

New Movies

'Tex' Marks Departure for Disney

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — Disney Studios has been attempting in recent years to shake its innocuous image and produce films that are entertaining but, nevertheless, reflect more accurately the complex and troubled times in which we live. The recent sci-fi thriller "Tron" was a radical attempt in this direction. "Tex" (Disney-B.V) is a much more conservative departure from the past, and the results are far happier.

Based upon a novel of S.E. Hinton, the popular writer of fiction for young people, "Tex," which marks the debut of director Tim Hunter, is for the most part the story of a relationship between two quite different brothers, growing up without parents on a rundown ranch outside Tulsa, Okla.

The younger of the two, Tex (Matt Dillon), is 15, an amiable boy who has difficulty in thinking ahead for more than five minutes at a time, and who preserves a wholly unwarranted optimism towards their widowed father, a rodeo rider who is gone for long periods of time during which he rarely writes or sends any money.

His older brother, Mason (Jim Metzler), has become a cynic by force of hard ex-

perience. Mason grinds away at his studies and his basketball playing because he realizes that his only hope of escape from Bixby, Okla., is a basketball scholarship to Indiana University. If events seem to make little impression upon Tex, they affect Mason too much, and he has the ulcer to prove it.

The nub of the plot has to do with Mason's selling Tex's beloved horse — horses are one of the few things Tex takes seriously; girls, too, but they confuse him and horses don't — and Tex's attempt at revenge by hiding the favorable reply that Indiana U sends to his brother.

Matt Dillon, who has appeared to no great advantage in a number of unmemorable films to date, comes into his own here. He creates an altogether believable portrayal of a good-natured, sensitive, but somewhat erratic and feckless teenager.

Just as effective in a far less spectacular role is Jim Metzler, who expresses very well his affection for his brother and his distaste for his foibles. Meg Tilly is also very good as the sharp-tongued daughter of a wealthy rancher who feels herself drawn to Tex but realizes that their relationship has nowhere to go. Ben Johnson makes a good contribution as Miss

Tilly's stern father, and Bill McKinney is just right as the brother's loving but errant father.

The flaws of "Tex" — aside from the two principals being far too old for their roles — have to do mostly with the Charlie-Haas script and, most likely, the novel upon which it is based.

The dialogue is consistently good, but the story is overloaded with incidents, two of which are highly melodramatic and have Dillon attempting to wrest a gun away from an assailant. Miss Hinton's novel apparently touched most of the bases of teen-age travail, including the menace of drugs, class distinctions, and the pangs of first love. This might go in a novel, but in a movie — one, moreover, that makes no attempt to be profound — the burden is too heavy and the loose ends abundant.

The virtues of "Tex," however, outweigh its flaws. It's consistently entertaining and sometimes moving. If you don't go with your expectations blown out of proportion by extravagant blurbs, you should enjoy it.

"Tex" has some jocular references to sex, a restrained scene of teen-age fumbling in the same area, reference to drugs, and some extremely brief and moderate violence. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-11 —

adolescent and adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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Father Bruce Ritter

I WISH I UNDERSTOOD IT BETTER

There's a mystery here—in this story—of grace and sin. I wish I understood it better than I do. Let me tell you what happened so you can try to understand it too.

I never met him although he tried several times to see me, just dropping over, taking a chance I'd be in the Center. My staff tells me he's a big man, inches over six feet. A couple of times he sent over runaway girls too young to work for him, and once, a really sick youngster. He owns and operates the newest and raunchiest peep show and brothel in town just across the street: beautiful girls—25 cents a look. Over a dozen prostitutes work the place (average time with a john is 7 to 20 minutes, for \$20.00). The place is open 18 hours a day.

Last week about three in the morning he came over again carrying a milk bottle filled with quarters, dimes and nickels. "This is for your kids," he said. "We like what you're doing. I'm in a bad business but I don't like kids getting hurt. We collected this money from the girls and their johns for your kids." He handed the milk bottle filled with money to Peter, the young and by now bug-eyed, slack-jawed staff person on duty and walked away. "God bless you," he said. It came to \$84.20. The next morning my staff told me what had happened. I was furious, I was outraged. I also laughed till I cried. Take it back, right away, I said. Tell him no thanks. Thanks a lot, but no thanks—tell him we appreciate the thought but no thanks. Thank him for sending the kids over though.

I thought that was the end of it—just a bizarre incident to add to the many hundreds of others. But he came back the

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House/UNDER 21, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

next day dressed in a beautiful white silk suit, grabbed a broom to help Peter sweep the sidewalks. "He didn't have the right to do that, that Priest. He didn't have the right to refuse a gift to God. I don't hurt anybody. I've got four kids. I got to make a living. I cleaned up my place, made the girls stop stealing and ripping off the johns. I go to church. I tithe. I gave the money to another church." He went back across the street, got into his gold Eldorado and drove away.

The more I thought about it, the more the inexplicable mystery of sin and grace and love, of lying and caring, oppressed and obsessed me. I think he tried to do a good thing. Yet what he does across the street is clearly evil. "God bless you," he said. He gives 10% of his "income" to charity. He runs a low-class brothel yet he cares about runaway kids and people who help them. And, he wants very much to be understood.

He owns and operates the newest and raunchiest peep show and brothel in town.

I can't get that "God bless you" out of my mind. I couldn't have said it back to him: the words would have stuck in my throat. I hate what he does. I do my best to close him down. But I have this awful suspicion that he was sincere. I wouldn't worry so much if he were clearly a flaming hypocrite. But that "God bless you"... I think he really meant it. And my mind reels and I can't understand.

I know a lot about mixed motives. I'm the world's expert on mixed motives—my own—trying to disentangle the good from the evil, to unravel the knotted skein of the worthy and the unworthy, to pry loose the clutching impure fingers from the throat of my better self. The weeds keep growing with the wheat and suddenly I am overwhelmed by my kinship with this man, for we are both sinners hoping for the mercy of God and His forgiveness.

I still can't take his money—as the Scripture says: "The sacrifice of an offering unjustly acquired is a mockery; the gifts of impious men are unacceptable"—even though 95 more kids came in yesterday. And 72 of them needed a bed; the rest, food and counselling (that usually means comforting). It's the help of people like you that keeps us going. We are your hands and heart and love for these kids. That's what the Lord said.

Pray for us all the time, please. We pray for you. Pray for the guy across the street too. I wish I understood it better. Please help our kids if you can.

I, too, want to extend my hands and heart and love to the homeless and runaway boys and girls. Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____

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