

(Continued M3S1)

really strike a nerve (at one point, he spreads his arms in Christ-like fashion). In fact, old Supe baby had more dialogue in the regrettably uncinematic "Superman IV: The Quest For Peace" than in this movie. He can fly, he has determination, he is super indeed, but he is a taciturn man with no inner life - a blank automaton for the Internet and cell phone age that can be downloaded and compressed into thin air.

As for Kate Bosworth, bless her heart for trying but she is completely miscast. Again, no real personality and her brown curly hair is a gross injustice for a blonde (she seemed more alive on a recent "Tonight Show" spot than here).

Kevin Spacey is superbly evil as Lex yet he has so few scenes, and his ultimate plot to decimate America is the most foolish idea that this character has ever had (it seems he has the brains of Otis, his goofy partner from eons ago). And the Parker Posey of the 90's is gone - here, she plays Lex's girlfriend but has no spunk or attitude either. A spunkless Parker Posey?

(M4S1)

Directed by Bryan Singer, "Superman Returns" has some whiz-bang moments of awe, including Superman saving a burning plane before it crash-lands on a baseball stadium, a slow-motion shot of a bullet hitting Supe's eyeball and, well, the flying scenes are fantastic but then again, we have seen lots of flying scenes since Supe's last incarnation. But the movie is drab, indifferent, dreary and far too long (and has a scene with a poodle that will make many cringe as to its existence in this movie). This sequel has none of the verve or spice of the early Superman films, nor the excitement of even Bryan Singer's own "X-Men" movies. Christopher Reeve made us care for Superman and Clark Kent, a superhuman who wanted to be human. He had his own individual quirks, and so did Kidder's Lois. I am now in the middle of reading "It's Superman" by Tom De Haven, and it has those elements down pat. In this movie, the humanity has been peeled from the Man of Steel.

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<http://www.jerryatthemovies.com/> (M5S1)

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R3

Superman Returns (2006)

reviewed by
Michael Dequina

(M1SUB1S1)

_Superman_Returns_ (PG-13) *** (out of ****)

When it was announced that Bryan Singer would be tackling the long-in-the-works big screen return of DC Comics icon Superman, both film and comic fan alike eagerly anticipated what he would come up with--after all, this is the same filmmaker who was able to make mainstream-accessible, cinematic sense of what is arguably the most complex conventional superhero mythos, that of the X-Men. But those walking into _Superman_Returns_ to be uniquely "Bryan Singer's _Superman_" will be let down as this is more or less the sequel that 1978 _Superman_ director Richard Donner was never allowed to complete. (M1SUB1S3)

(M1SUB1S5)

This is, of course, not necessarily a bad thing, as Donner's film (and, for the most part, the 1980-81 Donner/Richard Lester hybrid sequel _Superman_II_) treated Joe Siegel and Jerry Shuster's historic creation with the respect due any literary character with such enduring appeal, not with campy condescension just because of its comic book origins. The familiar, lengthy, outer space-set main title sequence scored to the still-stirring John Williams theme announce this film as being firmly in line with those first two films, and so goes the whole of _Superman_Returns_--extremely close to, if not downright aping, the originals. After a five-year absence from earth that began shortly after the events of _II_ (1983's disastrous Richard Pryor co-starring vehicle _III_ and the unspeakable 1987 abomination _IV: The Quest for Peace_ are mercifully erased from the timeline), Superman/Kal-El/Clark Kent (Brandon Routh) once again comes crashing down to Earth, specifically at his mother's (Eva Marie Saint) farm in Smallville. Clark soon returns to Metropolis, the offices of the _Daily Planet_ and, hence, the world of his true love Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth)--but she is now not only engaged to editor Perry White's (Frank Langella) nephew Richard (James Marsden, getting far more screen time here than he did in the sadly Singer-less _X-Men: The Last Stand_), but she also has a young son (Tristan Lake Leabu). (M1SUB1S4)

(M3S2)

But those changes sound far more radical on paper than they do in execution, as from beginning to end (there's even the classic capper of Supes flying above earth), top to bottom, the tone, the style, the look (many of John Barry's original sets are reflected in Guy Hendrix Dyas' production design), the feel is Donner through and through. While the attention to consistency is remarkable--writers Michael Dougherty and Dan Harris pepper the script with a number of detailed references to those first two films--one cannot help but wish that Singer took a more distinctive spin on the material. He does introduce some God/Jesus/savior allegorical ideas that point to how

(M1
SUB1
S3)

(Continued M3S2)

creative yet intelligent and respectful he has proven to be in the past with comic book material, but those intriguing (if a bit obvious) interests take a clear back seat to paying near-slavish homage to Donner, whose most distinctive strength is his anonymous, workmanlike precision.

