

'King' is old-fashioned adventure



NC News

Nick Nolte leads a troupe of Borneo tribesmen fighting against the Japanese in the World War II adventure "Farewell to the King."

By Judith Trojan
NC News

"Farewell to the King" (Orion Pictures) is a credible, entertaining epic set in the exotic jungles of Borneo during the final months of World War II.

Director John Milius ("The Wind and the Lion") adapted his screenplay from the prize-winning novel by Pierre Schoendoerffer and cast Nick Nolte as fiery American soldier Learoyd, who survived Japanese slaughter at Corregidor only to end up an Army deserter and the adopted "king" of central Borneo's head-hunting natives.

Learoyd's contented rule is disrupted by the arrival of British Special Forces officer Capt. Fairbourne (Nigel Havers), nicknamed Botanist, who is sent to rally the natives into battle against the approaching Japanese. At first opposed to turning his innocent people into gun-toting fighting machines, Learoyd comes to respect Botanist, and the two men fight side by side

with the tribe to squash the Japanese death squads.

Learoyd's singular devotion to his native wife (Marilyn Tokuda) and child is admirable, as is his futile battler to protect the dignity of the Borneo tribes from Japanese and Allied desecration. Milius leaves little doubt about who the true savages are in this historic microcosm.

With his flying mane of blond hair and rough, gravelly voice, Nolte looks and sounds the part of a fabled white king of Borneo natives. Havers is suitably British as Learoyd's mouthpiece in the "civilized" world, and the native actors and extras are effective as window-dressing.

"Farewell to the King" is uncomplicated, old-fashioned entertainment reminiscent of but hardly equal to the classic John Huston epic "The Man Who Would Be King."

Due to some intense battle carnage and minimal rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Slaves of New York'

With "Slaves of New York" (Tri-Star), director James Ivory tries and fails to satirize successfully the contemporary downtown Manhattan art scene.

Adapted by writer Tama Janowitz from her popular collection of short stories, the film works overtime to reproduce the chaotic glitz of the post-Modernist-New Wave subculture. Clothes, hats, hairdos, the artists' seedy lofts and subterranean night-

clubs — all are material for the canvas of the graffiti-inspired artists in focus here.

Ivory, who is always so adept at period detail ("The Bostonians," "A Room with a View"), goes overboard in his attempt to get everything to look and sound just right. He even overuses artsy editing tricks (split-screen vignettes and super-impositions) to make connections between his large, free-wheeling cast of exotic characters. But none of these gimmicks has lasting impact. One senses that his inexperienced screenwriter deserves much of the blame for the film's lack of focus.

Aside from a stand-out turn by Bernadette Peters as an insecure hat designer locked in an abusive relationship with a successful artist, Ivory and Janowitz fail to provide more than superficial commentary on the hedonistic, narcissistic denizens of this rule-less, throwaway society.

"Slaves of New York" may work for those familiar with the art, fashion and music scene. But for audiences looking for some character and philosophical insight into the "anything goes" subculture, this film is a bust.

Due to some profanity, brief nudity and humorous glamorization of sexual promiscuity, drug use and the every-man-for-himself lifestyle, the USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Gleaming the Cube'

A contrived murder mystery is used as the hook to showcase some daredevil skateboard wizardry in "Gleaming the Cube" (Fox). In this coming-of-age saga about a punk skateboarder and his equally

blotto buddies, fancy footwork outshines a silly plot about betrayal and murder in a Southern California Vietnamese community.

When alienated Brian Kelly (Christian Slater) loses his adopted Vietnamese brother Vinh (Art Chudabala) in an apparent suicide, Brian won't rest until he proves he's really been murdered. The teen cleans up his act, junks his decadent wardrobe and proceeds to track down the culprits. Of course, no one believes him, not even hotheaded rebel detective Al Lucero (Steven Bauer).

"Gleaming the Cube" features a far-fetched climactic chase that will thrill adolescent skateboard aficionados and wake up dozing adults in the audience. This is strictly 1980s "Hardy Boys" film fare in which director Graeme Clifford relies on the talents of notable skateboard champions (Tommy Guerrero and Tony Hawk) to divert attention from the flimsy storyline.

Due to mild rough language, some violence and comic-book menace, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Trojan is on the staff of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

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