



# Nick Prescott's Reviews

## **The Departed**

Talent: Matt Damon, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jack Nicholson, Mark Wahlberg, Alec Baldwin, Vera Farmiga, Martin Sheen, Ray Winstone.

Date of review: Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, 2006.

Director: Martin Scorsese

Classification: MA (15+)

Duration: 152 minutes

We rate it: Five stars.

For any serious cinemagoer or lover of film as an art form, the arrival of a new film by Martin Scorsese is a reason to get very excited indeed. Scorsese has long been regarded as one of the greatest of America's filmmakers; since the mid-1980s he has been regarded as one of the greatest filmmakers in the world, period. With landmark works like *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Raging Bull* (1980), *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999) to his credit, Scorsese is a director for whom any actor will go the distance, and the casts the director manages to assemble for his every project are extraordinarily impressive. As a visualist Scorsese is a force to be reckoned with, and his soundtracks regularly become known as classic creations; his regular collaborators, including editor Thelma Schoonmaker and cinematographer Michael Ballhaus are the best in their respective fields. Paraphrasing all of this, one could justifiably describe Martin Scorsese as one of the most important and interesting directors on the face of the planet.

*The Departed*, Scorsese's newest film, is on one level a remake of a very successful Hong Kong action thriller from 2002 called *Infernal Affairs*. That film, written by Felix Chong and directed by Andrew Lau, set the box office on fire in Hong Kong and became a cult hit around the world. The fascinating premise is complex and effective: two young men join the police force and train as plainclothes officers; one is a plant working for a major criminal organisation whose boss wants to infiltrate the authorities. The other youngster is an idealistic fellow whose background means he is chosen to go deep undercover posing as a member of the criminal underworld. Thus the film's two central characters are far more complex than they appear; each is something other than that he pretends to be, and the two will inevitably meet in the most suspenseful and potentially destructive context.

Scorsese has taken this intriguing thriller setup and transformed it into something even more complex and devastating. In the two central roles, Matt Damon and Leonardo DiCaprio demonstrate conclusively that they are far more than pretty-boy

matinee idols. Both actors deliver riveting and enviably mature performances - DiCaprio deserves particular praise for the breathtaking intensity with which he imbues his role. Alongside these impressive turns is a staggeringly accomplished supporting cast, every member of which carries off brilliant work. Jack Nicholson's searing portrait of a ruthless crime boss is unforgettable, and Martin Sheen's humane portrayal of a decent man struggling against overwhelming corruption and violence is unbearably affecting. Ray Winstone, Mark Wahlberg and Alec Baldwin all deliver pitch-perfect turns in smaller roles.

It is difficult to describe *The Departed*'s plot turns without ruining the carefully controlled pace of its narrative for viewers. Suffice to say that Scorsese demonstrates that he is as fluent with the conventions of an action thriller as he is unrelenting in his examination of masculinity and violence. *The Departed* is a staggeringly unflinching film: it's a tough thriller, filled with profanity and vividly depicted brutality, and it's a devastating portrait of the destructive and base nature of untempered masculinity. If this sounds a little too theoretical, don't let it put you off. Many action films carry a critique of masculinity and violence underneath their skins; *The Departed* carries these elements on its unforgettable surface. A challenging and harrowing film, *The Departed* is not easily forgotten.

Nick Prescott