That latter description also kind of extends to Routh. He does a completely competent job here, even if it's quite obvious he probably was cast more for his look (Christopher Reeve meets Mark Steines) than anything else. (His voice, on the other hand, is rather disturbingly close to Tom Cruise.) That said, the jury is still out as to if he'll be a star or any good outside of these films--unlike Singer's last great find, Hugh Jackman, who in his first scenes in the original 2000 X-Men instantly announced him as a movie star, period, and not merely a star when playing the legendary character. But for now, for the purposes of this re-introduction film, his impeccable Reeve impersonation will do. Bosworth's Lois is similarly competent though her youthful appearance--even younger than her actual 23 years--makes her somewhat difficult to reconcile with Margot Kidder's brassier take in the first two films. The one cast member--nay, the one prominent member of the whole team--to bring something fairly freshly his own to the table is Kevin Spacey. While his Lex Luthor does pick up from the madcap vein of Gene Hackman's original portrayal, he brings some of his own darker edges to the part. For the first time in a major Superman feature, Luthor is both amusingly wacky *and* a believably sinister threat to the Man of Steel. The Hackman versus Spacey comparison can be summed up thusly: Hackman uses a Kryptonite block, but Spacey wields a Kryptonite shiv.

The film as a whole could have used a little more of that type of ferocious instinct, as in terms of an adventure Returns pulls out its action showstopper very early--too early--with a spectacular jet plane rescue (a sequence that should be especially phenomenal on IMAX 3-D) and then coasts its way toward its fairly low-key whisper of a conclusion. What goes on between is never boring--and how could it not be, what with the state-of-the-art effects; lavish set and production design (no mystery where the money in the megabucks budget went here); Spacey's Luthor hamming and sniping with new female sidekick Kitty Kowalski (a wonderfully dry Parker Posey); and the kick of seeing the Man of Steel simply do his Super-thing using his heat vision, cooling breath, and superhuman strength--but just when you clamor for Supes and Singer to deliver a knockout rush of blockbuster excitement, they instead settle for being merely entertaining. While that is enough to make Superman Returns an agreeable summertime diversion, it cannot help but be a bit of a let down given not so much the studio-manufactured hype (though that does count) but the anticipation by fans over the years. (M4S2)

(c)2006 Michael Dequina (M5S2)

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R4

Material Girls (2006)

reviewed by
Sam Osborn

(M1SUB1S1)

Material Girls
reviewed by Sam Osborn
rating: 1 out of 4

Director: Martha Coolidge Screenplay: John Quaintance, Jessica O'Toole, Amy Rardin Cast: Hilary Duff, Haylie Duff, Anjelica Huston MPAA Classification: PG (language and rude humor) (M1SUB1S2)

There's a moment in Material Girls when the infinitely wise and humble lawyer at the Free Legal Clinic bears down on the equally infinite stupidity of Ava Marchetta (Haylie Duff) and coolly snarls, "you're all frosting, without the cupcake." Granted, this one-liner is of no great wit or intelligence it does hold a kind of all-encompassing truth about Material Girls. Except, in saying Material Girls has as much density as a cupcake's frosting is probably giving the film a world of credit it has no business deserving. (M1SUB1S5)

(M3S1)

The gimmick of Material Girls is in the Duff sisters. Whatever film photographed behind them on the film's posters is immaterial. For all we care, this could be Hong Kong Kung Fu Fury, just as long as it stars the Duff sisters. So in the same way people go to see Snakes on a Plane just to see some actual snakes on an actual plane, people will go see Material Girls only to watch they're adolescent idols bouncing and hopping and giggling about in front of the camera. The quality of the film behind them is irrelevant; just a prettily painted canvas for a blonde hullabaloo. But for all those parents goaded into bringing their ten-year old daughter, I suppose a synopsis is appropriate. Ava and Tanzie Marchetta (Haylie and Hilary Duff) are the faces of Marchetta Facial Products. They're glistening socialites in the vane world inhabited in reality by Paris Hilton and her partying cohorts-minus the sex tapes. They're father, Victor Marchetta, passed away two years earlier and the company will soon be left in the girls' hands. But when a cut-rate newscaster breaks a scandal on Marchetta products causing cancer, the girls' stock plummets and they're left, gasp, without their credit cards. The girls must unite and disprove the accusations in order to save the image of their father. In the process of course, Ava and Tanzie must learn humility and sincerity through the conduit of their loss of funds and fortune.

