

## 15.6 Two reviews

## READING

A

Read these reviews and then answer the questions below:

## Jakob the Liar

by CLARK COLLIS

There was once a time when a comedy about the holocaust would have been considered an audaciously brave and/or audaciously stupid move. Unfortunately for *Jakob the Liar*, the conclusion of that particular period in cinema history occurred last year, with the release of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*.

As a result, what would otherwise have been, if nothing else, at least controversial, simply comes across as a vehicle for Robin Williams at his most unpleasantly sentimental.

The artist formerly known as Mork plays the economically truthful Jakob, a mild-mannered Jewish baker-cum-boxing manager who we discover failing to make ends meet in a Polish ghetto towards the end of World War II.

After accidentally learning that Germany is losing the battle for the Eastern front, Williams spreads the good news – and before you can say, 'Goooooooooooooood morning, Warsaw!' the entire community is under the misapprehension that he has somehow saved a radio from Nazi confiscation.

Which presents something of a dilemma for our supposedly unheroic hero. Should he tell the truth and destroy his increasingly suicidal friends' last hopes?

Or should he risk execution by pretending that he does have a radio, enabling him to do a lot of funny voices behind a screen for the entertainment of the cute little concentration camp-escaping child that he stumbled across way back in Act One?

Anyone who bets on the first option has clearly never seen a Robin Williams movie – although they would certainly be well advised not to make this their first.

Since it was based on a book by camp survivor Jurek Becker, no one could argue that director Kassovitz's intentions are less than noble. But as entertainment, the end product is as turgid a film about mass genocide as we are ever likely to see.

Moreover, while the support from fellow players Alan Arkin, Liev Schreiber and Nina Siemaszko, as Williams' fellow persecutees, is competent enough, the entire enterprise has been smothered with such a sickly layer of glutinous Hollywood sentimentality – replete with a predictably semi-happy ending – that diabetics should probably consult their doctor before even seeing the trailer.



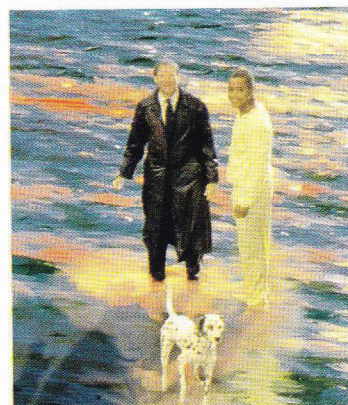
- 1 *Jakob the Liar* is .....
  - a a controversial film
  - b a moving film
  - c not controversial
  - d better than *Life is Beautiful*
- 2 The writer finds Williams' performance .....
  - a distasteful
  - b charming
  - c better than in his previous films
  - d dull
- 3 What does Jakob do when his fellow-inmates think he has a radio?
  - a He has a lot of fun
  - b He keeps up the pretence
  - c He tells them that Germany is losing the war
  - d He tells the truth
- 4 Which of these phrases is NOT used humorously or sarcastically?
  - a the cute little concentration camp-escaping child that he stumbled across
  - b they would certainly be well advised not to make this their first
  - c no one could argue that director Kassovitz's intentions are less than noble
  - d diabetics should probably consult their doctor before even seeing the trailer



## What Dreams May Come

by KIM NEWMAN

One advantage of recent advances in special effects technology is that films can take you to places you've never seen before, and couldn't even imagine. *What Dreams May Come* takes you somewhere you may not want to experience quite yet. Chris Nielsen (Robin Williams), a doctor whose happy marriage has already been blighted by the deaths of his kids, is killed in an accident and wakes up in a private universe which takes the shape of his wife's semi-Impressionist paintings. Death isn't so bad, especially with guide Albert (Cuba Gooding Jr.) around to give tips and reunite him with his put-down dog and lost little girl. However, Chris' wife Annie (Annabella Sciorra) can't take another bereavement and commits suicide. Since this condemns her to the Hell section of this afterworld, Chris strives – guided by Max Von Sydow – to haul her out of the slough of despair and bring her to the happy lands, even though everyone says this is futile.



Adapted from a cranky mystic novel by Richard Matheson and directed with visual genius by Vincent Ward, this is one of those failures that has so many near-great things that it almost gets by on guts. Few films have the nerve or the imagination to create a world beyond, and the settings are consistently incredible, whether in the idyllic heaven or the paved-with-agonised-faces hell.

The problem is that, despite mostly strong performances, there's something not right about the central perfect relationship so you get distracted arguing with all the religious guff. It feels like what you'd get if you took the legend of Orpheus and previewed it in Pasadena, then rewrote the classical tragedy as a feelgood Hollywood hug-fest. After the underrated excellence of *Map Of The Human Heart*, Vincent Ward is entitled to a misstep and we probably ought to be grateful that this one is as interesting as it is.

- 5 When Dr Nielsen dies and wakes up in the afterworld .....
  - a he is all alone
  - b he is very unhappy
  - c he meets his dog again
  - d his wife is by his side
- 6 What does the writer mean by *incredible* in the second paragraph?
  - a absurd
  - b very strange
  - c not believable
  - d wonderful
- 7 Why does Annie kill herself?
  - a She wants to join Chris in heaven
  - b She is all alone in the world
  - c Too many of her nearest and dearest have died
  - d She doesn't realise she'll go to Hell
- 8 The writer thinks that *What Dreams May Come* is .....
  - a a brave attempt
  - b not worth seeing
  - c well worth seeing
  - d nearly as good as the director's previous film

### B 1 Discuss these questions:

- Which of the films would you **LEAST** like to see? Why?
- What was the **WORST** film you've ever seen? Tell your partners about it.
- How seriously do you take reviews? How much do they influence your decision whether to see a movie, buy a CD, eat at a restaurant or go to a show?

