MOVIES

Hard to 'Snatch' meaning from Guy Ritchie's latest

BY VICTORIA DIAZ
SPECIAL WRITER

Call me the cockeyed optimist. After reviewing movies for some time now, you'd think I'd learn to take a film's pre-publicity with a bit of salt.

Still, when I read the advance word on Guy Ritchie's *Snatch*, labeling it a comedy, I was encouraged. As it happened, on the night I headed out to see the film, I was in the mood for something to make me laugh. Once the lights dimmed in the theater, I could hardly wait for the picture to start, as a matter of fact.

Silly me.

If burnings, hackings, cruelty to animals, shootings, beatings, and other such activities tickle your funny bone, then *Snatch* will probably crack you up. You'll probably laugh till you die, actually, since it is full-to-bursting, packed down, and running over with all the above. Otherwise, though scattered moments in this movie may be laughable, many moviegoers will find it about as funny as root canals minus Novocain.

As in Ritchie's debut flick, *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels*, the plot of *Snatch* is serpentine, to say the least. At its core lurks something about the heist of an 84-carat diamond. A shifty American (Dennis Farina) and some hoods disguised as rabbis go after it, then a jeweler pretending to be Jewish figures in, then some idiotic pawnshop owners thicken the morass, along with a boxing "syndicate," and a bunch of Irish gypsies known as "Pikeys." A dog augments the dizzying drama, and often possesses considerably more charm than many of his thuggish "superiors."

Brad Pitt

Stay with me here. Somewhere along the way, somebody rigs a bare-knuckles boxing match or two (or three, or four; you lose count), in which Irish gypsy pugilist Mick (Brad Pitt) is instructed to take a fall. Only he won't, because he's just not that kind of guy (or something) and, anyway, the syndicate burned a gypsy caravan in retribution with his sainted mother (Sorcha Cusack) inside it at the time, and Mick is determined that they will get theirs. In the meantime, the diamond has disappeared, and the morons who are after it are about to get theirs in various and sundry, vicious and bloody ways, too. At least, this is pretty much what seems to be happening. You need a scorecard to keep up, and besides that, American audiences may find much of the English Cockney and Irish gypsy dialogue nearly unintelligible.

On the plus side (and also as in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*) Ritchie displays a knockout penchant for cinematic style, and not just in an arresting array of visuals, editing tricks, cuts, freeze frames, slomo shots, and even the physical appearance of the cast. This is a writer/director who also understands the importance of sound effects in a film. By the time *Snatch* comes to its knockdown, drag-out finish, you may feel pummeled, simply by all the cleverly-placed noise this movie spews forth.

Ritchie also knows something about how to get good performances from his players. Some of those cast in *Snatch* have never acted before, but, in most cases, it's next to impossible to tell that without production notes. A standout is a hefty fellow named Ade, whose character repeatedly fails his task: driving a getaway car.

Dennis Farina as Avi, chief diamond thief, turns in his usual convincing job as a vaguely reptilian villain. And Benicio Del Toro in the role of Franky Four Fingers definitely makes his mark as a slimy sort you certainly wouldn't want to offend in a dark alley.

Watching Brad Pitt as the tortured and toughened Mick O'Neil, you learn something about movies: It's not necessary to know what an actor is saying all the time in order to know that he's walking away with the show. (Pitt always blends in subtly with the rest of the cast here, though). This ugly picture may be what has best showcased his talents so far, and gone farther than anything else to reveal that he's not just another pretty face.

'Double Take' not worth a second look

BY JON KATZ
SPECIAL WRITER

I'll be honest with you; I lost track of the plot about three minutes into *Double Take*. Sometimes, however, you just have to move over into the passenger seat and enjoy the ride, no matter how long and winding the road is.

Unfortunately, you'll have to overlook more than the senseless and ceaseless story twists to leave *Double Take* feeling happy you came along. What the writer found funny-ninety minutes of jive talking-pretty much went out with "Feets, do yo' stuff."

■ George Gallo also gave us 'Midnight Run' and '29th Street'. One can only wonder: what happened?

Based on *Across the Bridge*, a 1957 drama starring Rod Steiger, *Double Take* begins by implicating Daryl Chase, a Harvard-educated African-American New York City banker (Orlando Jones), in a money laundering scheme for a Mexican drug cartel. Wherever Daryl goes, Freddy shows. That's Freddy Tiffany (Eddie Griffin), proud graduate of HKU – Hard Knocks University.

On the street, in Daryl's office, at a fashion show – Freddy shows up everywhere, loud and manic, making Robin Williams look like he's in slow motion by comparison. But when Daryl has to grab a train to Mexico to clear his name and the FBI's closing in, Freddy's conveniently there to switch identities with him. All aboard and let the chase begin.

So who's really in on the conspiracy? Who's FBI, who's CIA, who's crooked and who's all of the above? You can try and follow along, but they don't hand out scorecards when they take your ticket.

As for the cast, Eddie Griffin's admittedly funny in a Damon Wayans-already-did-that sort of way. Best known for the TV series *Malcolm and Eddie*, his wise here wears thin quickly, too often coming perilously close to the offensive. Orlando Jones (*The Replacements*) has it easier; his cultured Daryl only has to pretend to be Freddy in short spurts.

Writer/director George Gallo also gave us *Midnight Run* and *29th Street*. One can only wonder: what happened?

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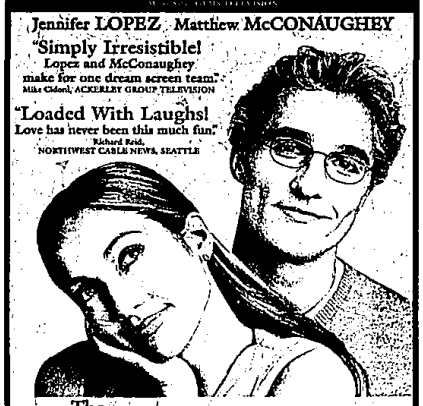

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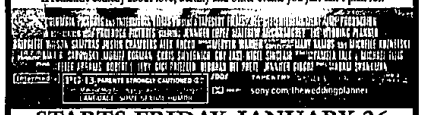

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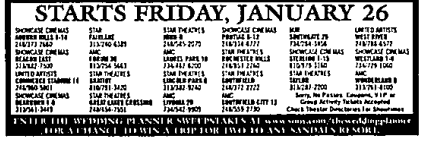

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