

BY DUNCAN H. BROWN

MOVIE REVIEW

Inside Man starring Denzel Washington, Willem Dafoe & Jodie Foster. Directed by Spike Lee.

Inside Man is a riveting thriller wrapped around a bank robbery. There are guns, and hostages, and police SWAT teams with deadly-looking weapons who scuttle around ready to "take someone down." It's unexpected thoughtful element asks you to look beyond the seemingly dire and terrible immediate situation.

Denzel Washington is a hostage negotiator in New York City. He's got a bank full of hostages, so he thinks his job is clear. Talk with the baddies, get concessions, don't get anyone killed, and eventually get the robbers to surrender. The film goes through the motions of bank robbery movies: cops seal off the streets, a mobile command center is set up, and the robbers make requests for food and demands for a bus and an airplane.

Everything should be clear-cut for Washington. But things aren't what they seem; Washington starts to suspect that he doesn't really understand what's going on. That's when a hostage negotiator loses control, and can no longer do his job.

Washington is convincing as the detective who's having a very bad day, which looks to get worse and worse the longer the hostage situation continues. Willem Dafoe is always fun to watch; in this case he's head of the SWAT response team. For him, the only good bank robber is a dead bank robber. It bugs him that his men can't just go in with guns blazing. But he understands (albeit reluctantly) that there's the small matter of the hostages.

Curiously, this is a thinking-man's bank robbery movie. It works on several levels: caper film, police procedural,

political commentary, and mystery. I also detected homages to *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Quick Change*, which is an interesting mix.

Jodie Foster is a delight as a sort of fixer. (If you're Osama Bin Laden's nephew, you come to her to buy a condo overlooking Central Park.) She's brought into the robbery situation, and her steely menace and obvious competence are a marked contrast with some of her other roles in which she plays a sensitive, caring person. She's such a good actress that she pulls it off. She doesn't waste a moment of her screen time.

Spike Lee has made an entertaining movie: it's fun to watch, and in spite of the seeming context of guns and robbers, somewhat lacking the violence we've come to expect in this sort of film. I'd recommend it for anyone who enjoys action films, and even for some who don't. It's more of a thriller, actually—lots of suspense, unanswered questions, and a ticking bomb of a plot that you want to see through to its (explosive?) conclusion. (Note: this movie might be too intense for younger children.)

New and Notable on DVD:

New: Event Horizon One of the few films that I'm sorry I paid to see. It seems like it's Science Fiction, but it's really a horror movie. (It's the kind of horror movie where we're all doomed and evil pretty much wins.)

My favorite movie: **The Seven Samurai**

A thrilling film by director Akira Kurosawa about a poor Japanese village that hires seven samurai to defend them against rampaging bandits. Visually