(M4S1)

Director Martha Coolidge stumbles in her approach to the material. The film's intention bounces between parody and sentimentality. Sometimes it strives to ooze sympathy for its ditzy protagonists and rolls out the morals by the bushel. But other times, Coolidge ravages her characters with a volley of farcical gags. There's a happy middle-ground between the two intentions that a better director would likely find:

where the believably clueless socialites learn to interact with the similarly convincing world of middle-class American society. But Coolidge veers more towards the feel of a sitcom, sans laugh-track. Without it, the jokes fall flat. Neither of the Duffs have a sense of comic timing and the screenplay doesn't bother with helping them along. Material Girls is so woefully unfunny that not even the heaps of twelve-year girls could be heard laughing. (Continued M4S1)

Just before the film started, I mistimed my restroom break and admittedly missed the opening minute or two of the movie. I asked my girlfriend, who'd been kind enough to sit through its entirety, what I'd missed afterwards in that opening minute. She explained it to me and I felt a deep sympathy for her. She was subjected to two more minutes of Material Girls, and the thought of any more torture was physically painful to me. That's essentially the effect Material Girls has: it is physically painful to endure. (M5S3)

-www.samseescinema.com (M5S1)

Snakes on a Plane (2006)

R5

reviewed by
Sam Osborn

(M1SUB1S1)

Snakes on a Plane
reviewed by Sam Osborn
rating: 2.5 out of 4

Director: David R. Ellis Screenplay: John Heffernan, Sebastian Gutierrez Cast: Samuel L. Jackson, Bobby Cannavale MPAA Classification: R (sex, snake violence, gore, and language) (M1SUB1S2)

The strange little phenomenon of 2006 is finally here. Never has it mattered less whether or not critics approve of a movie. Despite early reports that the film was actually liked by test audiences, New Line Studios still made the decision not to allow pre-screenings for critics. Well, I for one was not to be deterred and lined up along with the group of fifteen-year old boys chanting "Snakes, Snakes, Snakes" for the midnight screening. Is it as good as we all hoped, or as terrible as we all hoped? For me there's only fun or not fun, and Snakes on a Plane unexpectedly falls somewhere in between. (M1SUB1S3)

(M3S1)

It's a tough film to pull off. A certain tone must be struck, where silly, farcical camp must meet slithery fear and story. The film can't degenerate into pure parody since the snake and plane gimmick would grow old long before credits rolled. Snakes on a Plane has to scare us and at least draw us some of the way into its outrageous tale if it wants to satisfy its rabid audiences. There is, on the other hand, the element of

(Continued M3S1)

Snakes on a Plane's default cult status. People are buying tickets to see what they believe to be a terrible flick. And there's an awkward moment as the film begins when the audience realizes that, to an extent, Snakes on a Plane wants to be taken seriously. But it's a situation where no matter how good the film actually is in a serious sense, audiences will still adore the hype and experience, and come back for second helpings.

This doesn't actually answer whether or not Snakes on a Plane is any fun, though. Well to answer the question, it is, but only kind of. Before it lifts off to cruising altitude, the film spins a yarn surrounding a notorious Los Angeles mobster tracking down a witness for the prosecution. Agent Neville Flynn (Samuel L. Jackson) is charged with the witness' protection and is trying to transfer him from Honolulu to L.A. without incident. We also get several well-spun sub-plots surrounding the other passengers aboard the infested flight. They play off the usual stereotypes, but do so with a fresh and easy humor that skims over the clichés like they're only the obligatory ingredients to a wonderful recipe. From there it's all hissing and snake-bites and the title kicks in as self-explanatory.

