

The movies that split people down the middle, put in the **Empire** dock...



PROSECUTION: KAT BROWN

MEMBERS OF THE JURY: THE

film in the dock is good-looking and well-edited, but as shallow as a paddling pool. It's been getting high off its own supply for years, and it's up to you to send it to movie rehab.

When *Requiem* was released in the States as an unrated title, annoyed fans clamoured for it to be required viewing in schools. I put it to you that this would be as grievous an insult to teenage intellect as teaching Shakespeare with the "forsooths" taken out. *Requiem* is stylish and stunningly packaged, but has all the soul of an empty bin. Far from being an educational warning, it's an endurance test: a precursor to modern gorenography and the cinematic equivalent of a crap tattoo. Aronofsky clearly wants it to be a strong depiction of how drugs fuck you up, but it's only Ellen Burstyn as Leto's speed-addled mother who's allowed to go the full nine yards to ugly town.

The rest is a Calvin Klein ad of muttery voices and exquisite bone structure, 'heroin chic' without a trace of irony (Exhibit A). The

"HIGH THEATRICALS TEETER ON THE ABSURD... THE SHOCK VALUE DOESN'T SUSTAIN IT."

beautiful people might lose an arm and wind up double-ending a hooker in front of a baying crowd, but they'll finish their stories looking hot, unlike poor old prematurely written-off Mom whose quest to look nice for television is punished by ending crazily in a hospital.

It's also a cacophony of hammy acting. Oscar-nominated Burstyn acts everyone off the screen, but in the absence of a grounded plot or developed characters it's the tinny, theatrical hysteria of Joey Tribbiani melodrama, with the added downer

of a *possessed fridge* laughably undermining Burstyn's valiant attempts to inject some depth into proceedings (Exhibit B). By the time the cast reach their demises there's no emotional wrench: they're just hysterics finally running out of breath.

