

DISCLOSURE

Michael Crichton wants to be the modern day version of Upton Sinclair. Sinclair, you'll remember, was a political commentator who wrote *The Jungle*, a rather graphic account of the Depression-era meat industry. Through Sinclair's eyes the reader witnessed the horrifying treatment and the rather disgusting habits of the workers in the meat packing plants. Crichton, similarly, writes of the terrible conditions of today's big business, yet where Sinclair meant to shock readers with his descriptions, Crichton's method is to entertain while informing. *Disclosure*, Crichton's newest book, is a cautionary tale of big business, yet it also deals with the ripped-from-the-headlines issue of sexual harassment. But oh, what's this? What a novel idea Crichton has. A man sexually harassed by a woman!? What a role reversal! How provocative! How avant-garde! The next sound you hear is Clarence Thomas cheering. What it all boils down to, though, is a marketing ploy. Crichton is trying to pass off a potboiler piece as political allegory. The book was compulsively readable, though, and Crichton made millions off its bestseller status. Sinclair should have been so lucky.

One thing that Sinclair lacked back in the Depression-era that Crichton has today was a medium through which he could communicate his ideas to those Americans, and there were many of them then as now, who found the reading of complete sentences an unnecessary distraction. The medium I'm speaking of is, of course, the escapist world of the movies. Sinclair's book never reached more than the most dedicated of readers, and even if auctioned to be filmed, not a studio would touch such a depressing piece. Crichton, on the other hand, seems to have a stranglehold on Hollywood, as *Disclosure's* auction to the movie studios occurred before its completion. So now down to business. How does the new film adaptation of Crichton's bestseller compare to the original piece? Is it as provocative? Is it as sexy? For the younger generation, like, do they have that, like, cool virtual reality scene?

Well all you fans of the book, I'm happy to report to that the movie version of *Disclosure* hinges faithfully to Crichton's vision. Unlike *Rising Sun* where the murderer's race changed or *Jurassic Park* where John Hammond morphed from the book's mega-mogul Scrooge into the movie's fun loving Santa Claus, *Disclosure's* director Barry Levinson (*Bugsy*, *Diner*, *Toys*) and screenwriter Paul Attanasio (*Quiz Show*) keep all the plot basics, only eliminating a few unnecessary characters and some minor confrontations. They do however make some welcome improvements. Crichton's book was readable due to the flow of the prose. Yet there was no really witty commentary or banter in the book, a necessary addition Attanasio makes to the movie. *Disclosure*, you see, is mostly talk. If a movie is mostly talk it better be interesting things that the audience hears, otherwise they become disillusioned. It is fortunate then that Attanasio gives the actors words

worth saying. The banter is both interesting and in many cases funny. What Attanasio has done is to combine the dialogue of a screwball comedy with the plot of a political thriller. Imagine *Sleepless in Seattle* meets James Bond where Bond sues Meg Ryan for writing him romance letters and you've gotten the idea. Attanasio also adds some scenes to the film, none more funny than in a satirical dream sequence where our protagonist Tom Sanders (Michael Douglas) is subject to sexual advances from his company's, DigiCom's, deceiving boss (Donald Sutherland).

Dialogue may work well on paper, but a movie needs actors experienced enough to deliver those lines as well. It is something *Disclosure* has in all cases. Michael Douglas is by now a pro at being another woman's vibrator. He assumes his role of family man and sexual object with incredible ease and makes his characterization of Sanders likable and sympathetic. As Meredith Johnson, Sanders' new boss and ex-lover, Demi Moore leaves behind her nice girl roles of *Ghost* and *Indecent Proposal* becoming the non-homicidal but nonetheless power hungry version of Sharon Stone's character in *Basic Instinct*. It's obvious from the start that Johnson is to be the movie's wicked witch. None of the characters in *Disclosure* have anything approaching three dimensions. Yet Moore and Douglas, especially, work with this limitation instead of against it and provide the audience with the desired happy and pat results. Adding necessary comic relief are Nicholas Sadler and Dennis Miller as two young, ambitious computer geeks who are quick to turn on Sanders at any given moment. Caroline Goodall plays the Anne Archer role of the accepting wife. She has a few scenes where she gets to burst into an outrage, but always comes back to the "I love you honey, now and forever," resolution. Donald Sutherland is properly evil as the head of DigiCom, always cracking that Jack Nicholson psycho-smile when things go his way. The real standout among all the cast, though, is Roma Maffia as Sanders' lawyer, Catherine Alvarez. Maffia has a certain assurance in her scenes with Sanders. She is calm, cool, and collected, always one step ahead of the opposition. In the court hearing scenes Maffia delivers her lines with an intelligence that always makes her the centerpiece and also a definite consideration for a Supporting Actress Oscar.

Coming off his recent bombs, *Toys* and *Jimmy Hollywood*, *Disclosure*'s director, Barry Levinson, has opted for a safe commercial hit. He moves his camera in an exploratory manner, always sure that the audience takes in every bit of the breathtaking world of DigiCom. He stages the two show-stopping set-pieces rather well, the harassment scene of Sanders by Johnson and the virtual reality scene where Sanders searches through a computerized version of a file cabinet, though the former does go on a bit too long. Levinson sometimes seems to be aiming to make an *All The President's Men* of the big business world, but most often he is smart enough to realize that *Disclosure* is nothing more than a piece of entertaining fluff, not a cautionary tale of business and the women who run it. *Disclosure* is almost a step down for Levinson from his character driven hits

like *Bugsy* and *Avalon*, yet he is more than competent in his direction and should not be ashamed to add *Disclosure* to his resume.

Where *Disclosure* falters, and I will admit most people will hardly notice this, is in the musical score by Ennio Morricone, a composer whom one remembers for his Spaghetti Western themes of the 60's. The music brings to mind thoughts of a silent film as scored by a two-year old child banging on a piano. It literally leaps out at the audience and pounds their eardrums into oblivion, none more obvious than in the virtual reality scene. Morricone's music takes away something from *Disclosure*, but the movie as a whole clearly outweighs this quibble.

The person who will most likely benefit from this venture is Michael Crichton. He had a lot of control over *Disclosure*, a choice he made after the disastrous changes Philip Kaufman made to his version of Crichton's *Rising Sun*. Evidently, Crichton wants the audience to leave the theater discussing the issues he places before them. Yet what Crichton doesn't realize is that what the audience sees will no more elicit reactions about sexual harassment than *Plan 9 From Outer Space* was to elicit about earth-invading aliens. Crichton may think he's created an informative and cautionary tale about big business, but what he has actually done is to give trash-loving-tabloid-eating Americans a metaphorical turn-on. Crichton may consider himself an Upton Sinclair, but *Disclosure*, in both its forms, proves he's nothing more than a high-rent trash novelist.