The comedy works fine, with Sam Jackson doing his badass thing and snakes lunging for genitalia, but it's the excitement that wanes with the running length. After you've seen one snake attack, you've pretty much seen them all. There are exceptions, like with the massive anaconda who devours a person whole, but otherwise the snake attacks quickly become nondescript. Director David R. Ellis keeps things varied, however, launching a sub-plot with the FBI rescue effort on land, following Special Agent Harris (Bobby Cannavale) as he tracks down the required anti-venoms, and little set-pieces like when Agent Flynn must find and flip the inevitable switch at the snakes' source.

And then there's the line. You know the line, we all do. The one about the motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane. That one. Well, it's there and as fine and dandy as we all expected it to be. There was a great whooping cheer as Jackson said it, loud enough to drown out his succeeding two lines. It's really a moment worth seeing the film for. But, on the whole, Jackson still doesn't exude badass to his greatest potential. In my humble but hugely partial opinion, Jackson is only a true badass under the tutelage of one Mr. Quentin Tarantino. Without him behind Jackson, there's a key element missing. That's not to say Jackson doesn't get his fair share of badass moments. My favorite is after the snake expert describes how pheromones act like a drug for the serpents. In response Jackson snorts in mock humor, "Great. Snakes on crack," and slams down the phone.

(M3S3)

Despite my occasional foray with arrogant pomposity, in general I don't consider myself to be pretentious film writer. I recommended Final Destination 3, for goodness sake. So my negativity isn't borne out of film elitism or any such nonsense. Snakes on a Plane is a mildly exciting experience, one that is hugely affected by those around you. I wouldn't recommend seeing it alone on a lazy Tuesday morning when the theatre will be empty. Go see it opening weekend, with a sold-out theatre and a group of rowdy friends. It's a bizarre and unique movie-going experience, no matter how good Snakes on a Plane actually is.

-www.samseescinema.com - (M5S1)

R6

Snakes on a Plane (2006)

reviewed by
Steve Rhodes

(M1SUB1S1)

SNAKES ON A PLANE

A film review by Steve Rhodes

Copyright 2006 Steve Rhodes

RATING (0 TO ****): *** 1/2

SNAKES ON A PLANE, by David R. Ellis (CELLULAR), is a first class B movie set in a snake-infested airplane high over the ocean. On Pacific Air Flight 121, a tough as nails FBI agent named Nelville Flynn, played with confident swagger by a perfectly cast Samuel L. Jackson, is doing his best to protect a rapidly dying group of passengers as deadly snakes are making mincemeat out of them. But, in one of the funnier movies of a dismal summer, you can put your money on Jackson to win. The only real questions are who will die first and who will be left standing when the plane touches down in L.A. (M1SUB1S2)

The only problem with SNAKES ON A PLANE has nothing to do with the movie per se but with New Line Cinema's overconfident marketing. Having convinced themselves that the intensity of the Internet buzz was enough to make the picture presold, they decided all they needed to do was to arrange for an ultrawide opening and then wait for the deluge of fans to show up. The advertising budget was reduced and the advanced screenings to critics were eliminated since both appeared superfluous to the studio for a movie with a guaranteed -- or so they thought -- big box office. The movie opened to disappointing results. The reason you might care is that this is the sort of film that is best viewed with a large and boisterous audience. When we saw it, there were only a dozen people in a theater that could hold six hundred. (M1SUB1S5)

The story opens with innocent bystander Sean Jones (Nathan Phillips) accidentally witnessing the nefarious Eddie Kim (Byron Lawson) and his gang killing an L.A. prosecutor who was on vacation in Hawaii. Agent Flynn later rescues Sean from some of Eddie's hired killers. Agent Flynn insists that the only way Sean will ever be safe is for him to accompany Flynn to L.A. to testify in the trial against Eddie. Of course, Eddie got a big surprise for the flight -- some snake stowaways who are over-stimulated by the scent-loaded leis onboard. (M2S1)

(M3S2)

In a film that is fun and funny, the snakes start taking people out before others realize the danger on the aircraft. People go about their business, not knowing of the peril the hazards under their feet. One horny couple, for example, heads to the restroom, where they plan to smoke dope and join the mile high club. In a movie that

(Continued M3S2)

never makes the mistake of taking itself too seriously, the woman is happy to take off her top for us that we can admire her store-bought breasts.

