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from the April 03, 1998 edition

The Monitor Movie Guide

Staff
BOSTON— Reviews in this weekly guide are written by Monitor critic David Sterritt (the first set of '+' marks in each review) unless otherwise noted. Ratings and comments by the Monitor staff panel (the second set of '+' marks in each review) reflect the sometimes diverse views of at least three other viewers. Information on violence, drugs, sex/nudity, and profanity is compiled by the panel.

- ++++ Excellent
- +++1/2 Very Good
- +++ Good
- ++ 1/2 Average
- ++ Fair
- +1/2 Poor
- + Worst

New Releases

LOST IN SPACE (PG-13)

Director: Stephen Hopkins. With William Hurt, Gary Oldman, Mimi Rogers, Matt LeBlanc, Heather Graham. (125 min.)

++ High-tech version of the '60s television series about a family whose intergalactic mission goes astray when a nasty stowaway sabotages their spaceship. William Hurt and Mimi Rogers are a bit more believable than Guy Williams and June Lockhart, their small-screen predecessors in the main roles, but most of the movie is an uneasy blend of shallow psychology, campy comedy, and perfunctory action episodes.

Sex/Nudity/Drugs: Some sexual innuendo. Violence: About 17 instances of laser shooting and fights against monster spiders. Profanity: Minimal.

MEET THE DEEDLES (PG)

Director: Steve Boyum. With Paul Walker, Steve Van Wormer, Dennis Hopper. (90 min.)

u Rebellious twin-brother surfers are sent to summer camp, and wind up posing as rangers at Yellowstone National Park, assigned to rid the place of destructive prairie dogs set loose by a deranged former employee. Redeeming moments are scarce in this Disney disaster, which has a plot so ridiculous that even children may find their intelligence insulted. By Mariah Gardner

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NO LOOKING BACK (R)

Director: Edward Burns. With Edward Burns, Jon Bon Jovi, Lauren Holly, Blythe Danner. (96 min.)

+++ After the disappointments of "The Brothers McMullen" and "She's the One," this vaunted independent filmmaker creates an absorbing, atmospheric tale of working-class suburbanites coping with lives far less glowing than their dreams. Burns also gives a star-quality performance at the head of a finely chosen cast.

Currently in Release

THE BIG LEBOWSKI (R)

Director: Joel Coen. With Jeff Bridges, John Goodman, Steve Buscemi, Julianne Moore, John Turturro. (117 min.)

+++ Hired to deliver a ransom in a kidnapping scheme, two bowling-league buddies decide to abscond with the money themselves, landing themselves in a heap of complicated trouble. There are many delirious laughs in the Coen brothers' sprawling crime-comedy, but the heroes - a dope-smoking relic of the '60s and a gun-toting Vietnam vet - aren't exactly role models, and beware of some outbursts of violence and other scruffy material.

+++1/2 Hilarious, quirky, colorful.

Sex/Nudity: Brief nudity. Violence: Fistfighting with some biting. Profanity: Non-stop (319) profanities and crudities, a Movie Guide record. Drugs: Constant drinking and smoking marijuana.

CHARACTER (Not rated)

Director: Mike van Diem. With Jan Decleir, Fedja van Hut, Betty Schuurman. (117 min.)

+++ Winner of the Oscar as best foreign-language film, this Dutch drama focuses on a young man struggling for personal and professional success in Rotterdam of the 1920s while waging an emotional war against his distant, domineering father. The movie steers a steady course between realistic drama and Kafkaesque delirium, handling both skillfully.

EVEREST (IMAX, Not rated)

Director: David Breashears. With Robert Schauer, Araceli Segarra, Ed Viesturs, Sumiyo Tsuzuki. (50 min.)

++++ "Just plain breathtaking." That's how an adviser to the producers of "Everest" accurately describes the 80-foot-IMAX screen movie portraying a 1996 climb up the world's tallest peak. The story is told through the personal lives of the climbers, and though the dangers are made clear, the film doesn't become gruesome. Much is made of the task of lugging a 42-pound IMAX camera up the 29,028-foot peak. It provides panoramic views of dramatic beauty, as well as a sampling of the grueling step-by-step climb. Some of the more dramatic shots are taken the easy way - from a helicopter. By David Francis

GREASE (PG)

Director: Randal Kleiser. With John Travolta, Olivia Newton-John, Stockard Channing. (110 min.)

++ Twentieth-anniversary reissue of the popular but utterly unmemorable musical about teenage life in the '50s era.

