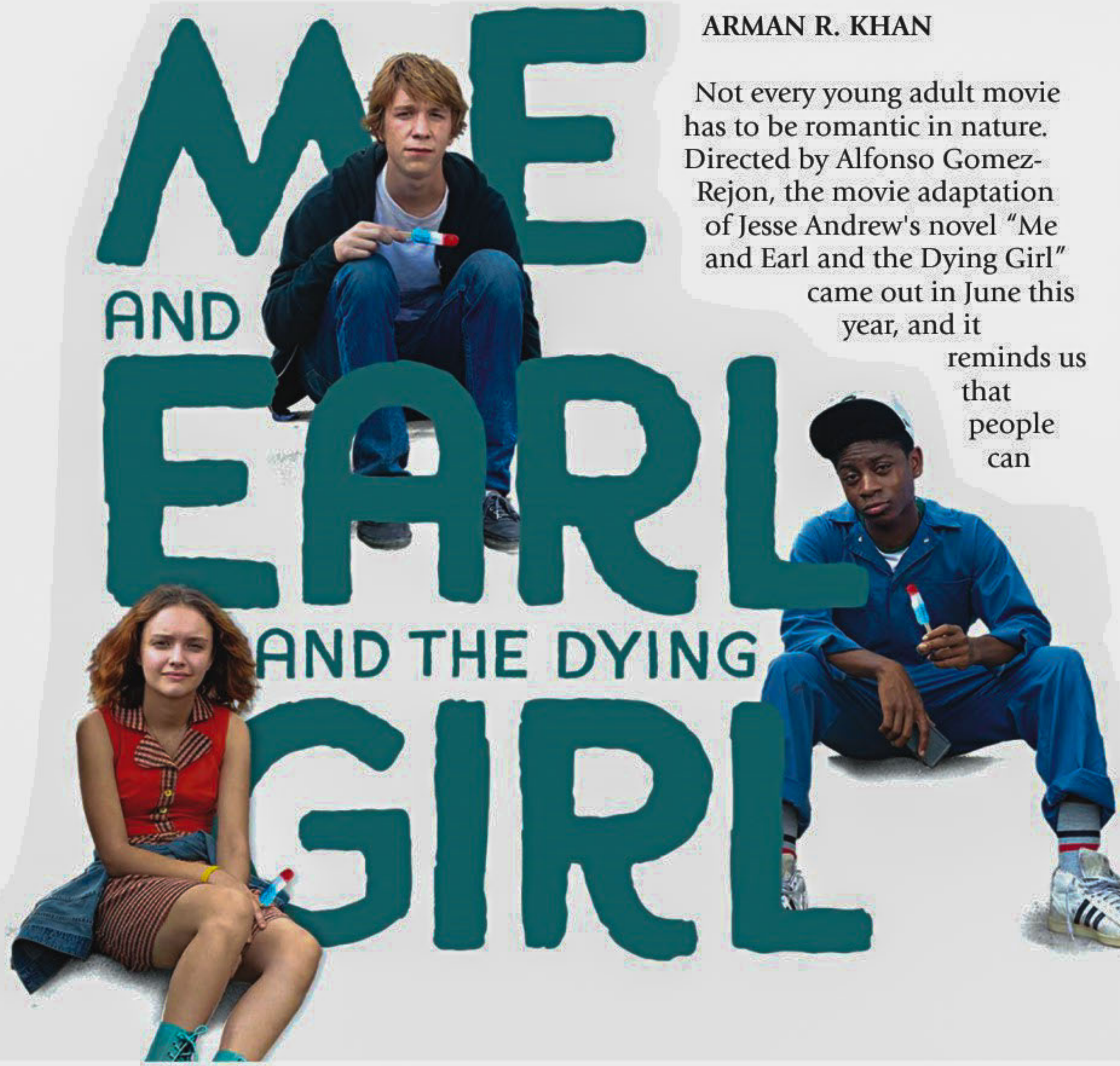


Better than **TFIOS**

MOVIE REVIEW



ARMAN R. KHAN

Not every young adult movie has to be romantic in nature. Directed by Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, the movie adaptation of Jesse Andrew's novel "Me and Earl and the Dying Girl" came out in June this year, and it

reminds us that people can

actually be friends without falling madly in love with each other.