The smartest thing the producers did was to shoot for an R rated film. Reportedly their original intention was for a tamer PG-13 version. Armed with the freedom that an R gives them, the filmmakers were happy to amp up the violence, while still not turning it into some kind of gorefest. Still, some people do die quite horrendously, including ones not killed by hissing reptiles. One guy, for example, gets impaled in the eye by a woman's high heel in a stampede caused by snake pandemonium.

The humans do get their revenge in frequently humorous ways. An apparently gay flight attendant pops one snake in the microwave and tells it, "Now, who's your daddy, bitch!"

Julianna Margulies, the long-time head nurse on "ER," plays Claire Miller, the head stewardess on the flight. As the death toll mounts, the plane is left with only a one-handed copilot -- a snake incapacitated one of his arms -- to fly the plane home though horrible storms. Claire asks Rick (David Koechner) if he is capable of flying them to safety with just a single hand on the controls. The ever-raunchy Rick gives her a confident smile and informs her, "Hey Baby, you'd be amazed at what a guy can do with only one hand." (M2S1)

As the plane approaches California and the problems appear to be resolved, you can trust movie logic to throw many more roadblocks in their way before they are completely safe and sound. (M4S1)

SNAKES ON A PLANE is easily the best popcorn movie of the summer.

SNAKES ON A PLANE runs a well paced 1:45. It is rated R for "language, a scene of sexuality and drug use, and intense sequences of terror and violence" and would be acceptable for most teenagers. (M4S2)

My son Jeffrey, age 17, gave it *** 1/2, saying that he found it campy fun. He liked the way they went with the R rating. He remarked that he was glad they only chose one well-known actor since that kept you guessing about who would die and who live. His girlfriend Yasmin, also 17, gave it ***, saying that it was a lot of fun and really trippy. (M5S3)

The film is playing in nationwide release now in the United States. In the Silicon Valley, it is showing at the AMC theaters, the Century theaters and the Camera Cinemas.

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(M5S1)

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R7

Eight Below (2006)

reviewed by
Steve Rhodes

(M1SUB1S1)

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EIGHT BELOW

A film review by Steve Rhodes

Copyright 2006 Steve Rhodes

RATING (0 TO ****): *** 1/2

(M1SUB1S2)

EIGHT BELOW, by Walt Disney Pictures, is a thrilling, old-fashioned animal adventure that ranks with the best of such classic Disney films. Animal lovers everywhere will absolutely adore this movie. And, even if you've never even had a pet or wanted one, this gripping story will have you frequently on the edge of your seat. Although loosely based on the same true story that inspired the 1983 Japanese film, NANKYOKU MONOGATARI, EIGHT BELOW barely mentions this fact, instead choosing to let its script work on its own rather than using the true story crutch.

(M1SUB1S5)

Although the stars of the production are the very emotive canine actors with the magnificent scenery as their supporting cast, the human actors do a fine job playing third fiddle to the dogs and the view. Paul Walker, usually the epitome of blandness, turns in one of his better performances as Gerry Shepherd, an Antarctic dogsled driver. Gerry spends six months every year transporting NSF scientists over the frozen earth. During the long winter, he is sent home since nothing can go in or out during that hostile season, making his services unnecessary.

(M2S1)

The love -- or more precisely the loves -- of Gerry's life are his eight trusty dogs who pull his sled. You'll fall instantly in love with each of them too, but I think you'll be hard pressed not to like Max, the blue-eyed youngster of the bunch, best.

When Gerry is called upon to risk his and his dogs' lives on a mission to find a Mercury meteorite late in the season when the ice is especially thin, he reluctantly agrees. Bruce Greenwood plays the scientist. The other main human actors are Moon Bloodgood, who plays the pilot and the love interest, and Jason Biggs, who plays the cartographer and the funny sidekick. You can safely ignore them. As I said, this isn't their movie. Director Frank Marshall correctly puts the emphasis where it should be with the animals and their environment. This is particularly obvious since the only time the movie ever meanders is a needlessly long episode set back in the states.