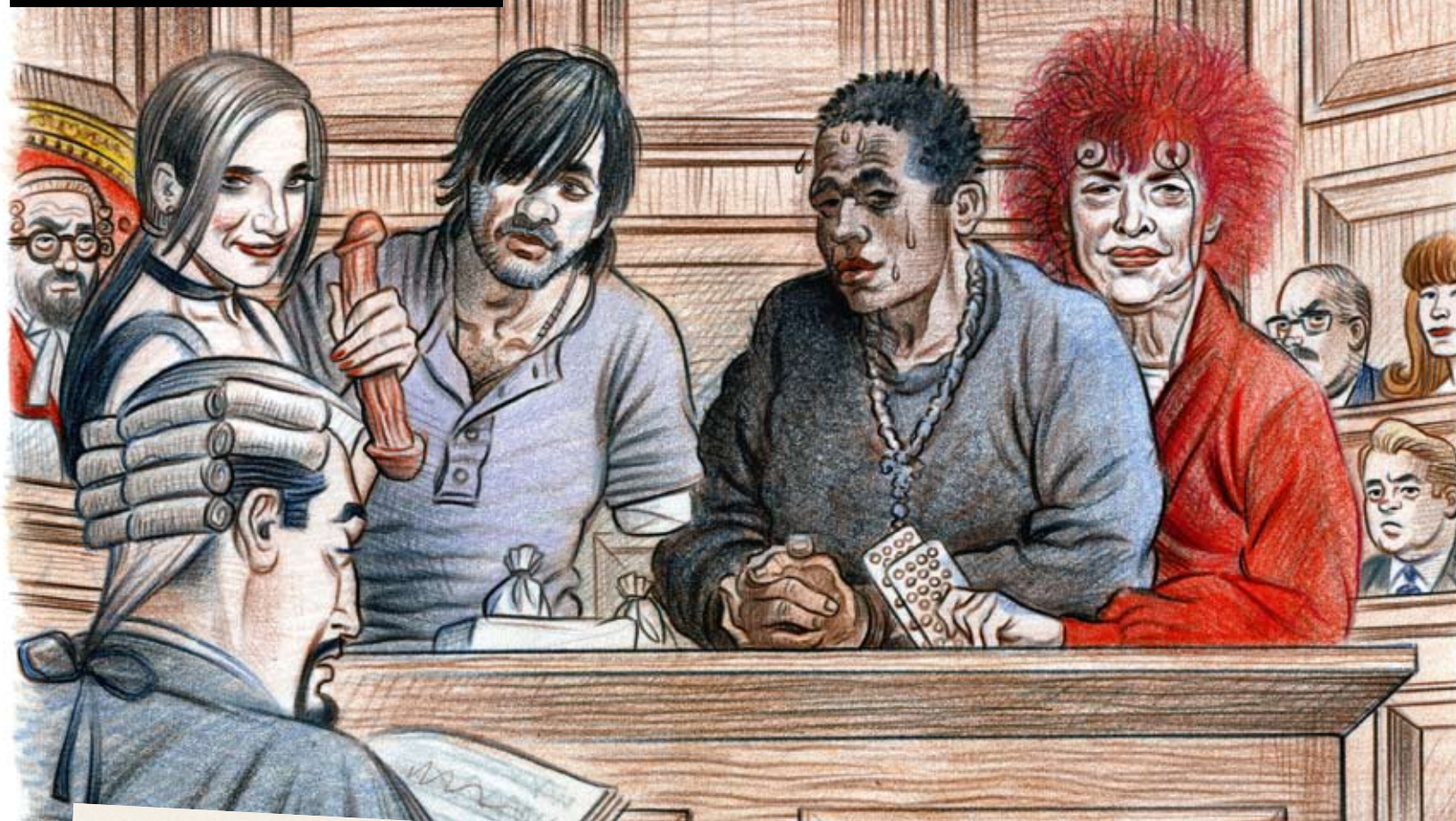
Rather than invest in Jennifer Connelly and Jared Leto, Aronofsky treats them as beautiful lab rats without humanity or audience sympathy (Exhibit C). Connelly in particular is saddled with a character so vacuous you can almost see through her (and of course there's *that* scene), which might as well beg the question, what attracted you to the traditionally award-winning character of drug-addled sex hottie?

With high theatrics always teetering on the absurd, the pervasiveness of this lightheaded thesping makes the final montage faintly ridiculous rather than just horrifying (Exhibit D). The shock value of the first viewing isn't enough to sustain it a second time round. Ironically the only cast-member to come out unscathed is White Chicks' Marlon Wayans who, in the 'best friend' role, was

presumably ignored just about enough to be able to get some grip on his character.

It's fitting that its legacy is also its requiem; Clint Mansell's epic soundtrack which has gone on to attain *Crimson Dawn* levels of success. If you want to put teenagers off heroin, give them *Trainspotting*. If you want to give yourself a high five for cinematic endurance, watch *Requiem* then put it in a cupboard and forget about it. Think of it as a drug-addled model, but for once, don't let it get off. Convict!

THIS MONTH: REQUIEM FOR A DREAM



EVIDENCE

Exhibit A

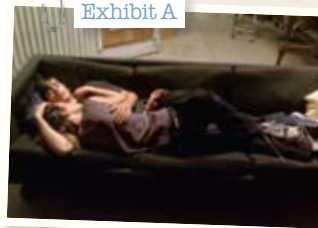


Exhibit C — "While director Aronofsky pistol-whips your attention with his style, the characters (mostly relegated to human mannequins in Aronofsky's visual schemes) suffer big time." Desson Thomson, *Washington Post*

Exhibit B

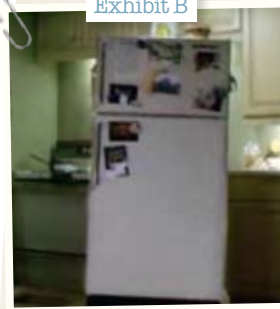


Exhibit D — "The end result is incredibly depressing, not just because of the subject matter but due to the relentless predictability. You will want to look away, you may want to laugh." William Thomas, *Empire*