The narrator of the movie is Greg Gaines (Thomas Mann), an average guy with a sense of humour who stays low-key in high-school. Him and his friend – or as Greg says, his co-worker – Earl (Ronald Cyler II) make parody short films together. When Greg discovers that an acquaintance from school, Rachel Kushner (Olivia Cooke), has been diagnosed with leukaemia, his mother forces him to befriend Rachel. Despite the forceful initial hang out, Greg and Rachel become inseparable friends in a short time.

The movie has a level of realism in it that makes it all the more believable and easy to comprehend. To be honest, the plot is less about Earl and the dying girl, and more about Greg himself due to his friendship with Rachel. It's in the last few minutes of the movie that we learn quite a bit about Rachel. The narrative can get a little annoying at times, but it avoids clichés. It is in fact quite different than *The Fault in Our Stars* in terms of the storyline.

Why, then, did I compare it to everyone's favourite *TFIOS*? I admit, the title of

this review was to grab attention of the young adult genre fans. However, both were adapted from novels, and due to the same genre and similar settings, a comparison is inevitable. Like I said, *MAEATDG* is not a romance story, unlike *TFIOS*. There are no grand gestures of love or catchphrases like in *TFIOS*, but it has more pragmatic elements in it that makes it relatable, like college applications and faux pas at school. Though *MAEATDG* has a believable plot that doesn't romanticize cancer, *TFIOS* has a more emotional appeal with its dialogs and the entire Amsterdam episode. The narrative is also better in *TFIOS*, but I credit that to John Green's years of expertise.

Personally, I liked *MAEATDG* more than *TFIOS*, but I don't expect everyone to feel that way. Overall, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* is a movie with teenage friendship at its core, and made me want to pick up my phone and call my friends at once. I would say that if you are a lover of the YA genre, you'll probably find this movie interesting, regardless of whether you liked *TFIOS*.

Arman R. Khan is a caffeine addict, a dreamer and a culture enthusiast who

MANGA REVIEW

BABY STEPS

A Realistic and Relatable Manga

NOVO MANZOOR

First released: 2007
Volumes: 36
Status: Ongoing

Sports manga like *Kuroko no Basket*, *Eyeshield 21*, *Prince of Tennis* depict Japanese schoolchildren as practically superhuman. They use magical super-moves, gain skills at a god-like pace and act as if the world's survival depends on high school sports competitions. *Baby Steps* is a breath of fresh air for those who have had enough of that particular type of manga.

Unusual name aside, the manga also differentiates itself through its artistic direction.

Baby Steps follows Eiichiro Maruo, a diligent student who takes exhaustive notes of every class. As a result, he is a top class student and is known as "All A's" Eiichiro, or Ei-chan. When he starts to grow bored of this lifestyle, he searches for an outlet where he can engage in physical exercise.

The inspiration of his beautiful classmate Natsu (aka Nat-chan) leads him to the local Southern Tennis Club (STC), where he is at first overwhelmed by the physical rigours of the sport. But his nature of observing things, noting them down and working diligently to overcome his weaknesses

Soon he grows to love the game and through his nature, starts improving rapidly. He goes on to a journey of becoming the best tennis player he can be.



Baby Steps has a lot in common with manga like *Slam Dunk* and *Major*. The sport is shown realistically, the practical problems are treated in a sincere manner and

the character relationships are believable.

The life of a teenage tennis enthusiast is shown with all its ups and downs, including practical concerns of pursuing tennis as a profession. All the tough decision making and sleepless nights have been depicted sincerely. All the rivals are treated as actual characters, not one-dimensional obstacles to be passed and forgotten. No evil character or outright villain is shown. The hero wins and loses matches at a realistic rate. Even the small amounts of romantic elements shown are treated in this restrained and tasteful manner. The romances are sweet, not-sudden, organic and don't detract from the main plot.

All of this is not to say that the manga is boring. It provides its thrills through close, but realistic, matches of good tennis. And Maruo is very easy to root for because he is so believable.

Baby Steps won the prestigious Kodansha Manga Award, which is a testament to its greatness. The only small point I have a problem with is how the flow of time within the manga can be a little confusing to follow. If you want to enjoy *Baby Steps* but don't want to read hundreds of chapters, you can watch the anime which has had two seasons released so far. Overall, *Baby Steps* is an engaging and relatable manga. Even if you are not particularly a fan of tennis, the story and the craftsmanship of *Baby Steps* will draw you in.

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