

# "Invictus" tells heroic sports tale



BY KEN DUSOLD  
Reviewer

"I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." These are the final words of English poet William E. Henley's 1875 poem, "Invictus." Henley wrote the poem from a hospital bed, following the amputation of one of his feet (a result of tuberculosis). The poem serves as a refusal to accept a diagnosis of defeat and vows to believe in human perseverance. It is no surprise, then, that a copy of the poem is one of the few things Nelson Mandela kept with him for the entirety of his 27-year incarceration.

During the last decade, Morgan Freeman has tried numerous times to get Nelson Mandela's 1995 biography transformed into a film adaptation, with the Academy Award winner serving as both its producer and star, although without success. Alternatively, he bought the rights to the 2008 novel, "Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation" by John

Carlin, and hired Clint Eastwood to direct — an unmistakably brilliant decision.

"Invictus" follows the actions of newly-elected South African President Mandela (Freeman) as he attempts to unify a bitterly divided and changing country in the wake of apartheid. Mandela wants white citizens to reconcile with those they previously oppressed and he wants blacks to forgive and forget.

"The past is the past," he says to African National Congress party members. "It is time to move forward."

The Springboks rugby team, which is about as good at rugby as the St. Louis Rams have been lately at football, have a fan base made up of South Africa's white minority. The nation's blacks want the Springboks dissolved. Mandela, realizing the potential in rallying a nation around a sports team, saves the team from extinction and makes a personal plea to team captain Francois Pienaar (Matt Damon) to get better — and to do it quickly. The team, reluctantly following the duty-bound leadership of Pienaar, improve upon its game and fan base enough to make it into the 1995 Rugby World Cup Final.

Eastwood, a four-time Academy Award winner, demonstrates his usual excellence in capturing the strength of the story, the truth in its characters and the hearts of its audience. There can be little question that Eastwood belongs among cinema's finest filmmakers, with five of his last



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com

seven films receiving Oscar nominations and an expected deluge of nominations for "Invictus."

Damon, who has grown noticeably during his acting career, gives a tremendous performance as Pienaar and nails the accent without so much as a hint that he is anyone other than a native South African.

The movie, however, belongs to Freeman, who is responsible for making this amazing story into such an outstanding film. His portrayal of the former South African president is commanding. His simple presence, with the carefully crafted stance, walk and gestures of Mandela, is all

that is needed to feel the essence of one of the 20th century's most extraordinary human beings.

Freeman's Mandela is arguably one of the best performances of the last decade, and sure to earn him an Oscar nomination for best actor, if not the actual Oscar.

The film is a modern sports film at its most basic level. "Invictus" ranks somewhere near "Remembers the Titans," "The Natural" and "Rudy" in its exhibition of resilience in the face of staggering challenges. Although not perfect (the special effects are beneath what they should be for a film with such respectable names attached), "Invictus" is

a very good addition to the top echelon of great sports movies. If one looks beyond the rugby field, though, the film also depicts a story that needed to be told. South Africa overcame the deep-seated hatred planted during the era of apartheid to form a nation of peaceful and equal citizens. It is a lesson for all of the world's states, as well as the lasting legacy of Nelson Mandela's unstoppable efforts and success in steering his country toward that accomplishment. It is in watching "Invictus" that one can be certain that Mandela was in full control of South Africa's fate and was captain of its soul.

## OK Go takes new course



Photo courtesy of MTV.com

From left: OK Go lead singer Damian Kulash, bassist Tim Nordwind, drummer Dan Konopka, and guitarist/keyboardist Andy Ross



BY COREY BOMMEL  
Reviewer

### OK Go

Break out the treadmills because OK Go is back from their five-year album drought with new music. It's hard to find someone who hasn't seen the viral video of OK Go's single "Here It Goes Again," but with their latest release, "Of the Blue Colour of the Sky" it proves it is so much more than an Internet fad.

Previously known for quirky power-pop, OK Go chose to branch out in a new direction for a new decade. The music is much less pop and much more psychedelic funk. The band's sound on this album draws heavy influences from Purple Rain-era Prince. Singer Damian Kulash produces a slinky falsetto on most of the tracks while guitarist Andy Ross wails out the solos.

The Chicago natives chose to work with Flaming Lips producer Dave Fridmann to help reinvent their sound. The album's name and overarching concepts were based on a 19th century pseudoscientific book by General Alfred Pleasonton. As a result of these influences, "Colour" becomes a much darker offering than earlier releases, with songs still fun to sing along with despite their lack of straight pop hooks.

The CD's first single and opening track, "WTF," acknowledges the band's new path. "WTF" was written in 5/4 time and foreshadows the rest of the band's changes to come. "White Knuckles" is an '80s throwback with intense guitar solos and frantic vocals. OK Go slows it down for the romantic "Last Leaf," a more acoustic track. Fridmann's influences also can be noted

on the Flaming Lips-esque "Back from Kathmandu."

