ON THE SCREEN

Screen, from Page 8

The latest film in a long line of testosterone-dominated action flicks has a lot more going for it than its plot. It's a movie of moments, whether the scenes marvel at the physical prowess of its stars or are filled with crackling dialogue and a sense of purpose (i.e., Jackson's hit-man character seduces Sylvester Stallone's hero). The Specialist is another example of the genre's ability to combine action and emotion, making it a must-see for fans of the genre.

**** Pulp Fiction
Winner of the Palm d’Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival, this movie combines standard plots of hit men, junkies, and criminals, with an amazing facility with storytelling. The story consists of three principle stories: first, the daily experiences of two hit men (John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson); second, Travolta's character involved with his gangster boss's wife (Uma Thurman) as an escort; and third, the plans of a boxer, who has been paid off to take a dive in the ring, instead choosing to win the fight and take off with the money and his girlfriend. Although these film noir concepts may seem a bit clichéd, writer-director Quentin Tarantino infuses his characters with crackling dialogue and a sense of purpose (i.e., Jackson's hit-man character quoting bible verses as a prelude to execution). Tarantino's career may still be young, but his latest film confirms his mission to shake up the current course of cinema. - Rob Marcus, Loomis Cheri.

**** Quiz Show
The quiz-show scandals of the 1950s forced America to probe the changing face of morality. Robert Redford directs this fresh look at television and honesty in an age of illusions and image-making. Excellent performances by Ralph Fiennes and John Turturro, as quiz-show-contestants Charles Van Doren and Herbert Stempel, make this reality-based drama worth the contemplation and dissection of ethical issues amid the phoniness of television. - Craig K. Chang, Loomis Cheri.

**** The Shawshank Redemption
This extraordinary movie about hope, friendship, and renewal in the face of suffering in life is much more heartfelt than its title suggests. Tim Robbins embodies the classic protagonist in Andy Dufresne, a banker who is imprisoned for two murders he swears he did not commit, and he is forced to face the abrasive reality of prison life. He eventually comes out of his shell and cultivates a friendship with Red (Morgan Freeman), whose connections inside the prison provide a neat counterpoint to Andy's own talents as a financial planner, which he eventually exploits to get on the good side of the prison guards. Through all of Andy's suffering in prison, he never loses the hope of being free, and this carries both Andy and Red through the tough moments. This film transcends its short-story basis (originally written by Stephen King) with excellent performances and artful direction — it has "Oscar" written all over it. - John Jacob, Loomis Cheri.

**** Schindler's List
Director Steven Spielberg triumphs in this historical drama about Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), a German businessman, who only cares about money to one who only cares about saving lives. Ben Kingsley perfectly plays the fatale May Munro, who seduces Sylvester Stallone's character in the sensual thriller, The Specialist.

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