+++ Energetic, fun, lively.

Sex/Nudity: Heavy sexual innuendo. Violence: Threat of violence between T-Birds and Scorpions. Profanity: Mild profanity. Drugs: Several scenes of drinking - wine at a slumber party and spiked punch at the dance.

JAMES ELLROY: DEMON DOG OF AMERICAN CRIME FICTION (NOT RATED)

Director: Reinhard Jud. With James Ellroy, Phil Tintner. (90 min.)

+++ Energetic documentary about the popular author of "L.A. Confidential" and other books. He talks with the pungent, punchy tone that surges through scruffy novels like "Because the Night" and "Killer on the Road," but his monologues reveal much about contemporary American life. Contains explicit views of real-life crime.

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK (PG-13)

Director: Randall Wallace. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Jeremy Irons, John Malkovich, Gabriel Byrne. (132 min.)

+++1/2 Musketeer revolutionaries in 1662 Paris plot to replace an arrogant king with his forgotten twin brother, who was condemned to life in an iron mask. Chivalry and camaraderie are dominating themes in this powerful, exciting drama. Although DiCaprio is effective as both brothers, the superb supporting cast lends the story's most touching moments. By Mariah Gardner

+++ Lively, stylish, great story line.

Sex/Nudity: The king beds female subjects; one scene with male nudity (from the rear). Violence: Swordplay and musketry, but with little gore. Profanity: Two mildly crude expressions. Drugs: Four scenes involving alcohol.

MOON OVER BROADWAY (NOT RATED)

Directors: Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker. With Carol Burnett, Philip Bosco, Ken Ludwig, Tom Moore. (98 min.)

+++ Lively, funny documentary about a cast and crew bringing a musical comedy from the drawing board to the Broadway stage, with previews in Boston and plenty of suspense along the way. An entertaining eye-ful from two of the finest nonfiction filmmakers around.

+++ Insightful, engaging, informative.

Sex/Nudity/Violence/Profanity/Drugs: None.

MR. NICE GUY (PG-13)

Director: Sammo Hung. With Jackie Chan, Richard Norton, Gabrielle Fitzpatrick, Miki Lee, Karen McLymont (113 min.)

+++ Jackie Chan is more Fred Astaire than Bruce Lee; his dance-like combat and goofy humor make this film entertaining. A minimal plot involving stolen cocaine is the excuse for nonstop chase sequences, paced like a Road Runner cartoon choreographed by Twyla Tharp. An overblown ending is the only real downside. By James Turner

+++ Creative, humorous, well-crafted.

Sex/Nudity: Accidental breast grope. Violence: Long chase and fighting scenes; some cartoon-like violence. Profanity: Minimal Drugs: Social drinking.

THE NEWTON BOYS (PG-13)

Director: Richard Linklater. With Matthew McConaughey, Ethan Hawke, Skeet Ulrich, Julianna Margulies, Vincent D'Onofrio, Dwight Yoakam. (121 min.)

++ Meandering yarn based on the real-life exploits of a gang that robbed an enormous number of banks between 1919 and 1924. The cast is full of likable faces, but the story rings few interesting changes on its familiar genre.

+ Dull, slow, waste of time.

Sex/Nudity: No nudity; scenes of "skinny dipping." Violence: Some police beatings of prisoners. Profanity: Minimal
Drugs: Social drinking.

A PRICE ABOVE RUBIES (R)

Director: Boaz Yakin. With Rene Zellweger, Christopher Eccleston, Glenn Fitzgerald, Allen Payne, Julianna Margulies. (120 min.)

++ An orthodox Jewish woman comes into conflict with her devout husband by longing for more independence than their highly traditional community is prepared to allow. The drama etches an intermittently sharp portrait of a subculture caught between a rich religious legacy and a changing contemporary world, but it's marred by digressions and touches of unneeded sensationalism.

PRIMARY COLORS (R)

Director: Mike Nichols. With John Travolta, Emma Thompson, Adrian Lester, Billy Bob Thornton, Kathy Bates. (140 min.)

+++ Smart, colorful adaptation of the 1996 novel about a Southern governor whose presidential campaign is dogged by one sexual rumor, allegation, and scandal after another. Travolta and Thompson are excellent as the candidate and his wife; Lester makes a sensational debut as an African-American aide; and Elaine May's screenplay paints a vivid portrait of the hero who's also an utterly sincere "people person" determined to help the little folks ignored by business-as-usual politicians.

