

## Document Citation

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# A Bad Ending

**T**en years after the Scandal — and its negative effect on the size of his audiences and his power and independence — Woody Allen broke his longtime avoidance of the Oscar telecast with his pro-

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New York stand-up shtick at this year's ceremony. The positive audience response suggested that all is forgiven ... the industry still loves Woody ... they don't really believe he molested a ten-year-old. It seemed like a big step forward in the rehabilitation of his public image. Sadly, *Hollywood Ending* may erase that gain.

Like any Allen film — excepting the self-consciously “serious” ones — *Hollywood Ending* has a number of clever plot contrivances and first-rate zingers. It may not even be the worst film Allen has made. But it's the ways in which *Hollywood Ending* is bad that make it so dispiriting an experience, particularly for those of us who are diehard fans.

The film's classic, Hollywood-style farce premise has substantial promise. Val Waxman (Allen) is a once-mighty director who has fallen on hard times. Reduced to shooting TV commercials, he is thrilled when his agent, Al (Mark Rydell), sends him a terrific script. Of course, there's a catch: The film will be a production of Galaxy Pictures, run by Hal (Treat Williams), the very studio boss for whom Val's ex-wife, Ellie (Téa Leoni), left him. In fact, it's Ellie — now a Galaxy executive — who pushes for Val to get this last big chance to salvage his reputation. Hal is swayed by Ellie and gives Val the job, sending Ellie to keep tabs on him throughout preproduction.

Things seem relatively hopeful until a

few days before shooting begins when Val, true to form, suddenly goes psychosomatically blind. If word gets out, he's finished, so Al convinces him to forge ahead with the movie, pretending to still have his sight — an absurd plan that requires a conspiracy involving Al, the Chinese translator, and eventually Ellie. High jinks ensue.

While the subject matter bears some resemblance to *Bullets Over Broadway*, his intent here seems much lighter. That is, there are no big themes being worked out through the story, no great insights into art or the nature of genius. Which is just fine; the same could

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***Hollywood Ending***  
Written and directed by  
Woody Allen. Starring  
Woody Allen, Téa Leoni,  
Treat Williams, Mark  
Rydell, and Debra Messing.

**Round Zero**  
**Round Zero II**  
by Rosenblatt  
ahedi. At the  
ema, Friday,  
ugh May 17.

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be said of all of his early, funny films, as well as of the more recent *Curse of the Jade Scorpion* and *Small Time Crooks*.

What's particularly scary about *Hollywood Ending*, however, is that its flaws are exactly the sort of problems that often afflict aging directors, flaws that we've never seen in Allen before — bad comic timing, slack pacing, an unsteady control of tone, a reliance on jokes that have long since become clichés. While other Allen misfires suggested a great artist having a bad day, *Hollywood Ending* is the first Allen film to suggest a great artist losing it altogether.

On top of that, there's the ever-recurring issue of the autobiographical content in Allen's work. He constantly denies it, even while crafting films that make the connections unavoidable. And that brings us to the matter of Allen's casting of himself. He may be the best performer of his own work, but the age disparity between Allen and his leading ladies gets more distracting with every film. They're getting younger as he gets older: First Tracy Ullman (24 years' difference), then Helen Hunt (28 years),