

Tropic Thunder

As I'm sure you've heard, the movie [Tropic Thunder](#) received much hype in the media because of several controversies. Part of this hype is a normal side effect of a movie's release – spin doctors go to work; sometimes even people who are associated with the movie spread their own rumors because there's a saying that goes, "There's no such thing as bad publicity". Tropic Thunder is under scrutiny for two reasons: [Robert Downey Jr.](#), a white actor, plays a white man in the movie who undergoes pigment infusion in order to portray an African-American man in the movie within a movie. I guess I should go back and give a summary of the plot so that my explanation of the controversies of Tropic Thunder make more sense.

A group of quirky actors are filming a big budget war movie in Vietnam, and they get stuck there – that's basically the plot and explains why we have a movie within a movie. Before seeing the movie, I was under the impression that the actors didn't know they were on their own in Vietnam and that's when the hilarity would ensue. But I was wrong on both accounts. The actors knew they were no longer filming the movie pretty much right off the bat, and Tropic Thunder is not funny. It is violent and crude; two things I could handle if the movie had other appealing qualities, but this one does not. I do not recommend Tropic Thunder to anyone. I can't see who would like this film since it's not funny nor is it really an action film – it just seems like a poor excuse for total crudeness and senseless violence. I'm surprised about this because of its major star power: it was directed by [Ben Stiller](#) who also stars in the movie, along with [Jack Black](#), Robert Downey Jr., [Matthew McConaughey](#) (who has a difficult name to spell, by the way!), [Nick Nolte](#), and [Tom Cruise](#), who makes a "special" appearance. Turns out what is so special about Cruise's appearance is the audience getting

to see an A-list actor spewing out apallingly crude lines. I have to admit though, they do a good job of disguising Mr. Cruise, and since I hadn't heard he'd be in the film, I only recognized him because his voice was familiar and my husband leaned over and asked me, "Isn't that Tom Cruise?" Seeing Tom Cruise as a middle-aged bald jerk barking out insults and orders was probably the only entertaining thing in the whole movie but still not nearly enough to make it worth seeing. Not quite so bad as to be put on [my famous movie stinkers list](#), but it was a close call!

And that was going to be the end of my post until I realized that I forgot to go back and write more about the controversies surrounding this movie. There was the one about Robert Downey Jr. portraying an African-American; I guess the feeling was why couldn't they hire someone who was really African-American to play the role. And then there was the controversy about the use of the word (and please forgive me if I offend you, I'm just repeating what I heard in the media) "retard". I can see how people would be offended by both circumstances; mostly I'm all for people lightening up about being politically correct and those kind of things, but perhaps these complaints have merit, especially the latter. The movie's portrayal of a "special" person and use of the word "retard" was quite condescending and like the rest of the movie, not the least bit funny. But what I would say to the people who were offended is don't waste your time because this movie's not worth it, especially if the "no such thing as bad publicity" theory pans out – why give this bad movie any more press than it's already gotten? Waste of money. Period. Not a waste of time, however, but only because I saw it in good company ☐

Finding Inspiration

Everyone has a passion in life. For some it is a hobby. Others maybe family. But whatever it is, most have to learn to balance their passion with what may seem like the mundane world of everyday life. In the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*, one man struggles to do just that and along the way finds that his passion in life may have changed.

Richard Dreyfuss portrays Glenn Holland, a would-be composer who accepts a "day job" teaching music appreciation to high school students. During the course of his 40 year career, he finds that he has the power to instill passion in others. A clarinetist lacking confidence and an academically challenged athlete who HAS to take his course to fulfill his graduation requirements are just two of the students he encounters. My favorite student is the young promising singer who he encourages to follow her dream. Glenn not only inspires musically but in all aspects of life.

However, Mr. Holland's personal life is often filled with turmoil. He spends a lifetime searching for the inspiration to compose his one great piece of music. He struggles to find a balance between work and family. His musical passion and his family life are put to the ultimate test when his young son, Cole loses his hearing. A brilliant scene shows Mr. Holland attempting to bridge the rift with his son by performing a personal rendition of John Lennon's "Beautiful Boy."

Some intriguing historical flashbacks are used to show the passage of time. This creates the illusion that the audience is watching a movie based upon the events of a real person. The Vietnam War is seen through flashbacks and creates drama in Mr. Holland's life.

Mr. Holland's Opus is a remarkable movie for anyone who has inspired or been inspired. It is sentimental without being

sappy.