### 2 Before one of you looks at **Activity 5**, and the other at **18**, read this introduction:

#### Movie clichés

Apparently there are only half a dozen basic movie plots. However, the list of movie clichés is endless. Many of them are necessary short cuts (movie people never ask for change in a shop or from a taxi driver, for instance), but the rest are gratuitous. Still, they can alleviate the tedium of watching a bad film.



Part 1 of the Reading Comprehension Paper consists of 18 multiple-choice questions on missing words from three texts. The questions focus on different aspects of vocabulary and grammar. Look at the annotated questions (1–6) and then answer questions 7–12 unaided.

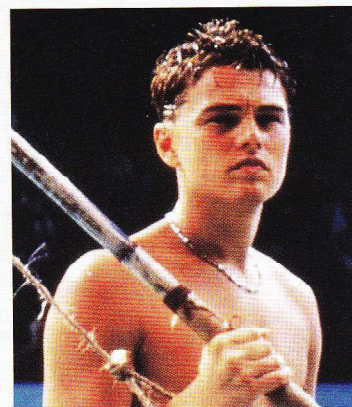
## The Beach

by ANGIE ERRIGO

Getting away from it all on an <sup>1</sup> tropical beach is not the idyll of your lottery winning dreams in this unnerving drama of a hidden Eden where obsessive travellers disassociate from the world.

Leonardo DiCaprio is backpacker Richard, who thinks he's worldly-wise, but is so "the young American abroad" when he seeks adventure and danger in Thailand. A strange <sup>2</sup> with crazed Daffy (Robert Carlyle), who rants of a perfect, secret beach, seems the travel tip for him. And he recruits a French girl he fancies rotten (Virginie Ledoyen) and her amiable boyfriend (Guillaume Canet) to <sup>3</sup> him on a mysterious, funny, scary journey to the spectacularly beautiful (take a bow, cinematographer Darius Khondji) haven.

There Sal (Tilda Swinton) holds sway over a community of drop-outs who are kind of a <sup>4</sup> between the *Swiss Family Robinson* and an apocalyptic water sport cult. Like Garland's novel, the film will be compared with *Lord Of The Flies* as the absence of societal constraints and concerns creates a moral vacuum for wild things to rumpus mightily. *The Beach* is more a <sup>5</sup> of the modern world, though, with a more experienced gang and their alternative attempts to connect with <sup>6</sup> riven by their secrets, desires, jealousies and competitiveness. They import their own serpents into this paradise.



Choose the best word or phrase to fill each gap in the text:

In the exam it's a good idea to put a pencil mark beside the questions you can't answer and come back to them later. It's usually best to eliminate the answers you know to be wrong first.

- |                                      |                                 |                                    |                                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 A abandoned<br>not appropriate     | B unspoilt<br>✓                 | C tropical<br>not grammatical      | D Asian<br>OK but not the best      |
| 2 A meeting<br>OK but not the best   | B rendezvous<br>not quite right | C date<br>not appropriate          | D encounter<br>✓                    |
| 3 A encounter<br>doesn't make sense  | B join<br>✓                     | C travel<br>not grammatical        | D escort<br>not appropriate         |
| 4 A mixture<br>OK but not the best   | B blend<br>not appropriate      | C cross<br>✓                       | D association<br>different meaning  |
| 5 A microcosm<br>✓                   | B symbolic<br>not grammatical   | C comparison<br>doesn't make sense | D reflection<br>OK but not the best |
| 6 A themselves<br>doesn't make sense | B a team<br>silly               | C each<br>not grammatical          | D one another<br>✓                  |

Richard is more than a little disturbed, as we learn from a voiceover that <sup>7</sup> on intrusive but underlines his alienation. His fixation with Vietnam movies could be spelled out more clearly to <sup>8</sup> his solitary stint in the jungle turning into a pathological commando game, *Heart Of Darkness* for the Sega generation.

DiCaprio's <sup>9</sup> as the smartarsed thrill-seeker and the more wry narrator with <sup>10</sup>, but he works very hard for his reputed \$20 million fee when required to turn into a bug-eating nutter. <sup>11</sup> the dodginess of this interlude, however, Boyle's direction holds a true line between allure and horror, and John Hodge's <sup>12</sup> is intriguing and forceful. It's much better than rumoured: entertaining, cngrossing, and ripe for discussion – somewhere civilised – afterwards.

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|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| then if you're still unsure you may have to guess. It's better to make a wild guess than not to answer at all. | 7 A frontiers  | B borders   | C approaches | D comes close |
|  | 8 A explain    | B justify   | C interpret  | D describe    |
|  | 9 A role       | B part      | C voice      | D perfect     |
|  | 10 A foresight | B hindsight | C retrospect | D knowledge   |
|  | 11 A Although  | B In spite  | C Despite    | D Because of  |
|  | 12 A script    | B book      | C story      | D plot        |