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GRAPHIC BY PETER KUPER

DEAD BANG

(Director: John Frankenheimer)

AND THE WINNER OF THE OSCAR FOR THE MOST MORONIC FILM TITLE OF THE YEAR GOES TO KILLER BASTARD MARSHMELLOWS FROM TOPEKA!!!... NO WAIT THERE'S BEEN A MISTAKE! IT'S ACTUALLY ... DEAD BANG! (WILD APPLAUSE)

Yes, Dead Bang. We had actually arrived at the plaza by mistake, thinking that another film was playing here. Having seen all the other fodder on offer and, being far too late for the North Side, our stupidity is rewarded with this single choice.

"It has Sonny in it!" - I enthuse to my partner who is now looking at the formula poster of Johnson - long coat flapping and firearms akimbo.

"Whoee!" - She exclaims with a deadpan face, "luckily I brought a change in underwear."

MEAT

But you know such circumstances can yield a pleasant surprise. Dead Bang (clears throat noisily) comes out a winner. Well, almost.

There's no argument from me when it is suggested that Don Johnson has charisma. He may be a grunty nerd that has been plonked into swell duds and a flash car or 'Slimy Lice', but there's always a magnetism that provides compelling viewing. I only wish he hadn't stopped smoking.

In Dead Bang, Johnson plays Gerry Peck, a down on his luck (Good Lord, what an innovative twist!) L.A. dick: the estranged wife has slapped a restraining order on him preventing him from seeing his kids, even though it's Xmas eve, and he lives in a dump so close to Burbank airport that passengers on 747s lean out of the windows and gob in his letterbox. But it's business as usual, and Peck is assigned to a double homicide involving the brutal murder of a black store clerk and a policeman. And so we trickle into the main story, which is that the perpetrator is very likely to be part of one of those vile aryan nation nest of vermin. The rest is pretty standard "good-whitey-and-the-blacks-shoot-up-the-redneck-scum."

Predictable, it is. Peck is the loner that has to deal with the pricks. Parole officers, megalomaniac psychiatrists and puritan FBI agents that are more interested in keeping language clean than the fact that Dorbon, Oklahoma, is home to militant racist tossers. But Johnson carries it off. Apart from a couple of ineffectual one-liners, Donald is entirely convincing as the haggard penniless cop with a heart of dirty gold. When he blows up in anger or casts incredulous stares with those wrinkly old feline peepers, you don't wonder whether your toenails need clipping. He's cold lampin' F'sho.

One thing which does nag at me is that Dead Bang is a guy's movie. Without sounding like one of those pseudo-liberal insect toadies with a degree in sociology that slobber for credibility all over the SWC, the only female character in the movie plays a decidedly dodgy role. It turns out that this gal and Don share a night of Xmas eve passion, only for the lady in question to sprint out of the door before Don has got time to pass the airline pilot his breakfast muffin through the kitchen window. Later he finds out that the woman is in fact the ex-wife of the dead cop. 'I wanted to try and get you to kill that man that killed Charlie' she says. This is the last we ever see of her, leaving us to wonder what on earth the directors were thinking of. Completely inappropriate and entirely stupid.

So why 'Dead Bang'? In the pick-up truck with the Black Sheriff (Tim Reid), Peck

spouts a little bit of homespun philosophy on the wretched nature of life. "All it is is Death and Taxes..." I scare everybody shitless by screaming "HERE IT IS! - he's going to use a phrase that includes 'Dead Bang!!!'. But no, we were right. The film's name is a bag of sensationalist wank. I think it was Pauline Kael that said that if 'Cry In The Dark' was called 'Dingoes Ate My Baby' it probably would have pulled in stacks more at the B.O. Perhaps a similar thing happened here.

"So what do we call it...?"
"Erm... The Oklahoma Incident?"

"No."
"Ebony and Ivory?!"
"No."

"Err... I know! DEAD BANG!"
"BRILLIANT! Have a cigar Henderson!"

