Beware The Ides Of March

By [Eugene Yiga](#)   9 Jan 2012

Strange things happen when a group of Hollywood hotshots star in a film; either you get something like Contagion, a movie so brilliant that even a bowl of peanuts sent shivers down your spine, or you get something like New Year's Eve, a movie so bad that it makes you wonder how so many agents could be so blind.

Then you get The Ides of March, which stars Oscar winners George Clooney, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Marisa Tomei, Oscar nominees Paul Giamatti and Ryan Gosling, and some normal people too. As expected, there's a lot of award buzz. The movie has received Golden Globe nominations for Best Director (George Clooney), Best Actor in a Drama (Ryan Gosling), Best Screenplay, and Best Drama. Personally, I just don't get it. Yes, the individual parts work brilliantly, but as a whole? I'm not so sure.

The script is way too complex

Basically, the movie is about the days leading up to a Democratic presidential primary, with two contenders fighting for their party's top spot. The specific politics don't really matter, but that doesn't stop the script from getting way more complex than it needs to be. There are too many nudges and winks about the Clinton scandal and Obama campaign, to name only two. (Expect audible snickers and "aha" moments in a cinema near you.) Perhaps it was meant as wry attack on the current state of bipartisanship in the US. Or perhaps I'm missing the point entirely.

The title refers to the that day Julius Caesar was assassinated, which is probably why the main focus of the movie is people doing whatever it takes to get ahead. It's fascinating to watch them play games with each other, casually betraying loyalties without so much as breaking a sweat. This raises some interesting questions about their behaviour. Can you succeed without sacrificing at least some of your values? If not, is it justified to play dirty if you're doing so for a greater good? What if other people get hurt in the process? And who decides what the greater good actually is?

It's hard to answer the questions

Unfortunately, it's hard to answer these questions because it's hard to tell why these people are doing what they're doing. You don't know if they're fighting for power to make their country a better place or if they're just out to satisfy their own deluded and selfish desires. And because you don't really know, you don't really care. Yes, it sucks to see good people getting hurt while the worst that happens to one of the bad guys is losing his job and landing another one in which he earns a million dollars a year. But that's about it.

Ultimately, The Ides Of March is not the kind of movie that leaves you feeling good. Then again, perhaps it's not supposed to. Perhaps all it's meant to do is show us that politics is a mucked up affair with many casualties along the way (as if the media doesn't remind us enough of that every day). It's cynical. It's unfair. It's also the truth. Still, I think the movie forgets that who we are and what we do are different things. There's a chilling scene at the end in which Ryan Gosling's character seems to understand that. He knows he can do better. Why? Because he already is.

Rating: 3 out of 5
Running Time: 1 hour, 40 minutes
Age Restriction: 13 (LS)

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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