

Tropic Thunder (2008)

Rated R. Our ratings: V-5 ; L-7 ; S/N-2 . Running time: 1 hour 47 min.

*Fools think their own way is right,
but the wise listen to advice...
One who is clever conceals knowledge,
but the mind of a fool broadcasts folly.
Proverbs 12:15, 23*

Ben Stiller appears on both sides of the camera in this vulgar spoof of the adventure/war genre represented by the Rambo and Chuck Norris-Vin Diesel type of films. He plays fading lead actor Tugg Speedman, whose last movie Simple Jack was about a mentally challenged guy (and which has garnered protests from those who see no humor in mental retardation). It is Robert Downey, Jr. who steals much of the show as Kirk Lazarus, a method actor so deep into his character that he has his skin surgically died so that he can play a black man. Indeed, he has crawled so deeply into his role that he can no longer separate it from reality, which exasperates real black man Alpa Chino (Brandon T. Jackson—say the character's name out loud, and you'll get his character).

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Jack Black is also a member of the acting team, his Jeff Portnoy being addicted to heroin and known for his original fart jokes (yes, we have to have this in this type of comedy).

Producer Lee Grossman (Tom Cruise) has dispatched the film crew into the jungles of South Asia, where director Damien Cockburn (Steve Coogan) tries to make sense out of writer Four Leaf Tayback's (Nick Nolte) screenplay, supposedly based on his exploits as a soldier in Vietnam. When an explosives scene goes wrong, Cockburn sends the actors off further into the jungle, telling them that there are cameras hidden everywhere (yeah, sure) to record their actions. When they stumble upon a real dope manufacturing camp run by renegade soldiers, they are captured, still believing this to be a part of the realism of the film. The drug dealers would have killed them, but they recognize Tugg from the one video that they have been watching over and over, Simple Jack. They have him act out the various scenes for their amusement. How all this mayhem works out is fun to behold—especially the Oscar ceremonies at the end of the film—if you can stand the vulgar language, anal humor and such. Buried amidst all this are some of the funniest scenes of any summer blockbuster (and yes, this one cost as much as those which it spoofs.)

For Reflection/Discussion

1) This being an equal opportunity offensive movie, what part(s) bothered you the most? Do you agree with the protestors that Simple Jack should not have been included in the film? Were you also bothered by the film it is spoofing, I Am Sam?

2) What other films do you recognize, or characters, that are

being parodied?

3) Who is the most opportunistic character? What is his driving motive, and thus the charge made against the Hollywood studio system?

4) Who is most like "the fool" found throughout the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes?