George Lucas film gets mostly negative reviews, with many critics citing a poor script as its downfall.
By Kevin P. Sullivan

Kevin Phillips in "Red Tails"
Photo: Jiri Hanzl

After two decades of trying to get the story on the big screen, executive producer George Lucas finally gets to tell the tale of the Tuskegee Airmen in "Red Tails."

The film, which stars Terrence Howard and Cuba Gooding, Jr., is not getting the reviews Lucas hoped for, garnering mild to negative reviews from many critics, most citing the film's script as the main source of problems.

Here is our roundup of "Red Tails" reviews.

The Story
"The Tuskegee Airmen were a group of African-American fighter pilots who were trained despite the racism entrenched in the U.S. armed services during World War II. They were deployed in action and achieved fame and many decorations for their skills against German pilots, which included engaging and shooting down Messerschmitt Me 262s, the first jet fighters. So successful were they at escorting American bombers that the white pilots requested them — contradicting a 'study' at the time that claimed 'Negroes lack the intelligence to operate heavy machinery.' " — Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*

The Performances
"Howard, especially, seems burdened with responsibility. Whenever he speaks, it's as if he might never get the chance again. He and [David] Oyelowo evoke different aspects of the old Sidney Poitier dilemma, Howard in his intense dignity, Oyelowo in his attempt to turn his natural British accent American and loose. The sight of Howard denouncing racism in uniform while

seated at the Pentagon carries a gust of uplift. But it would be dishonest to say that he's better here than he was as a rapping pimp. For any actor, down and dirty is more fun than pressed and starched. But pressed-and-starched is all this movie can afford to be." — Wesley Morris, *Boston Globe*

The Script

"And so it goes in a script that doesn't begin to show what these young men were really up against and how patient and stoic they had to be in the face of so much resistance. Screenwriters John Ridley and Aaron McGruder neglect, or perhaps assume too much common knowledge of, the key component of struggle at the heart of all social drama." — Todd McCarthy, *The Hollywood Reporter*

The Action

"The movie has potent sequences of aerial combat that recall Tom Cruise and his flyboys bombarding evil out of the air. Here, though, the planes zoom close to the ground, with the tree-lined hills of Italy looming up behind them. The actors really appear to be flying, and that gives the Airmen's brushes with the enemy — even when they're just providing 'escort' cover for white pilots — a heart-in-the-throat, you-are-there quality. Plus, they do get to bomb a few Nazi planes." — Owen Gleiberman, *Entertainment Weekly*

The Final Word

"The actors do all they can. But Lucas and company did not get the script right with this one, which is the single, dubious link 'Red Tails' has to 'Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull.' " — Michael Phillips, *Chicago Tribune*

Check out everything we've got on "Red Tails."

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