But obvious macho flaws aside, it is an entertaining movie. Direction and cinematography are at least proficient were it not for irritatingly long fades between shots; supposed to indicate the shifting in the sands of time or a lingering period of thoughtfulness; but actually a bloody pain in the nuptials. Excellent casting by Lynn Stalmaster provides the film with REEBEL NASTY baddies and the score is reasonably suspenseful too (even if it does use that dink-dink-dink-dink type approach to get us on the edge of our seats.)

See it if only to marvel at the development of Don Johnson as an increasingly convincing character actor.

STEVE GRIFFITHS



"I DON'T CARE SHERIFF.... I'M NOT GOING IN THERE WITHOUT MY MEAT T-SHIRT - NO SIR." - EL Donno states the rules in Dead Bang

SO YOU DIDN'T GET AN OSCAR?

CASSANDRA CONTINUES HER MEAT SELF-HELP SERIES WITH SOME SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO GET YOUR HANDS ON A 'GROUCH'

This past Wednesday (March 29th, the birthday of Marina Sirtis... and I DID NOT even MENTION *** Trek: The **** Ge***ra**on), the Academy (Oscar) Awards were held. For those of you who didn't get nominated, here's a few helpful hints so that you don't have to miss the next round of awards shows. Oh, yes... Rain Man is an exception to EVERY rule!

FOR THE BEST ACTOR, ACTRESS, SUPPORTING ACTOR/ACTRESS CATEGORIES: Your very best bet is to star in a critically acclaimed movie. And do this repeatedly! Of course, you can't perform WELL. That's not RIGHT. You should grate on the public's nerves so well that it's totally impossible to appeal to them. (It helps to be rich and famous.) Example: Sigourney Weaver (I apologize).

BEST PICTURE, DIRECTOR, SCREENPLAY (Original or Adapted): Get Siskel, Ebert, Medved and all of those people on your side so that you may obtain CRITICAL ACCLAIM. Next, get big name people working on the movie. For example, I wrote a play at one point. Were I to adapt it into a movie, I would have to have worked on twelve smash hit films starring big name people and have it directed by somebody like the DeLaurentis family. Third, have no animated rabbits or futuristic ideas. Only dark, serious films with today as a setting ever win these awards, even though lovely, bright comedies are nominated.

CINEMATOGRAPHY, ART DESIGN, FILM EDITING: Anything set in the late twentieth century would do well to just do a lot of waving the camera all over the place and blow half a million on a spotlight. Every thing else (Star **** and War films, Willow, junk like that) can do what they damn well want. It's not like you're going to lose. You have a very fair chance in these categories, unless "Rain Man" is nominated.

MAKEUP, F/X, COSTUMES: If you are doing a major science fiction/fantasy film, you're best off giving up all hopes of a low-budget movie. Spend millions. If Mulroney can do it, SO CAN YOU. Go into debt and write it off your income tax. And have Industrial Light & Magic working for you. If you're doing a typical Rain Man-like movie, it honestly eludes me how you're going to win, my child.

ORIGINAL SCORE AND SONG: JUNK ALL THE POP ROCK. For heavens sakes, do you think "Dirty Dancing" is the ACADEMY's idea of a good soundtrack? (Me neither, but...) Classical all the way!!! And musicals don't count! Of course, you can have ONE song with words. Just make it VERY hokey.

FOREIGN FILMS: Be European or Soviet. Heavens, do you think CANADA stands a chance at being nominated? Bore your audience. (Although Canada can do this well, I wouldn't...) and DUB POORLY OR USE SUBTITLES, whatever you do!

DOCUMENTARY SHORT, DOCUMENTARY FILM: A dumb topic, a boring film, and lots of people running around speaking Outer Mongolian or something, wins awards. It's quite beautiful to not know what the hell is going on. Besides, nobody watches these things.

ANIMATED SHORT: The National Film Board of Canada will have a lot of fun with this one, but there's one problem: The short film has to be DESCENT. Shorts like "The Big Snit," surprisingly enough by the National Film Board, which have a lot of weird and funny jokes packed into 15 minutes, do quite well. Be wild. This is the only category you'll do well in.

Cassandra D.T. Carlisle