Daybreak. looking forward to, was reviewed plyes to films. This same convention ap­
Artists involved in its making and to grotesque discourtesy both to the
grotesque. She is, of course, not
to enjoy its cinematic features, but
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disclose the ending of a film of this
he ought to praise and, since over­
people are not paid for their failure to
people are not paid for their failure to
much like a sad but faithful old dog
he ought to praise and, since over­
she probably rather smugly feels that she has provided insights which may help people like me to a
more perfect understanding of the movie.
more perfect understanding of the movie.
I know several otherwise sensible people are guided in their entertain­
ment choices by reviews. To make sure that we don’t waste our time seeing something we might not like, we allow complete duds like the
Radio National reviewer to steal some of the piquancy of our aesthetic experience by explaining what is already perfectly clear.
A convention of reviewing is that a reviewer should not reveal the en­
ding of an entertainment of this kind. This same convention ap­
plies to films.

Recently Alien 3, a film I had been looking forward to, was reviewed on the Radio National program Daybreak. The comments of the
reviewer, whose name I have happily forgotten, were both banal and pretentious. She is, of course, not alone among film reviewers in pos­sessing these qualities. However, to disclose the ending of a film of this nature is not only arrogant, it is a grotesque dis­courtesy both to the artists involved in its making and to listeners who make up part of its potential audience. I did see Alien 3 a few days later and was then able to enjoy its cinematic features, but the review had indeed managed to
More plausible-looking characters offer nothing more worthwhile than their own opinions and a few gleanings from standard film guides. John Hinde, on the ABC, does not seem as pompous as SBS’s David Stratton, but Hinde tends to outline even more of the plot. Channel Seven’s Ivan Hutchinson looks so much like a sad but faithful old dog that I can hardly bear to watch any film that I know he is going to intro­duce. However, I have to admit that the ‘Ask Ivan’ column in TV Week can be compelling reading, full of questions like: “To settle a bet, is Jana Wendt the sister of Hannah Arendt?”; and “Is Gerontion de’ Anthell, who played Methuselah in the 1919 version of The Bible, still alive?”

Bill, John, David and Ivan may be amiable characters but most people don’t need a savant to anticipate the
details listed in the credits, or to describe ‘arresting visuals’ or ‘powerful performances’. They are capable of seeing the virtues and faults of a film, regardless of whether it is given the imprimatur of ‘Movie of the Week’.

For those who do feel the need for such interpretations, the standard of film criticism in Australia is generally low. Take, for example, the fourth paragraph of Evan Williams’ recent review of Batman Returns in The Australian:
The most likely audiences would appear to be immu­nute adults, fans of Michelle Pfeiffer, and those interested in the silent German expres­sionist cinema of the 1920s.

In the final paragraph of the same review, he states:
Those most likely to enjoy it will be penguin fanciers, admirers of Mussolini’s archi­tectural style, fans of Pfeiffer, sports car en­thusiasts, and everyone like­ly to appreciate in-jokes about German expressionist cinema.

To call such writing sloppy would be a compliment.

An acquaintance of mine was a film reviewer on the main newspaper of a large Queensland city in the 1960s. This person had no idea which films he ought to praise and, since overseas films took months to arrive in Australia at that time, he simply consulted back issues of Time magazine and borrowed its critical stance. It may have been comical to see him draw a salary for such shameless plagiarism, but unthinking as­sent to any point of view is frightening. Too many filmgoers differ from this person only in that they are not paid for their failure to use their critical intelligence.

MICHAEL CONATY would like to see a media embargo on Lethal Weapon 3.