

Inside Man. Directed by Spike Lee (don't think his real name is "Spike," but something awful and Innercity; my name, for instance, isn't really Lance). Starring Denzel Washington, Clive Owen, Jodie Foster, Christopher Plummer, some other guys.

Question: What's ice cold, white, bright, and oily at the same time? If you said Prince William Sound on the sunny morning after an Exxon spill, that's how much you know. Answer is: Jodie Foster. And about how I always imagined her: hair pulled back, tight skirt (at what? ...fifty? *beaux restes* (French for "still got a butt would stop a clock"), high heels, Cos Cob™ jumper, annnnnnd... the soul of a lug wrench. You'd have more fun with the lug wrench at the prom, too. But, she's great at it! And that's only *one* of the several perfections of this glossy puzzle flick, which hangs mostly on plot (as drama should according to Aristotle... or one of them) and hardly on explosive characterization... or even explosive detonation. Nobody gets killt (Aw, rats... didn't mean to ruin it for you. Okay... somebody gets killt. Happy now?).

Spike Lee has made mostly instructive flicks up till now (instruct us dumbos about Pharisees about poverty, racism, sexism, did I say racism? ...exclusion, hypocrisy, the 'hood, and on and on) and mostly boring, that is: *well-received* by overweight, I-know-better-you critics out there in Cineemahland. As we know, alas, instruction is not entertainment. And vice versa. Wanna nail down the difference? Ask any college graduate since 1968 something (anything) about art, history, literature, science, mathematics. Want a real immersion in reality? Ask a science major graduate something about art, history, literature or a major in art, history, literature something about science, mathematics. *Beati pauperes spiritu*. Anyhow. Think Spike mighta got it right this time, though. He's clearly spent his years of "instructing" learning, too: about light, about story-telling, about humor, and about that dark precinct called Innercity ...not as theater for societal agony but as *amphitheater* for alltoohuman *agon* (a lot like "agony" except, you know, literarier). This film is a delight... and not (sorry to ruin it for you) without its (lightly) instructive moments into the bargain.

Goes like this. Underthegun burnout Keith Frasier (Washington, his deadpan delivery for once appropriate as a deadon competent detective, reduced to the pariah status of "negotiator," beaten in but still stubbornly decent and tenacious once engaged in the mystery of a human being's behavior) gets woken up one sunny morning in the absence of the senior in his department and deployed to the scene of what looks at first like a failed bank heist. Dalton Russell (three-day-bearded Clive Owen, apparently an Iv—or—ry League burnout, reduced to the pariah status of hustler and now thief, beaten in but still stubbornly decent and tenacious once engaged in the mystery of a human being's behavior) announces to us in the first clip of this film that a feller can be "confined to a small space but not in prison" and that we need to watch closely what's happening. We have to because the guys supposed to (cops, for instance) are operating by their tactical template and seem to watch that rather than the action before their eyes. Swat cop Darius—Classics majors (pre-1968, of course) will remember that the Persian king Darius once forgot to watch the Hellespont and fell the flock in it with half his *satraps* (or his *parasangs*... Hey! ...same thing.). You can look that one up, too!—played by Willem Dafoe with the dispassionate indifference of a guy who's done it

before waits for this one to fall into a pattern familiar to him but knows in the end he or someone like him is gonna have to bust through that door into smoke and darkness and gunfire from some cornered, doomed, psychopath while the rest of the Emerald City goes about its business “filching lucre and gulping warm beer,” as Conrad (or one of them) has it. Well, Russell’s heist goes bad (or maybe doesn’t) and there’s a standoff. Burgeoning awareness on the part of Russell and Frasier that the other guy is smarter than he looks. Burgeoning awareness on our part that the mayor (some guy), the banker (Christopher Plummer), and the fixer (Jodie Foster) are up to no good and that virtue such as it is resides down at the foot of the ladder, split between the cops and the robbers, ironically.

What’s the darkest secret a man can harbor in this age? She’s my sister. She’s my daughter. She’s my sister *and* my daughter. That’s what outcast director Roman Polanski thought in *Chinatown*. Here’s the next darkest... coffered in that safe deposit box. The brightest secret, on the other hand, is the musical score to this thing. Check out cut #27 on the CD of *Inside Man*: Chaiyya Chaiyya Bollywood Joint.