

Dear Friend!

Find Me Guilty is a Courtroom Drama (based on the True Story of the longest Mafia trial in US History) it's written in the spirit of ***Twelve Angry Men*** with a heavy dose of ***My Cousin Vinny***.

I have attached two reviews for you.

Best regards!

TJ Mancini, Cell 310.709.8486
Producer & Writer of ***Find Me Guilty***



**Diesel Does Criminal Comedy
In Lumet's Latest Masterpiece**

By: Andrew Sarris

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Sidney Lumet's *Find Me Guilty*, from a screenplay by Mr. Lumet, T.J. Mancini and Robert J. McCrea, strikes this reviewer at least as the supreme achievement of this 81-year-old director, whose career spans almost half a century and over 40 films involving some of the greatest actors and most prestigious literary properties from the New York and London stages. Not that I can speak of Mr. Lumet as if I had been one of his hitherto foremost admirers. Indeed, back in the late 60's, in *The American Cinema*, I relegated him to the comparatively lowly category of "Strained Seriousness" as I concluded: "Unfortunately, Lumet shows no signs of ever rising above the middlebrow aspirations of his projects to become the master rather than the mimic of the current trend away from Hollywood."

Of course, I later had to modify my judgment in the face of such lively entertainments as *Serpico* (1973), *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), *Network* (1976) and *Prince of the City* (1981). Beginning with his explosive, low-budget debut film, *12 Angry Men*, in 1957, Mr. Lumet's milieu of choice has been the criminal courtroom and the urban gangland. And so it is with his crowning masterpiece, *Find Me Guilty*.

The stupendous irony is that after working with such established stellar talents as Henry Fonda, Marlon Brando, Katharine Hepburn, Anna Magnani, Ralph Richardson, Jason Robards Jr., James Mason, Vanessa Redgrave, Simone Signoret, Sean Connery, Trevor Howard, Al Pacino, William Holden, Peter Finch, Richard Burton, Jane Fonda, Jeff Bridges and Nick Nolte, Mr. Lumet plays his richest directorial notes of feeling and humor ever with Vin Diesel, a supposedly stereotyped action figure from the lower depths of contemporary moviemaking. Truth to tell, I had never before seen Mr. Diesel on-screen, figuring I'd save his DVD's for my dotage. Now I'd be very upset if he weren't nominated as one of the five best actors of 2006. He is that good.

Find Me Guilty vividly recreates a real-life, record-setting RICO prosecution case in 1987 and 1988 against 20 alleged members of the New Jersey-based Lucchese crime family. Much of the actual testimony is rendered verbatim in the movie. United States Attorney Rudolph Giuliani appears in vintage newsreel footage to kick off the proceedings, though he doesn't personally handle the prosecution. Still, watching this most overrated of contemporary politicians and potential Presidential candidates near the beginning of his headline-grabbing career made me root for the mob even before Mr. Diesel and company began doing their stuff.

The story begins long before the trial in a seedy gang hangout, where a messy, debilitated junkie makes an urgent call to a contact for a gun bigger than his feeble .22 in order to perform a hit. We later learn that this wretch is named Tony Compagna (Raúl Esparza) and that he has some grievance against his cousin and business associate, Giacomo DiNorscio (Vin Diesel). Tony bursts into DiNorscio's home, rushes past his startled daughter upstairs where Giacomo is resting, and nervously fires a shot that grazes Giacomo's neck. Sitting up and wide awake, Giacomo expresses shock and surprise that his own beloved cousin should be shooting at him. Undeterred, Tony fires three more shots, then flees in a drug-addled panic. One doesn't know whether to regard the episode as melodrama or farce, particularly when Giacomo survives the attack, telling the police from his hospital bed that he had his eyes closed all through the assault and therefore cannot identify his assailant. By this time, Giacomo is better known to us and everyone else as Jackie Dee. (In real life, we've been told, he was even better known as "Fat Jack.")

In any event, Jackie recovers from his wounds and resumes his career of narcotics smuggling—until he is busted after a big haul that lands him in prison for 30 years. This carefully orchestrated bust and unusually severe prison sentence is part of a federal plot to get Jackie to rat on the other members of the Lucchese family. When Jackie flatly refuses, he is thrown into the RICO conspiracy dragnet with his 19 other co-defendants but tried separately from them. The fun begins when Jackie fires his lawyer, who charged him \$150,000 to get him 30 years and now wants to charge him \$50,000 more to defend him against the new indictment. Thanks, Jackie says, but no thanks. When Judge Finestein (Ron Silver) soberly repeats to Jackie the old adage that a defendant who chooses to defend himself has a fool for a client, Jackie forces the judge to acknowledge with an almost imperceptible nod of his head that there are occasionally exceptions to that rule. To the jury, Jackie exclaims, "I'm no gangster—I'm a gagster." And he keeps demonstrating the latter part of his self-identification to gales and gales of jury laughter.

But he is not alone in his unexpected virtuosity. There is also Ben Klandis (played by the gifted dwarfish actor, Peter Dinklage), the most eloquent and accomplished of the defense counsels. Ben waits patiently while a mobile elevated platform is wheeled into place so that he can address the jury at eye level. The sheer gravity of this process and the seriousness with which Ben speaks to the jury, the judge, Jackie Dee, the other defendants and their counsels creates a strange spell against which Jackie's initially buffoonish-seeming behavior seems to clash, but eventually Jackie himself becomes more thoughtful in his presentation. He thereby achieves an unusual rapport with Mr. Silver's ever more deeply sympathetic Judge Finestein. When the judge calls Jackie into his chambers to tell him with palpable concern that Jackie's mother has died, but that he can't get permission to have the trial delayed for the funeral, Jackie weeps privately with his hand covering his eyes while the judge sits quietly, tactfully and respectfully.

There is also a strange feeling of compassion for the constantly beleaguered prosecuting attorney, Sean Kierney (Linus Roache), who becomes increasingly frustrated as Jackie's shamelessly confessional frankness ingeniously exploits the jurors' class inferiorities. When the panicky prosecutor offers the gangsters a generous plea deal, Jackie makes a heartfelt entreaty to his erstwhile comrades in arms to turn it down and stand fast. It is a sobering moment of self-recognition for Jackie, as he acknowledges that he has already lost everything but his honor and is resolved to keep that at all costs.

One by one, the prosecution's mob informants are destroyed by Jackie as he catalogs their vices and impresses upon the jury the government's shameful toleration and even encouragement of these vices. Jackie's *pièce de résistance*, of course, is his would-be assassin, his once-beloved cousin, the government's star witness, Tony Compagna. In softly wheedling, gently inquiring tones, Jackie destroys Tony as a credible informant. It's the first time we've seen Tony since the botched murder attempt, and it is through the aftermath that the jury is made aware of the full extent of Jackie's code of honor.

Annabella Sciorra as Bella, Jackie's angry ex-wife, turns a prison visit into a smoldering inferno of sexual longing after first bombarding Jackie with every pent-up epithet for all his infidelities during their marriage. But her provocatively bosomy costume seems intended as much to arouse Jackie as to punish him, and when they are pulled apart by Jackie's meanly sadistic guards, Bella spits in the face of one of them when he leeringly suggests that he finish what Jackie started. It is a carnal turn worthy of her having been imaginatively rediscovered on *The Sopranos*.

There is a revelatory surprise also in the implacable hostility and contempt that mob boss Nick Calabrese (Alex Rocco) displays toward Jackie for some undisclosed and unacknowledged incident in their past. Nick never relents, even when Jackie turns out to be the instrument of his escaping prison along with his many confederates. Still, I could have done without the cheering-section finales lavished on Jackie by his buddies and later by his fellow convicts in prison. I would have preferred the pathos of an ending that stressed the psychological letdown Jackie feels as he begins to confront a long stretch of loneliness when his clownish antics would be no longer helpful or appropriate.

Rumor has it that *Find Me Guilty* is meeting resistance at the box office despite (or perhaps because of) its overall artistic excellence. It may be the case that Mr. Diesel's horde of action fans are suspicious of the more creative and original role for which he has been cast in a change of pace from his usual feel-good heroics. Whatever the reasons, I urge all my readers to go see *Find Me Guilty*, perhaps the biggest and happiest surprise in this moviegoing year. Not that I happen to have any illusions that the gangsters in question were all that innocent, and I concede that lately there have been too many peculiarly unexpected "not guilty" verdicts lavished on beneficiaries with a rank odor of wrongdoing. What I do believe, however—and what Mr. Lumet has so beautifully demonstrated—is that all sorts of people have souls.

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NEW YORK TIMES MOVIE REVIEW | 'FIND ME GUILTY'

MORE ON 'Find Me Guilty'

A Bona Fide Soprano Entertains His Jury

By [STEPHEN HOLDEN](#)



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Yari Film Group

Vin Diesel as Giacomo (Jackie Dee) DiNorscio.

"I'm no gangster, I'm a gagster," crows Giacomo (Jackie Dee) DiNorscio, the goombah antihero of [Sidney Lumet's](#) gripping courtroom drama "[Find Me Guilty](#)."

Wearing a reddish-brown wig, his gut protruding over his belt loops, a goofy leer spreading across his mug, [Vin Diesel's](#) Jackie could be the cutup baby brother of Tony Soprano. The role of a wisecracking wise guy embellishes Mr. Diesel's menacing force field with stand-up comedy and macho sentimentality. At last he plays a real character instead of a swaggering cartoon of testosterone on the rampage.

"Find Me Guilty" resurrects a notorious 1987-88 court case in which 20 men said to be members of the New Jersey-based Lucchese crime family were prosecuted by the federal government on more than 75 criminal counts involving the usual assortment of mob activities. After dragging on for nearly two years, the trial ended with a shocking outcome.

Jackie alone insisted on representing himself. While driving both the judge ([Ron Silver](#)) and the mob kingpin Nick Calabrese (Alex Rocco) into paroxysms of rage and anxiety, Jackie, whose real-life nickname was Fat Jack, clowned and charmed his way into the hearts of the jury like an uncensored late-night talk show host. Mr. Diesel also succeeds in making a dangerous thug almost lovable with his sensational performance.

Mocking conventional courtroom decorum, Jackie portrays himself as a free spirit, brazenly and fearlessly cutting through the official rigmarole to tell it like it is in profane street language spiced with dirty jokes. Face to face with a witness who is a former associate, he accuses him in the most graphic terms of having always lusted after him. Another witness is ridiculed for not knowing the difference between a Lincoln and a Cadillac. Such details skillfully puncture the prosecution's pose of infallibility.

Jackie also skewers the prosecution's careless ethnic profiling. When a federal agent recalls his surveillance of a room of Italians, Jackie jokingly baits him to describe exactly how he was sure they

were Italian.

At the time the indictments are handed down, Jackie is already serving a 30-year sentence for an earlier crime. Offered a reduction in jail time in exchange for becoming a prosecution witness, he bluntly refuses. His insistence that he would never rat out a colleague, even one who had betrayed him, gives him the moral advantage when confronting the feds' star witness, his cousin Tony Compagna (Raúl Esparza). We meet this nervous, drugged-up underling in the movie's opening scene, when Tony bursts into Jackie's home, dashes upstairs and shoots him several times, failing to kill him. Facing his cousin in court, Jackie expresses only a magnanimous pity for a sick family member, and the witness, humiliated and guilt-stricken, withers before our eyes.

"Find Me Guilty," Mr. Lumet's first feature film in seven years, catches him near the top of his game. Now 81, this master surveyor of the urban jungle still has the machinery of police work and courtroom ritual down cold. His skill at conveying the feel of federal offices, jail cells and the eateries where cops and criminals gather to shoot the breeze is so precise you can almost smell the paint on the walls and the food in the kitchen. Where it can, the screenplay he wrote with T. J. Mancini and Robert J. McCrea uses dialogue taken from court transcripts.

Thanks to ["The Godfather,"](#) ["GoodFellas,"](#) ["The Sopranos"](#) and their countless imitations, the characters in contemporary mob dramas are now such beloved clichés that they are almost like family. Or rather, they are cherished fantasy projections of ourselves in a shadow version of a society obsessed with family values and corporate upward mobility.

With its herd of 20 defendants and nearly as many lawyers, "Find Me Guilty" suggests a panoramic episode of ["The Sopranos,"](#) with a little casting overlap. The most incendiary cameo belongs to [Annabella Sciorra](#) (who played Tony Soprano's suicidal girlfriend, Gloria) as Bella, Jackie's bitter ex-wife. It is only one of many excellent supporting performances. Mr. Silver, directing his eyes like drills into a mudflat, personifies cold judicial imperiousness. Peter Dinklage's chief defense attorney projects a more gentlemanly and well-spoken but equally ferocious gravitas. [Linus Roache's](#) smug chief prosecutor slowly and subtly begins losing his cool as Jackie's outrageous courtroom antics captivate the jury.

Looked at in a different way, "Find Me Guilty" could be taken as a serious comedy about the baleful impact of television on the criminal justice system, as the next step to media madness after Mr. Lumet's film ["Network."](#) Because the events in the movie preceded the Menendez brothers and [O. J. Simpson](#) murder trials and the debuts of Court TV and ["Law & Order,"](#) the film offers a tasty prelude to the era when crime and punishment expanded from part-time television entertainment into a fulltime spectator sport that merged fiction and reality.

In other words, Jackie Dee was a reality-star-in-waiting while the demonic recipe for a mediathon immersion was still being perfected.

"Find Me Guilty" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). It has abundant profanity and scenes of intense violence.

Find Me Guilty

Opens today nationwide.

Directed by [Sidney Lumet](#); written by Mr. Lumet, T. J. Mancini and Robert J. McCrea; director of photography, Ron Fortunato; edited by Tom Swartwout; music by Jonathan Tunick; production designer, Christopher Nowak; produced by Mr. Mancini, [Bob Yari](#), Robert Greenhut and Bob DeBrino; released by Yari Film Group Releasing. Running time: 124 minutes.

WITH: [Vin Diesel](#) (Giacomo DiNorscio), Peter Dinklage (Ben Klandis), [Linus Roache](#) (Sean Kierney), [Ron Silver](#) (Judge Finestein), Alex Rocco (Nick Calabrese), [Annabella Sciorra](#) (Bella DiNorscio) and Raúl Esparza (Tony Compagna).

