



Knight at the Movies: Be Kind Rewind, Vantage Point

By [Windy City Media Group](#)

The first great movie of 2008 is here and, ironically, it's about the unforgettable impact movies have on all of us. *Be Kind Rewind* is not just movie-crazy—a plus for anyone who shares a similar passion—its story and characters are also daffy and writer-director Michel Gondry works from an irresistible viewpoint that is both innocent and effervescent. This is a movie for mad, hopeless dreamers tilting at windmills. *Be Kind Rewind* is nostalgic and endearing and it's also funny as hell—a supremely blissful movie going experience.

Gondry's setting has the scruffy charm of two signature Norman Lear sitcoms from the 1970s—*Chico & the Man* and *Sanford & Son*—and given the premise, this isn't surprising. Two simpletons in a rundown area of Passaic, N.J.—Jerry (Jack Black) and Mike (Mos Def) —are good friends who endlessly pick at each other in the manner of their TV forebears. Feisty, wild- eyed Jerry lives in a camper in the junkyard where he works, just across the street from the video store where Mike, who doesn't say much, tends customers for Mr. Fletcher (Danny Glover) . The duo seems like a modern-day update on Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton of TV's *The Honeymooners*.

When the taciturn Mr. Fletcher is told that the building that houses the failing video store is to be condemned, he sets out to explore ways to improve his business by checking out his competition. He leaves Mike in charge and warns him to keep Jerry, who he doesn't trust, out of the store. During a failed sabotage attempt on the nearby electrical plant (which he's convinced is melting his brain) , Jerry becomes magnetized and, the next day, accidentally erases all the VHS tapes in the store. (DVDs have yet to come to Mr. Fletcher's.) In order to keep their few loyal customers happy, including the dotty Mrs. Falewicz (Mia Farrow) , Jerry and Mike re-create mini-versions of *Ghostbusters*, *Rush Hour*, *The Lion King*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Robocop* and other movies, enlisting Alma (Melonie Diaz) to come on board as the love interest. Eventually, the newfound popularity of the one-of-a-kind recreations alerts the authorities, who charge the trio with copyright infringement.

In one last ditch attempt to save the store, Jerry, Mike and Alma decide to film an original story—the life of Fats Waller, the great jazz musician who Mr. Fletcher told them once lived in the building. The recreations have been wildly inventive up to this point but when movie fever overtakes the whole neighborhood during the making of the Waller movie, it goes into hyperdrive—making the scene in which the locals gather to watch their little masterpiece almost unbearably bittersweet. Scored to a forlorn solo piano piece called *Solitude* (written by Jean-Michel Bernard) , the sequence is almost as powerful as the final moments of *It's a Wonderful Life* .

Gondry's valentine to the movies is aided enormously by his diverse cast—especially Black, whose exuberant, comic mugging could easily have overwhelmed the others (particularly Def, who gets sneaky laughs as Black's straight man) . The quiet authority of Glover, the spaciness of Farrow and the spunkiness of Diaz are also standouts, while Gondry's script pulls off the neat trick of being nearly epithet-free—a refreshing rarity in a contemporary urban comedy.

Unlike previous Gondry films, the imaginative *The Science of Sleep* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Be Kind Rewind* may push the writer-director into the mainstream. Just as original in its own way as those two offbeat indie efforts, *Be Kind*'s simplicity and subject matter give it an edge. Sleep deprivation and memory loss (the subjects of *Science of Sleep* and *Eternal Sunshine*) are filled with complexity, while the visceral impact that movies—even not very good ones—can have on receptive audiences is so simple and tantalizing that even simple dreamers like Jerry and Mike understand it.

To fall for *Vantage Point*, a political thriller in which the assassination of the U.S. president (played by William Hurt) is told from multiple viewpoints, you have to throw away any connection to reality. Nothing in it is faintly plausible—from the CNN-like reporter espousing her own political views on camera to Forrest Whitaker as a camcorder-wielding tourist chasing after a group of terrorists to Dennis Quaid and Matthew Fox (TV's *Lost*) as handsome but flawed Secret Service agents. There's also the fact that the main action (set in Spain) places the president on an outdoor stage in broad daylight in a courtyard ringed by windowed buildings in front of screaming hordes—a scenario that, given our current standing worldwide, is highly unlikely to occur for years to come.

The gimmick of the movie, as stated, is in the Run, Lola, Run style, which recaps the 20 minutes or so following the president's murder many, many times (it might have been as many as eight—I lost count) . Each time, more clues as to who really killed the president, who planted the bomb, etc., are revealed—and as the pretzel logic of the plots get intertwined the movie, too, gets backed into a corner. But if you decide to toss out reason and plausibility, Vantage Point is an entertaining, shamelessly good time (with one of those kick-ass car chases to boot) . And there's a great bonus for gay audiences—the terrorists are some of the most beautiful men you're likely to see outside of a circuit party.

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