

# Dull character makes for sluggish crime movie

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

Dustin Hoffman portrays vicious mobster Dutch Schultz in the movie version of E.L. Doctorow's best-selling novel, *Billy Bathgate* (Touchstone).

The movie deals with street-smart Bronx kid Billy (Loren Dean), who idolizes Dutch. He's shocked but not deterred when he sees Dutch commit brutal murders, and he wins the gangster's trust by turning in Dutch's second-in-command, Bo Weinberg (Bruce Willis), for selling out to rival Lucky Luciano (Stanley Tucci). Dutch promptly soaks Bo's ankles in cement and gives him the old heave-ho off the nearest tugboat.

Meanwhile, Dutch is facing trial upstate for tax evasion and goes so far as to get baptized Catholic and initiate friendly bingo games to convince the locals he's just a regular guy.

Billy gets caught in the middle when Dutch inherits Bo's girlfriend, the rich Mrs. Preston (Nicole Kidman), who foolishly flaunts her attraction to



Myles Aronowitz/Touchstone Pictures  
Bruce Willis and Nicole Kidman star in Touchstone Pictures' new gangster flick *Billy Bathgate*.

young Billy and soon seduces him.

But as Preston continues to flirt with danger and Luciano's hitmen close in on his boss, Billy needs all his cunning just to survive.

Tom Stoppard's screenplay and

Robert Benton's direction don't spell movie magic for this sluggish crime story.

Billy is a rather dull character on which to hinge the story. Continually looking dumbfounded when confron-

ted with ugly sudden deaths, he changes little and doesn't grow on the audience. Nor does the viewer know where the enigmatic Preston is coming from as she flits from man to man while her husband nonchalantly waits in the wings. Apparently, he is gay.

Willis has the best scenes as the doomed traitor, and Hoffman is pretty scary as the volatile killer. Unfortunately, it is only during his bursts of violence that the movie comes to life. Character actor Steven Hill is excellent, however, as Dutch's aide who knows full well what usually happens when you live by the sword.

As the movie is shown from the youth's point of view, it's definitely not for teenagers. On the other hand, adults will recognize it doesn't in any way glorify these repugnant criminals.

Due to sporadic sudden violence, brief nudity, a discreet bedroom scene, momentary homosexual innuendo and some rough language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

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