



Leonardo DiCaprio isn't the king of the world now, huh?

Matter Over Mind

The diamond trade's dark side

BLOOD DIAMOND: Written and directed by Edward Zwick. Cinematography, Eduardo Serra. Music, James Newton Howard. Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Djimon Hounsou and Jennifer Connelly. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006. R. 138 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

A man arrives at a refugee camp in Guinea looking for his family. Denied entry, the man stands despondent at a fence until, as luck would have it, his family happens by. Since the camp holds in excess of one million exiles, calling the reunion convenient is like saying the ocean is wet. It's just one of a number of lapses in *Blood Diamond* that not even several strong performances can overcome.

We know what happens when people pursue bright and shiny objects to the far ends of the earth.

The refugee is Solomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou). With him are Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio), a diamond smuggler, and Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), a reporter itching to tell Danny's story. The three are linked by an enormous pink diamond that Solomon found (and then buried) while a slave in a diamond camp. In exchange for Solomon's diamond, Danny will help Solomon find his kidnapped boy. Once retired, Danny will tell Maddy his life story — all 31 years of it — which will probably take down an international diamond cartel. In other words, *Blood Diamond* wants to be your basic cat-and-mouse thriller. Instead, it plays like *Pearl Harbor* set against the backdrop of an industry awash in blood.

Considering the seriousness of its themes — namely, how our perception of precious gems is at odds with the turmoil

involved in their extraction — *Blood Diamond* is a disappointment. We've all seen *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Lord of the Rings*. We know what happens when people pursue bright and shiny objects to the far ends of the earth: People die in proportion to their obsession with the objects. But in *Blood Diamond* there's very little of the spontaneity that makes those other films so great.

After a rushed but mostly crisp opening sequence, the film alternates between self-important speechifying and mayhem so senseless and chaotic that it makes *Pirates of the Caribbean* — the theme park ride, not the film — look like a highly choreographed ballet. The violence in *Blood Diamond* is both gratuitous and improbable. A tiny band of freedom fighters, for example — many of whom aren't old enough to drive — wreaks havoc far out of proportion to the members' number, age and size.

An inordinate amount of attention has been paid to Leo's accent in *Blood Diamond*. For the record, Leo's performance as a white Zimbabwean is excellent. His accent, its fidelity to South Africa aside, only wavers when Danny shouts, which isn't often. Shouting is for people who lack Danny's smooth exterior, his 007-esque sense of control. Unfortunately, *Blood Diamond* occasionally asks Danny to do things he simply wouldn't. That includes swiveling his head around wildly when he thinks he's being chased or handing wads of cash, child-like, to men of uncertain reputation — in public. (Or, my favorite, speaking very loudly when the conversation should be kept secret.)

Finally, I distrust movies in which anyone says "This place is about to explode!" and that gem makes an appearance here, courtesy of Maddy. Connelly, smoky-eyed, is radiant as Maddy, but far too clichéd as a crusading journalist. She's only a glimpse of the character we could have seen. Perhaps we expect too much from writer/director Edward Zwick, who gave us *Glory* almost 20 years ago. Zwick also, after all, gave us *Legends of the Fall*, a grandiose exercise in Hollywood excess that *Blood Diamond* sadly resembles. **EW**

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