EVIDENCE

Exhibit C

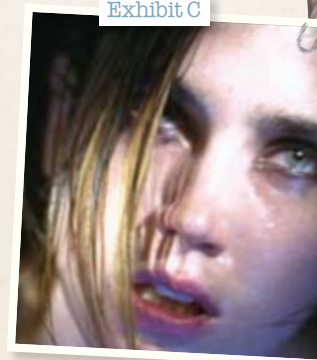


Exhibit A — "Aronofsky brings a new urgency to the drug movie by trying to reproduce, through his subjective camera, how his characters feel, or want to feel, or fear to feel." Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*

Exhibit B



Exhibit D — "Raw and riveting... No-one interested in the power and magic of movies should miss it." Peter Travers, *Rolling Stone*



DEFENCE: DAVID HUGHES

MEMBERS OF THE JURY, AFTER hearing the evidence

for the prosecution I can only suggest that m'learned friend must have been on medication of some sort to have viewed Darren Aronofsky's magnificent cine-rendering of Hubert Selby Jr.'s searingly powerful novella of addiction and despair with such profound, confounding philistinism. I would venture that she may look back on her words and wonder, in the manner of a reformed addict, "What the hell was I thinking?"

Aronofsky's second film, made at the tender age of 29, achieved exactly what it set out to do: to create a cinematic equivalent of Selby Jr.'s raw, scalpel-sharp writing, eschewing the traditional drug movie's objective, 'tut-tut' view of substance abuse by plunging the

Connelly) underwater primal scream (Exhibit B).

So much for the tour de force direction; what of the acting? The prosecution grudgingly acknowledges that Ellen Burstyn's extraordinary performance, as the woman who goes from telly addict to speed freak, earned her a Best Actress Oscar nomination (only to be beaten by, ahem, Julia Roberts). But Jared Leto and Jennifer Connelly are equally compelling as the handsome lovers for whom addiction to each other is not enough. The death of their dreams as the drugs take hold has a profound sadness which would not be possible if Leto and Connelly were, as the prosecution sniffily suggests, refugees from a 'heroin chic'-era Calvin Klein ad (Exhibit C). There's nothing aspirational about these stick-thin, snotty sacks of skin and bone; if anything, their

"AN ACHINGLY HUMAN PORTRAYAL OF ADDICTION THAT WILL NEVER LET GO."

audience into the centre of the maelstrom. Using multiple lenses, stops and stocks, jittery editing, disorientating jump cuts, split screens, special effects and variable speeds (super-fast for the all-too-brief highs, slurred-speech slow for the lows), not to mention Clint Mansell's omnipresent, trippy score, *Requiem* sticks a needle in the audience's eyeball — don't just watch me, it seems to say; feel me (Exhibit A). Like Selby Jr. (who makes a well-judged cameo as a brutal prison guard), Aronofsky wants to give us the straight dope on addiction, whether it's heroin or diet pills — dealer or doctor, it's all drug peddling. As faithful as the film is to the source text, however, the film is the writer-director's own: look at the doctor's disregard for his patient as he manages an entire scene without looking his patient in the eye. Or the crushing hopelessness of Marion's (Jennifer

physical and psychological disintegration is rendered all the more devastating because of the beauty, optimism and promise they show as the story begins. Speaking of acting, who could forget Christopher McDonald, note perfect as self-help guru-cum-game show host Tappy Tibbons? Like no film before it, *Requiem For A Dream* captures the drug experience in full: the highs (creative fecundity, unfettered optimism, elevated emotions) and the lows (everything else). Yes, it's a downer: but it's also a stark, yet achingly human portrayal of addiction. As indelible as a tattoo, the film itself is like a drug — it goes straight for the main artery, gets into your system and never lets go (Exhibit D).

YOUTHEJURY
→ Visit: www.empireonline.com to cast your deciding vote.