creative light until those films. Rich, engaging and with much to say. Also it breathed life into a genre that seems unable to update itself with anything other than flat lifeless imitations. Run to see 'A Prophet' - it was robbed of an Oscar win but it's surely a classic. Also Arestrup was soooo wickedly good. A true find.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER
ScreenName05 06:45 PM on 8/13/2010
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I actually thought the Godfather was a plague I was forced to endure not once but three times. Based on that I will wait until the Prophet comes out on TMC in 4 or 5 years.

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Gasparilla 09:51 AM on 8/15/2010
153 Fans



So you were forced to see all three Godfathers.

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sLegal 05:50 PM on 8/13/2010
228 Fans



I totally agree with you on 'A Prophet', its the best film I've seen in a while. Try to watch it in the best venue that you can. I just saw it 2 weeks ago at the NZ International Film Festival, such a good film, wow.

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Unrepentantliberal 04:58 PM on 8/13/2010
56 Fans

No, I like it that my President doesn't waste his valuable time finding out who Snooki is.

Honey, your fifteen minutes is up!

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pastgone 04:48 PM on 8/13/2010



244 Fans

All right: remember this name: Michael Glitz. Because if you pay cash money in any form to see "A Prophet", and you did so based on this article, you just got bamboozled. "A Prophet" is a somewhat decent film. In no way, no how, not any chance it's as good as this guy says it is. No way. Not even close. I'd give it a three out of five. And I'm being generous.

"The Godfather"? Please. That's so far-fetched it's actually scary.

Remember the name: Michael Glitz. You can't trust him. Trust me.

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TheBaffler 04:34 AM on 8/14/2010

261 Fans



He give reasons why he liked it; you give none for disliking it, and merely ask that we take your word for it. His argument is more persuasive, insofar as you don't even offer a counterargument.

I'll watch it and judge for myself.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 10:44 AM on 8/16/2010

59 Fans



I mean, consensus. See, I can't even type. Sorry you didn't enjoy the film more. What have been your favorites of the year so far?

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 10:43 AM on 8/16/2010

59 Fans



People definitely find reviewers whose tastes match their own and reviewers who don't. The recommendation of Roger Ebert appeals to some while David Denby of The New Yorker appeals to others. But you'll never agree with anyone 100% of the time so I hope you don't reject any one person just because of one review. Sometimes the most interesting discussions I have with movie friends is over the films we don't agree on. (The latest topic: Alfred Hitchcock's 3-D movie Dial M For Murder which I think is a bore.) What I tend to do with reviews is see what a broad group says: if a lot of different critics say good things about Inception, it's clearly worth checking out, even if I don't end up loving it. The fact that the Wall Street Journal said "Like The Godfather, A Prophet serves up crime as a metaphor for life and power" in a rave, that Rolling Stone gave it four stars and called it "a triumph of the highest order, a new crime classic," that the New York Times said it was "sensational" and that it was nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar doesn't mean I'm right and you're wrong. It just means that enough good outlets (not counting me) said this movie was great and worth your time checking out. <http://www.metacritic.com/movie/a-prophet/critic-reviews> Metacritic is good for checking out the consensus.

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