

IN REVIEW FEATURE

Latest offering of films a mixed bag

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Clear and Present Danger'

(Paramount) Classy political thriller in which a top CIA official (Harrison Ford) discovers that he is being set up to take the blame when the president (Donald Moffat) approves an illegal covert military operation (under Willem Dafoe) against a Columbian drug cartel. Director Phillip Noyce balances a dense plot with rich characterizations, lean performances, taut editing and intriguing moral ambiguities for a crackling good tale of suspense. Intermittent intense violence and an instance of rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Airheads'

(20th Century Fox) Armed with toy guns, three would-be rock stars (Brendan Fraser, Steve Buscemi and Adam Sandler) seize control of a radio station and try to force the on-air disk jockey



Twentieth Century Fox
(From left) Adam Sandler is Pip, Brendan Fraser is Chazz and Steve Buscemi is Rex in 'Airheads.'



Paramount Pictures

In 'Clear and Present Danger,' CIA agent Jack Ryan (Harrison Ford) finds himself thrust into one of America's war on drugs. Phillip Noyce directed the Paramount thriller.

(Joe Mantegna) to play their demo tape while a throng of delirious supporters taunt the police outside. Director Michael Lehmann finds only shrill and mean-spirited humor in the mindless antics of rebellious young adults trying to get attention by toying with violence. Comic mayhem, brief violence, a bedroom scene and crude gestures. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Barcelona'

(Fine Line) An American (Taylor Nichols) living in Barcelona reluctantly takes in an obnoxious cousin (Chris Eigeman) who suddenly shows up, but after becoming involved with two unpredictable local women (Mira Sorvino and Tushka Bergen), the cousins' old antagonisms resurface until resolved when one is nearly killed in a burst of anti-American violence. Writer-director Whit Stillman invests the somewhat bland story with an abundance of droll dialogue, gently mocking the political pretensions and sexual mores of twentysomething

Americans and Spaniards whose facade of sophistication masks their insecurities. Implied promiscuity, fleeting bedroom scenes, brief violence and minimal profanity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'The Little Rascals'

(Universal) Weak, overly cute comedy tries to update the "Our Gang" shorts of the 1930s to the present as Spanky (Travis Tedford) and the other little imps are horrified when trusty Alfalfa (Bug Hall) falls for a girl (Brittany Ashton Holmes) who is being courted by a spoiled rich kid (Blake Ewing). Director Penelope Spheeris strings together a succession of mildly comic scenes in which the youngsters look adorable but unconvincing in the role of rib-tickling mischief makers. Comic violence, mild double entendres and boyish disdain of girls. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.



Galileo tale puts his life in context

"Galileo," by James Reston Jr.; HarperCollins (New York, 1994); 319 pp.; \$25.

Reviewed by Brian T. Olszewski
Catholic News Service

Most people have heard about Galileo and about the church's condemnation of him and his work. But they don't know much about them.

In "Galileo," James Reston Jr. provides that knowledge and he provides it with such detail that the reader will be overwhelmed by the depth of the whole Galileo/church battle.

What this volume provides is dimension to the people involved — Galileo, of course, but also the major players in his downfall, e.g., Pope Urban VIII and Robert Bellarmine.

A biography about Galileo would not be accurate if it did not include biographies of the people who confronted and eventually brought him down. Nor would these biographies be of value if they were not set in the proper context of politics, culture and religion. Reston provides all of it.

As praiseworthy as the author is of the scientist's accomplishments, he does his subject and the reader justice by presenting the personal turmoil of the astronomer's life, as well as his arrogance and his antagonism toward those who did not possess his knowledge. Among those were the pope and his inquisitors.

We learn that those who sought to discredit Galileo in the name of the church and in defense of sacred Scripture were often acting not out of righteousness but rather out of vindictiveness toward their subject. Vindictiveness was not theirs alone; it was shared by those in the government and academic communities.

The most dramatic chapter is Galileo's trial. In novel-like fashion it brings to a climax the tension between the church and its prey. By itself, the chapter is excellent drama, but because Reston has meticulously constructed the story leading up to the trial, this chapter has a powerful presence.

"Galileo" is an outstanding biography because of the quantity and quality of material that it provides. But it is more. It is also an examination of the "God knows we're right" defense employed by those who have the authority to say it, but not necessarily the faith to believe it.

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Olszewski is the editor of the Northwest Indiana Catholic, newspaper of the Diocese of Gary, Ind.

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