(M3S2)

A series of misadventures causes the humans to have to leave the dogs behind, as the worst winter in twenty-five years sets in. Since Gerry thinks they will be able to fly back in a few hours, he carefully chains up the dogs outside. The rest of the movie is punctuated by updates on how long our canine friends have had to fend for themselves in a dangerous and inhospitable terrain. The periodic titles read, "Days On Their Own:" -- pause -- the ever increasing number. (M2S1)

(M3S2)

The animals' mesmerizing story is alternately sad, uplifting, funny and terrifying. There is one particularly sad moment, rivaling the death of Bambi's mother, and another scary one that had me jump more than at any so-called scary movie. Although a little tyke sitting on our front row got frightened, I think most kids will be able handle the film since they will be at one with nature and the dogs.

As the story moves toward the conclusion, the only two questions remaining are how long it will take for the crew to return and how many of the dogs, if any, will still be among the living. Suffice it to say that you're going to need lots of tissue for the evitable tears of joy and sorrow. And, when you exit the theater, you are going to feel more at one with nature and with man's best friend.

EIGHT BELOW runs 1:50. It is rated PG for "some peril and brief mild language" and would be acceptable for kids around 5 and up. (M4S2)

The film opens nationwide in the United States on Friday, February 17, 2006. In the Silicon Valley, it will be showing at the AMC theaters, the Century theaters and the Camera Cinemas. (M5S3)

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R8

Eight Below (2006)

reviewed by
David N. Butterworth

(M1SUB1S1)

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EIGHT BELOW

A film review by David N. Butterworth

Copyright 2006 David N. Butterworth

** (out of ****)

Around this time next year, when the nominations for the 79th Academy Awards are announced, don't be surprised if the family-friendly Disney flick "Eight Below" picks up eight nods: seven for Best Supporting Actor--Max, Buck, Shadow, Shorty, Old Jack, and the twins Dewey and Truman (or at least the two dozen or so animal "actors" that portray them) and one for Best Supporting Actress (Maya).

Lassie, eat your heart out. (M1SUB2S1)
(M1SUB1S2)

For the dogs are the reason to suffer "Eight Below," a reference as much to our octet of sub-equatorial Huskie heroes as the un-dogly (sic.) temperatures they experience down there at bottom of the world. It's an unremarkable film, largely, but

(Continued M1SUB1S2)

one that nevertheless lives and breathes on the strength of its south polar protagonists with their doggy derring-do-do.

Movie dogs have been upstaging their human counterparts for decades, of course, from the sublime Rin Tin Tin through Lassie to the ridiculous Scooby-Doo. And Hollywood sure has a fondness for bracing, snow-covered survival stories featuring these courageous canines-- movies such as "Balto" and "White Fang" spring to mind (it's also hard to forget Cuba Gooding, Jr.'s "bone"-headed performance in 2002's "Snow Dogs," try as we might). Which positions "Eight Below" quite nicely in the dogged scheme of things, itself yet another Hollywood remake of a smaller Japanese film nobody saw ("Nankyoku Monogatari"), both inspired by yet another true-life adventure story (although the actual incident wound up with a slightly more downbeat finale, survival statistics- wise). (M1SUB1S3)

(M3S1)

Paul Walker is the oddly human star of this Antarctic saga, a National Science Foundation research guide who's required to ferry a pushy geologist (played by Bruce Greenwood) to a remote, mountainous region in search of a rare meteorite. The only way in is by dog sled but as luck would have it Gerry Shepard (Walker) has an eager half dozen Siberian huskies at the ready, plus a pair of gutsy Malamutes, and they set off, unaware that the storm of the century is about to hit. When it does, Gerry and his team are forced to return and evacuate their base camp, leaving the bridled dogs behind.

It's almost six months before Gerry, Greenwood's scientist, Gerry's off-again, on-again girlfriend (Moon Goodblood, she of Korean, Irish and Dutch descent), and the comic cartographer interest ("Loser"'s Jason Biggs) can return to see if there's any chance the dogs survived the harsh, unforgiving winter. (M2S1)

Producer-turned-sometime-director Frank Marshall ("Congo") offers up spectacular frozen footage of the endless tundra one minute and "dramatic" human folderol the next, accenting both (fortunately) by plenty of scenes of the noble dogs learning to survive on their own. All of humanity's finest traits and emotions are on display in "Eight Below" and ironically more so whenever the two-legged performers are off-screen: teamwork, leadership, selflessness, intelligence, love and compassion for a fallen comrade, bravery, strength, and determination. It's too bad the A.K.C. doesn't have its own awards show! (M3S1)

