Entourage and *Spy*: Celebrity, wealth and the CIA—Hollywood's idea of summer fun

Joanne Laurier
19 June 2015

Entourage, *directed and written by Doug Ellin*; Spy, *directed and written by Paul Feig*

Once upon a time Hollywood could make funny, entertaining movies (and still does, very occasionally). Because comedy (like tragedy) has something to do with life, believe it or not, the most memorable of those earlier films directed their humor against the rich and powerful, or at least the stuck-up and pompous: Chaplin, Keaton, W.C. Fields, the Marx Brothers and more.

The most pointed comic works had a certain logic and cohesiveness to them that sprang from a protest on behalf of the population against the way life was organized. Genuine comedy in art and film tends to punch upward.

Is such a phenomenon imaginable in the present-day American film industry, which so thoroughly identifies with the wealthy and powerful, with the military and the police?

The staggering amounts of money and the accompanying, unprecedented conformism today squeeze the life out of the great majority of Hollywood's products. It stands to reason that the superficial, complacent writer or director or producer who follows the path of least resistance is unlikely to generate much in the way of genuine and prolonged laughter. With careers, entire studios and hundreds of millions of dollars (or more) at stake, why should anyone expect much liveliness or spontaneity from this quarter?

Two new alleged comedies, *Entourage* and *Spy*, are proof—for anyone who needs it—that filmmakers who take for granted the present unreal American political situation and that society's widely discredited institutions are incapable of getting (and do not deserve) more than a polite chuckle now and then from us.

The first-named movie preoccupies itself with the backward and self-absorbed Hollywood universe and the second with the Central Intelligence Agency, one of the most murderous and criminal enterprises on the planet. Neither Doug Ellin (*Entourage*) nor Paul Feig (*Spy*) thinks to questions his respective milieu or social setting. While writer-directors in their right mind could make—and a few have made—scathing satires about the cult of celebrity, what filmmaker with any serious thoughts in his or her head would embark on a comedy about the blood-soaked CIA?

Entourage

Based on the long-running HBO television series (2004-11), *Entourage* revolves around film superstar Vincent Chase (Adrian Grenier) and his immediate entourage, played by Kevin Connolly, Kevin Dillon and Jerry Ferrara, all loyal buddies hailing from Queens, New York, now "living the life" in Los Angeles.

That "life" consists of non-stop parties and non-stop carrying on with an inexhaustible supply of bikini-clad women. The raunchy activities form the core of a threadbare plot. Vincent's former agent Ari Gold (Jeremy Piven), a man with extreme anger management issues and who now runs a film studio, wants Vincent to star in a movie. The actor agrees on condition that he direct the project.

Complications arise when the movie's financial backer, a Texas investor (Billy Bob Thornton), and his ineffectual son (Haley Joel Osment) weigh in when approached by Gold for additional funds, threatening the careers of Gold, Vincent and his parasitical cohorts, one of whom is now a tequila mogul.

The movie is studded with meaningless cameo performances (the cinematic equivalent of name-dropping) by, among others, billionaire Warren Buffett, Olympic diver Greg Louganis, Jessica Alba, Gary Busey,

© World Socialist Web Site

New England Patriots Tom Brady and Rob Gronkowski, Kelsey Grammer, Armie Hammer, Green Bay Packer Clay Matthews, Liam Neeson, Ed O'Neill, David Spade, Andrew Dice Clay, David Arquette, Seattle Seahawk Russell Wilson and the movie's co-producer, actor Mark Wahlberg, to name a few.

According to the movie's production notes, the filmmakers spent two nights with 26 SWAT Team members for the filming of Vincent's directorial debut—a movie within the movie.

Ellin's *Entourage* is vulgar and appallingly unfunny. It does show something of the entertainment industry, but not in the form of a critique or satire. It is an homage to a self-absorbed and cultureless crowd, whose empty lives represent something of their own punishment.

Lest we be thought to exaggerate, the opening paragraphs of the production notes for *Entourage* provide something of the tone and attitude of the film: "Ever cruise Sunset Boulevard in a stretch limousine, and then hit the red carpet at a star-studded movie premiere? Stop by an impromptu party on the beach in Malibu, where the sun always shines and the cocktails flow? Score the best table at the hottest restaurant in town, no reservation required? And all the while, everywhere you go, gorgeous starlets wave as you pass by.

"It's everybody's fantasy to live the Hollywood dream, but Vince, Eric, Drama, Turtle and Ari Gold really do, and they make it all look so easy. Boy, do the boys of 'Entourage' know how to do it up and do it right, how to dream large—and live larger. …"

Doug Ellin took on the job of bringing this "enviable lifestyle of access and excess to the big screen." Unhappily, Ellin does not give the impression of having a single important thought. The same production notes cite his apparently boastful comment that his new film is "*Entourage* [the television series] on steroids." He further explains that the "goal of *Entourage* is and has always been wish fulfillment, the ultimate fantasy. No matter where you are in the world, say you're sitting somewhere in the freezing cold, you can go to the theater and look at what's happening on the screen and say, 'Wow, I really want to go there.' It's good friends living the good life, and there's nothing better than that."

This is pretty miserable, encouraging those "unfortunate" enough not to have access to Malibu, red carpets or starlets to live vicariously through the antics of these nonentities, and generally promoting the worst sort of celebrity worship.

Spy

Susan Cooper (Melissa McCarthy), a desk-bound CIA analyst, is the technological eyes and ears of suave field agent Bradley Fine (Jude Law). Fine is on a mission to Bulgaria in search of a nuclear bomb in the hands of a Bulgarian master criminal and his daughter, Rayna Boyanov (Rose Byrne). When it appears that Fine has been bumped off, Susan convinces her boss (Allison Janney) to allow her to leave the confines of headquarters (bat-infested at the moment) and embark on the glamorous and exciting life of secret spydom.

Like mild-mannered Clark Kent's transformation into Superman, the timid agent becomes an unstoppable super snoop. And despite continually crossing swords with rogue CIA agent Rick Ford (Jason Statham), Susan saves Paris from terrorists, and the world from the Bulgarian mafia.

Although it boasts a number of talented performers, *Spy* is essentially a potty-mouthed and sophomoric work, whose frenzied "action" attempts to cover up a one-note plot. And what would a pro-CIA movie be without an anti-Russian theme (disguised here as anti-Bulgarian) and a vague endorsement of the "global war on terror"?

Director Feig, who has already made one comedy that involves the inner workings of the police and FBI (*The Heat*) and another one of whose lead characters is a cop (*Bridesmaids*), centers his latest work on Murder, Inc., the CIA. One does not have the sense that Feig particularly intends to celebrate the intelligence services or the police, but rather that for a member of the insulated American upper middle class at this moment in history, these forces and agencies form part of the "normal" and unobjectionable fabric of life, both foreign and domestic.

Does it occur to Feig—or anyone involved in the making of *Spy*—that not everyone dotes on the forces of law and order nor finds their operations as endlessly fascinating as he apparently does? Presumably not.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site