+++ Thought-provoking, well-acted, too long.

Sex/Nudity: No nudity, but there are sex jokes, one brief lesbian kiss, and it's implied that the main character sleeps around. Violence: One suicide and a couple of slaps on the face. Profanity: More than 60 expletives. Drugs: Some social drinking .

THE PROPOSITION (R)

Director: Lesli Linka Glatter. With Kenneth Branagh, Madeleine Stowe, William Hurt. (114 min.)

++ In upper-crust Boston of the 1930s, an infertile husband hires a young man to impregnate his wife, a successful author who's convinced this arrangement will deepen their happy marriage. Narrated by a Roman Catholic priest with his own ethical dilemmas to face, the movie treats moral issues with welcome seriousness until it bogs down in melodrama and emotionalism in the second half.

TITANIC (PG-13)

Director: James Cameron. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Billy Zane, Bill Paxton, Kathy Bates. (197 min.)

+++ The great ship's legendary voyage, as recalled by an elderly woman who fell in love with a young scamp and rejected her pompous fianc in the hours before the awful iceberg struck. The first half drags a bit, but the adventure scenes are exciting and the visual effects are as dazzling as Hollywood's most advanced technology can make them.

++++ Awesome epic, riveting, tragic.

Sex/Nudity: Brief, fairly explicit sex. Nude woman sketched by artist. Violence: One suicide. Suffering, fighting as ship sinks; gunfire wounds two people. Profanity: Several dozen four-letter words. Drugs: Frequent scenes (27) of drinking and/or smoking.

WILD THINGS (R)

Director: James McNaughton. With Matt Dillon, Neve Campbell, Kevin Bacon, Bill Murray, Daphne Rubin

Vega, Theresa Russell, Robert Wagner. (113 min.)

++ Little is what it seems in this tricky thriller about a Florida guidance counselor charged with raping the daughter of a former girlfriend. Contains extremely graphic sex and many twists that are unpredictable but not very compelling.

++ Steamy, predictable, unusual.

Sex/Nudity: Scenes of full-frontal male nudity and several sex scenes with nudity. Violence: Graphic violence, including several fights and shootings. Profanity: Excessive profanity. Drugs: Five scenes of high school drinking and drug use.

Counterpoint!

THE BIG LEBOWSKI (R)

3-1/2 stars? For "The Big Lebowski"? Ha! "Big Le Bore" would be a better moniker. Dialogue? More than two profanities per minute. "Big Le Foul Mouth." Hold your ears. Action? Yes, but dude, it's all so ... meaningless. The Coen brothers do good stuff, like "Raising Arizona." But avoid this one, even if it's free. It merits a rating of DUD. Or ZZZ. Go bowling instead. By Katherine Dillin, Monitor panel member.

New Movie Guide Feature Begins Today

Movies stir our readers. When the Monitor gave a lofty rating to "The Big Lebowski," one reader decided to go see it. He later wrote that he had "never heard filth like that in the military or the back streets of Chicago." He walked out after 30 minutes. Members of the Monitor movie panel provide star ratings for most movies, along with Monitor critic David Sterritt, but even they frequently disagree. When "The Edge" got three stars from panel members (we average the votes), one panelist was dismayed. "Badly flawed," she said. For example, when Anthony Hopkins, lost in the Arctic wilderness, lights a campfire, she notes that the firewood had been cut with a saw! To give readers and panelists an outlet for contrary views, today we launch a new feature, "Counterpoint!" You'll find it near the bottom of this page. If you would like to sound off about any movie or review, we'd be happy to hear from you - in 70 words or less! Send your views to "Counterpoint!" c/o The Christian Science Monitor, One Norway St., Boston, MA 02115, or you may e-mail to: parneyl@csp.com

Out on Video

(In stores April 7)

BOOGIE NIGHTS (R)

(Drama)

++ Director: Paul Thomas Anderson. With Mark Wahlberg, Julianne Moore, Burt Reynolds. (152 min.)

+++ Thought-provoking, well-acted, definitely not appropriate for children.

RED CORNER (R)

(Drama)

++ Director: Jon Avnet. With Richard Gere, Bai Ling, Bradley Whitford, Byron Mann. (119 min.)

++ Slow, intense, sincere.

SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET (PG-13)

(Drama)

+++ Director: Jean-Jacques Annaud. With Brad Pitt, David Thewlis, B.D. Wong. (139 min.)

++++ Beautiful scenery, thought-provoking, moving.

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