On the parental guidance side of things, "Eight Below" is longer than it needs to be and there's a seriously scary scene involving a humongous leopard seal (so keep your little ones distracted when you first see the dead orca). If, on the other hand, numbers are more your thing then the film scores a dramatic shutout:

Dogs 8, Humans 0. (M4S1)

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(M5S2)

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (2006)

R9reviewed by
Sam Osborn

(M1SUB1S1)

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest
reviewed by Sam Osborn
rating: 3.0 out of 4

(M1SUB1S2)

Director: Gore Verbinski Screenplay: Ted Elliott, Terry Rossio Cast: Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley MPAA Classification: PG-13 (intense sequences of adventure violence, including frightening images)

(M1SUB1S5)

More, more, more seems to be the theme running through Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest. There's more adventure, more violence, more pirates, and more myth. Not to mention that two and a half hour running length. But while Superman Returns may have dragged some in its 150 minutes, Pirates hurtles along at a pace only expected from the offspring of a Disneyland theme-ride, rarely slowing for piddling bits of nonsense like, oh say, story. Of course, story's not the point of these flicks and it surely doesn't have to be. There's entertainment enough to be had without all the other hodgepodge. And Pirates 2, for all its expansion, manages to dodge common sequelitis pitfalls. It doesn't overdose on a memorable character from the original (cough, Matrix Revolutions, cough) or over-broaden it's scope (cough, Matrix Reloaded, cough). Dead Man's Chest is a continuation of the original Pirates adventure, just with a couple extra unmarked sails tacked onto its deck. (M1SUB1S2)

(M1SUB1S4)

The plot has something to do with ole' Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp, of course) and his debt to Davy Jones (Bill Nighy). Debts, as we've all learned by now, are not things Mr. Sparrow is most proficient at repaying. The Dead Man's Chest factors in as it holds Mr. Jones' beating heart, which was ravaged by the likes of a lady whom he loved in the past. The English Navy blowhards also seem to be after the chest, and blackmail William Turner (Orlando Bloom) to seek out Capt. Jack's magic compass, which supposedly points toward the treasure. Held in a cell is Will's fianč, Elizabeth Swan (Kiera Knightley), under charges of assisting Capt. Jack in the franchise's last swashbuckler. What it boils down to is a mottled mess of a chase to find the key to Davey Jones' chest, and avoiding his gargantuan beast, the Kraken.

(M3S2)

The myth itself wrings deeper than the original's, with Davey Jones and his seafood cohorts rendered with an unholy amount of CGI goodness to make them squirm convincingly in all their scaly, slippery evil. But the plot doesn't hold much water, same as the first, though plot was never the point. As long as it paints a tastily mythological backdrop for our pirates to plunder, we're kept smiling. And even though the picture has all the weight of a paperclip, the franchise has at least matured since it's last time around. The mood has thickened and no longer can we tell that the film is a shameless translation of its Disneyland ride. Writers Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio take efforts to develop each of our three heroes separately, using individual

(Continued M3S2)

sub-plots to fill in the otherwise empty molds left dry from the original. Will Turner has a family reunion with his father (Stellan Skarsgard), enslaved by Davy Jones and appearing as though he's slowly evolving into a starfish. Will's fiancé, Ms. Swan, escapes from her cell and hides as a stowaway on a trade vessel. And Jack, of course still functioning as the star of the show, develops his slimier persona with delectable cowardice and deception. Ironical that the teenagers of America have chosen Mr. Sparrow as their most prized character in film. Oh, wait, that honor instead belongs to Napoleon Dynamite. Perhaps we should be nervous about our country's future?

Anyway, along with the characters the adventure is also thickened heartily; though probably not by consequence of the writing, but instead because of the greatly inflated budget. Our friends are volleyed about the seas, facing the enormous sea monster, the Kraken, whose plunger-like tentacles crumple vessels like copy-paper. Swordplay is more indulgent too, with Verbinski going so far as to mount a chivalric swordfight inside a huge, rolling waterwheel as it bounces along the island's foliage. Verbinski juggles these stunts with ease, proving once again his filmmaking versatility. If you'll remember all the way back to last October (I know, in Hollywood-time nine months is an epoch) Verbinski made a quiet, gloomy little character study called *The Weather Man*. And before that, Verbinski also directed *The Ring* and Captain Jack's first adventure in 2003. Yup, this guy's the real deal. In the waterwheel sequence, Verbinski chooses not to succumb to any mere CGI trickery, and mounts a camera on the wheel's axis to show that at one point he forced Johnny Depp and Orlando Bloom to swordfight on a giant spinning wooden wheel. And he's more artistic than your typical Brett Ratner-esque director, finding a visual aesthetic perfect for a pirate's tale.

