

'Bad Boys 3' in development says Martin Lawrence: Release date set for 2015

## Spoiler alert: it's all about the ending (Photos)



Courtesy Warner Bros.



Jim Dixon  
Capital District Movies Examiner  
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My colleague, **Amy Biancolli** of the Albany Times Union recently wrote a piece about the struggle of movies to find the perfect ending. She got me thinking about the subject, and struggle suddenly seems like an understatement. How many movies have you seen with truly memorable endings? When you think about it, precious few.

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I've heard more than one writer, screenwriters in particular, liken the climax of a movie to the climax of sex. That's what it's all about. Getting there, in this school of thought, is only half the fun.

By the way, since we are talking about

ENDINGS here, we aren't going to warn you every time there's a spoiler. That's it. You've been warned.

Action movies, interestingly, don't generally have the most memorable endings. Action finales are common in many movies, but seldom manage to be memorable. Fred Zinneman's "High Noon" did, especially with the twist that that Gary Cooper's Quaker bride, Grace Kelly, has to shoot the last bad guy. That twist has been imitated many times, never with the same impact. "Robocop" had a distinctive ending, largely because of single line of dialogue, "You're fired," which gave the cyborg hero an instant comeback from defeat.

The late novelist Graham Greene said that endings should extract surprise from the inevitable, which sounds fatalistic, but perhaps he had a point. The twist ending, in particular, should not come out of nowhere. Once we've seen it, we should feel that it couldn't have come out any other way, despite the fact we didn't see it coming.

M. Knight Shyamalan's "The Sixth Sense" is a case in point. The whole point of the movie is that Bruce Willis is dead, has been since the prologue, and is just the last one to know. OF COURSE, we all exclaimed, slapping our foreheads. The kid "sees dead people." Has anyone else interacted with our hero since the movie started? It's brilliant. Until you try to sit through it a second time once you're in on the gag.

To a lesser degree, Bryan Singer's wonderful "The Usual Suspects" does the same sort of thing. This gorgeous take on film noir all leads up to the apparent revelation that Roger "Verbal" Kint (Kevin Spacey) has been the legendary gangster Keyser Söze all along. And like "The Sixth Sense," repeat viewings are likely to be less engrossing.

This is not a problem with two seventies horror classics, "The Exorcist" and "Halloween." The two have little in common on the surface, other than their intent to scare the pants off you. "The Exorcist" was a big-budget studio picture based on a major bestseller, and from the get-go a supernatural thriller. "Halloween" was a very low-budget indie from a nearly unknown young writer/director, and like "Psycho," rooted in the real world.

In "The Exorcist," Jason Miller plays Father Karras, a Jesuit priest who's lost his faith, but who attempts the ancient Catholic Rite of Exorcism on a young girl (Linda Blair) who is supposedly

possessed by a demon. When the experienced exorcist assisting him (Max Von Sydow) dies of a heart attack during the rite, Karras loses his composure and dares the demon to come into him. Karras suddenly shows signs of being possessed himself, but before he can harm the little girl, he hurls himself out the window.

Unlike many subsequent exorcism-themed movies, most of which are “Exorcist” wannabes at best, in “The Exorcist” the underlying struggle is for the soul of the troubled priest, and not the little girl. And ironically, it is in committing suicide, a mortal sin in Catholic canon, that the priest saves the child’s life. “The Exorcist” is attempting, and accomplishing, more than just a shocker, although it accomplishes shocks in spades. Filmed with by William Friedkin (“The French Connection”) with a startlingly realistic approach, this is a movie about the eternal struggle between good and evil, and the often high cost of discipleship.

“Halloween” is pretty much just a shocker, but an extremely effective one. And while “The Exorcist” took the fantastic and filmed it with a documentary-like verisimilitude, John Carpenter gave the simple knife-wielding maniac of “Halloween” supernatural overtones. When Donald Pleasance’s Dr. Sam Loomis (the name is lifted from Hitchcock’s “Psycho”) finally shoots Michael Myers out the window, Jamie Lee Curtis sobs “It was the boogeyman,” echoing the fears of the two young children she’s been babysitting.

Loomis is not comforting. “As a matter of fact, it was,” he intones, right before he finds that Myers’ body has already disappeared.

The endings of both movies leave you limp. Alfred Hitchcock, the master of suspense, did not always achieve this. Amy Biancolli admires the ending of “Vertigo” more than I do. “Recall those last deadly moments in Hitchcock’s ‘Vertigo,’” she writes, “which perfectly suit the psycho-twisted nastiness of the film as a whole.”

To me the ending just seems a forced contrivance to suit Hitchcock’s determination to avoid a happy ending. Compare it with the perfectly crafted climax of the auteur’s “Rear Window,” in which the wheelchair bound Jimmy Stewart’s photographer is able to slow murderer Raymond Burr’s attack with his flashbulbs long enough to attract attention. This is followed by a short but delicious denouement in which we find that Stewart’s recuperation from a broken leg is being complicated by recuperation from a second one, perhaps penance for being a peeping Tom, but now he’s being nurse-maided by girlfriend Grace Kelly, who may not be adopting his

outdoorsy lifestyle as much he thinks.

It is perhaps “**The Birds**,” Hitchcock’s last great film, that ends with the master’s most disturbing climax. “The Birds” is cloaked in mystery and a hint of the supernatural from the very first. Unlike “Psycho,” which ends with a nearly mind-numbing expository denouement after a riveting climactic confrontation, we never know why the birds are attacking. And “The Birds” ends on an ambiguous note. Our small band of survivors is apparently to going to make good their getaway from the isolated house, but what awaits them, and humanity itself, down the road - literally?

YNN film critic Jackson Murphy, aka “Lights Camera Jackson,” agrees. “I watched the DVD extras and learned that there was an alternate, extended ending to ‘The Birds,’” he says. “This scene was the continuation of the car leaving the house full of the nasty birds. While it’s good, I can see why Hitchcock decided not to use it, because it’s more of a typical Hollywood ending. I credit Hitchcock for going with something different and making it one of the most iconic final scenes in film history, and one that we still remember and discuss 50 years later.”

But it is with “Notorious,” a dark espionage-themed romance with Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman, that Hitchcock had his most audacious ending. Grant just goes into the bad guy Claude Rains’ house and leaves him to face the wrath of his colleagues. “Sorry fellas, I’ll just be walking her out of here, now. Toodles.” No gunfights. No car chases. No explosions. Minimalism indeed.

Bergman and Rains had been featured together before, in “Casablanca” a romance which at times briefly masquerades as a noirish thriller. “Casablanca” has many of the most-quoted lines in Hollywood history, and boasts one of the deservedly most memorable endings of any movie, though ironically no one making it knew how the film’s central romantic triangle would play out. Thank God they opted not to leave Bogart and Bergman together. We would have been deprived of Bogart’s greatest on-screen dialogue:

“Ilsa, I’m no good at being noble, but it doesn’t take much to see that the problems of three little people don’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you’ll understand that. Now, now. Here’s looking at you, kid.”

Woody Allen has made it clear how much he loves “Casablanca.” His play, “Play It Again,

Sam,” made into one of the few Woody Allen movies not directed by Woody Allen, is an open love letter to Bogart, and Allen gives himself some of Bogart’s lines from the end of “Casablanca” when he says goodbye to Diane Keaton. “Annie Hall” perhaps provides the bittersweet epilogue, as the amicable ex-lovers meet by chance, share an impromptu coffee but again go their separate ways.

Proof positive: Endings don’t have to be happy to be good.

What are your favorite, or least favorite, movie endings?