OK Go proves that any band can stay relevant without losing integrity. They are able to bridge the gap from pop to more introspective rock with "Colour."

### Vampire Weekend

Vampire Weekend released its sophomore effort "Contra" last week as a follow up to its 2008 self-titled album. The album's title stems from the Clash's album "Sandinista!" — a nod to Nicaraguan history buffs. The band enjoys emphasizing the fact that they are Ivy League graduates using subtle puns and facts.

Vampire Weekend is once again at the top of its game with its inimitable blend of indie rock and African beats. Their influences drawn from Paul Simon make his music the band's closest comparison. The Clash's influence is also evident on the structure of many of the songs in "Contra."

"Contra" consists of much heavier songs than Vampire Weekend's previous album. The hooks aren't as catchy, but the songs tend to be upbeat and ride on a wave of world sounds ranging from Afro-Cuban beats to Caribbean rhythms. Conceptually, "Contra" is a very laid-back album.

In the opening track, "Horchata," singer Ezra Koenig flexes his multiculturalism, loosely rhyming "horchata" with "balaclava" and "masada." In this one song, Koenig references cultural parts of three very different parts of the world. In "Diplomat's Son," a dance hall reggae track, the band samples Sri Lankan artist M.I.A.'s song "Hussel." This is in reference to M.I.A.'s song, "Paper Planes," in which the Clash's song, "Straight to Hell," is heavily sampled. The melancholy "I Think UR a Contra" has Koenig mourning over an ex-lover, but even when he is heartbroken and mourning "You wanted good schools and friends with pools / Well, I just wanted you," he comes off relaxed and shrugs off his problems.

Vampire Weekend could draw its influences heavily from styles of music that have been around for a long time, but its sound is that of a 21st century band. "Contra" proves it still has much to offer.

## Mario goes back to basics



BY ALEX CARLSON  
Reviewer

Mario's back for another round on the Wii. Grab your Wii Remotes and three of your gaming buddies, because "New Super Mario Bros. Wii" is here, and it has multiplayer.

"New Super Mario Bros. Wii" brings many features from its Nintendo DS release. In the core gameplay, very little has changed.

You're still running to the right, earning power-ups and stomping Goombas and Koopa Troopas, just as in the original "Super Mario Bros." Mario also still has jump and run commands, which can be combined for longer jumps. Tricks like triple jumping are actually pretty simple to accomplish, making the game extremely accessible but plenty deep.

The inclusion of a multiplayer component is quite possibly the biggest inclusion in "New Super Mario Bros. Wii." For the first time, up to four players can jump through and explore the Mushroom Kingdom simultaneously, offering plenty of new ways to find secrets and reach goals. If you have the hardware (four Wii Remotes), this is easily one of the most fun multiplayer modes since "Super Smash Bros. Brawl." The overall structure of the multiplayer mode offers incredibly frantic and chaotic gameplay. Unless you have spot-on cooperation and communication with your teammates, the entire mode can devolve into frustration with everyone rushing for power-ups and coins.

Despite this, the chaotic nature of the game is the multiplayer's best feature. It captures the competitiveness of other multiplayer titles without sacrificing any of the fun. Simply getting a group of friends together and playing through the stages is a wonderful feeling. Nintendo hit the



Photo courtesy of wired.com

nail on the head with this multiplayer component. The result is a crazy but remarkably fun addition to one of gaming's most treasured series.

For those who don't care about multiplayer, there are still plenty of things to do in "New Super Mario Bros. Wii." Each stage has three star coins to collect, which can be spent to unlock bonus videos that reveal secret abilities or hidden exits.

The game's presentation is a slight improvement from the DS original, but you'll still find that it focuses more on nostalgia than pushing polygons. The 3-D effects look sharp, especially the nice character light-ups when earning a power-up. Many of the environments have a great sense of character. Levels range from the typical grassy green worlds to high-flying sky stages, each one with distinct personality.

As far as sound goes, the classic Mario tunes and sound effects are fondly reminiscent of the original "Super Mario Bros." game. Mario's quips throughout the game do

not even get tiresome. It might not possess the graphical overhaul seen in other games, but "New Super Mario Bros." focuses on charm, and in that it succeeds with flying colors.

Aside from the slightly stagnant presentation, "New Super Mario Bros. Wii" is one of the best Wii games you'll find, standing toe to toe against heavy hitters like Zelda, Metroid and Smash Bros. It's simply astounding that the stellar gaming formula of "Super Mario Bros." hasn't aged a bit, and the inclusion of a multiplayer component shows that even one of the most venerable series still has some creativity. Unlockable videos, hidden exits and plenty of content throughout give "New Super Mario Bros. Wii" a powerful longevity. If you've been looking for a reason to get some friends together, this game will keep everyone interested and playing. It's a fantastic achievement in gaming. If you have a Wii, it would be downright criminal not to own "New Super Mario Bros. Wii."