But art and pretentious critic fodder aside, *Dead Man's Chest* is great entertainment. It's rich and exciting and chock-full of Captain Jack-isms for high schoolers to repeat over and over again. And the life of pirates is still a chunk of history that Hollywood has been unwilling to bite into for a while. *Pirates of the Caribbean*, for all its feathery, lightweight fun, gorges on this chunk and keeps us hooked on the adventure, waiting along with all the local eighth and ninth graders next year for the midnight showing of Captain Jack's trilogy capper. (M4S1)

-www.samseescinema.com (M5S1)

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (2006)

R10

reviewed by (M1SUB1S1)
Michael Dequina

Pirates_of_the_Caribbean:_Dead_Man's_Chest_ (PG-13) *** (out of *****)
(M1SUB1S5)

Expectations for the first Pirates_of_the_Caribbean_ film, 2003's The_Curse_of_the_Black_Pearl_, were understandably low--after all, its dubious source material was a theme park ride, of all things--but director Gore Verbinski and scripters Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio managed to come up with an entertaining, if

(Continued MISUB1S5)

overlong, throwback swashbuckler whose most distinct innovation was its old-fashioned style. Distinctly fashion-forward, on the other hand, was the film's ultimate ace in the hole: Johnny Depp's indelibly eccentric work as rogue pirate Captain Jack Sparrow, which made the film an even more jovial jaunt than it otherwise would have been.

M3S2

Depp's Capt. Jack hasn't mellowed his madness the slightest bit in Dead Man's Chest, the second of a now-planned trilogy, and while his performance still gives this film the film a kooky kick all its own, there is none of that out-of-left-field shock element attached to it; audiences are now not only expecting but looking forward to more wacky Jackie. But Verbinski and the returning Elliott and Rossio find other ways to surprise. Not that there isn't plenty of what audiences want and expect; the trio of Jack, dashing hero Will Turner (Orlando Bloom, regaining his footing after Elizabethtown), and plucky heroine Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley, back to delivering dialogue through clenched teeth after her Oscar-nominated Pride & Prejudice turn) again take to the seas for another adventure, this time to search for the "dead man's chest" of the title, which contains the beating heart of the legendary ruler of the sea Davy Jones (Bill Nighy), to whom Jack owes a blood debt. Along the way, there's all manner of swashbuckling swordfighting that one comes to expect in--once again--a somewhat bloated two-hour-plus run time.

(M2S1)

Verbinski finds giddy new ways of staging the mayhem, though, and an antic Looney Tunes sensibility amps up the two key action set pieces to even greater crowd-pleasing levels. But he doesn't rest on his popularity-proven laurels; with the character of Davy Jones, Verbinski and his visual effects team break startling new ground. Jones and the crew of his otherworldly ship The Flying Dutchman bear all the ravages of years of undersea damnation--that is, acquiring certain aquatic qualities--and the CG "makeup" done to bring the likes Jones's tentacled, squid-like head to life defies accurate description much like Depp's performance in the first film. While computer generated, the effects are remarkably tactile, the most meticulous digital approximation of practical FX to date. But considering such razzle dazzle is expected from big budget blockbuster follow-ups, the most surprising trick up Verbinski and the writers' sleeve is that this is not a typical sequel rehash but a rather ambitious and largely successful attempt at making a continuation of a larger story, with the film opening with events fully in progress and closing with not only loose narrative ends still dangling but the characters at more precarious points in a less predictable overall arc--not exactly what one ever expected from a series of films that is, after all, based on a theme park attraction.

(M3S2)

(M4S1)

But for whatever unusual ambitions, Dead Man's Chest, like its predecessor, also doesn't lose sight of those just-for-fun origins; while Verbinski still could stand to employ some tighter editing (there's really no detectable reason why these occasionally draggy films can't have a half-hour shaved off), it's the rollicking ride that keeps the audience coming back for more--and will keep them coming back for more when At World's End concludes the trilogy next summer.

