

## FEATURE

# Movie inflicts 'Damage' on audiences

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The controversy surrounding Warner Bros.' release of "Collateral Damage" turns out to be more interesting than the movie itself.

The movie's protagonist is a grieving firefighter and the plot involves terrorists killing civilians. So Warner Bros. decided to postpone release in the wake of Sept. 11's horrific attacks. Now the studio is hoping it will be welcomed as a patriotic story of a hero firefighter foiling any terrorists in his path.

Director Andrew Davis allows Arnold Schwarzenegger's indestructible character to dominate, as characterization and a credible plot fly out the window.

Outside the Colombian consulate, Firefighter Gordy Brewer (Schwarzenegger) witnesses a bombing that kills his family, whom the terrorists consider mere collateral damage. Realizing U.S.-Colombian politics would delay justice, Brewer decides to single-handedly track down the killers in the jungles of Colombia.

Although a number of CIA operatives are working in Colombia, only Brewer is able to find the terrorists' secret camp — after he's been shot at, survived a death-defying waterfall plunge, been imprisoned and beaten. In one of the film's thin redemptive threads, Brewer, about to blow up the terrorists, calls to warn a passing mother and child, lest they suffer the same fate as his family.

The mother (Francesca Neri), wife of the lead terrorist (Cliff Curtis), can no longer abide her husband's murderous ways and confides that he's on the way to



Warner Bros./CNS

Arnold Schwarzenegger stars in a scene from the action thriller "Collateral Damage."

Washington to launch a more deadly attack. They follow and the film goes into overdrive for an explosive climax with Brewer acting the patriot, not the cold-blooded revenge killer.

The film's political context is simplistic. Colombians are stereotyped as terrorists, brutal police or drug profiteers. Brewer is not a mere mortal, but a deified superhero. This may be appealing to some but is unrealistic and offers no insights into the struggle against terrorism and the pursuit of peace with justice. One

wonders if releasing the movie at this time can be seen as audience exploitation.

Due to frequent violence, ethnic stereotyping, profanity and rough language, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' classification is A-IV — adults with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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Pare is director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting

## More disappointing current releases

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following capsule reviews of movies in current release contain ratings by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Office for Film and Broadcasting and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

### 'Big Fat Liar'

Lame comedy in which a grade school boy's (Frankie Muniz) school essay ends up in the hands of a egomaniacal Hollywood producer (Paul Giamatti) who refuses to admit he stole it until forced to do

so. Director Shawn Levy's unfunny fantasy about a teen-ager getting revenge ends up mocking truth, while the plodding story line, caricatured characters and mean-spirited escapades become increasingly disagreeable. A few crude expressions. The USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### 'Hart's War'

Contrived drama set in a World War II German prisoner-of-war camp in which a

young American lieutenant (Colin Farrell) is forced to defend an African-American pilot (Terrence Howard) falsely accused of murder while their colonel (Bruce Willis) uses the distraction to plan a daring escape. Well-intentioned lessons about racism in director Gregory Hoblit's film can't compensate for narrative inconsistencies and one-dimensional characterizations. Some strong war violence including grisly images, fleeting nudity and sporadic rough language with profanity. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

### 'Last Orders'

Slow-moving drama in which a group of old friends (including Bob Hoskins, David Hemmings and Ray Winstone) get together to honor the last wishes of their close friend (Michael Caine) who wanted them to spread his ashes across the sea. As directed by Fred Schepisi, the sentimental script has many flaws but the superb ensemble cast picks up the slack, giving the deliberately paced film about death, painful memories and new beginnings some vitality. A few sexual encounters, an extramarital affair, brief nudity and sporadic rough language with profanity. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

### 'Rollerball'

Mindless remake set in 2018 in which the popular player (Chris Klein) of a brutal blood sport, combining roller derby, motorcycle racing and hockey, discovers that the team's owner (Jean Reno) is behind the serious on-court accidents aimed at increasing TV viewership. Sci-fi action flick is relentlessly repetitive with an absurd plot that director John McTiernan doesn't even bother to develop. Concentrates on violent extreme-sports antics and bizarre costuming. Intermittent violence, implied sexual encounter, fleeting drug abuse and recurring profanity and crass language. The USCCB classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

## Videos plumb life decisions

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette (VHS format) reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting. Theatrical movies on video have a USCCB classification and a Motion Picture Association of America rating and indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

### 'An American Rhapsody'

Stirring coming-of-age drama about a teen-age girl (Scarlett Johansson) living in 1960s America who returns to her homeland of Hungary to discover herself. Despite the often hurried story line, the autobiographical debut of writer-director Eva Gardos is a touching piece of melodrama that unabashedly tugs at the heartstrings with poised accuracy. A few scenes of brief violence. The USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. (Paramount)

### 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin'

Visually alluring World War II drama set during the Italian occupation of Greece in which an Italian officer (Nicolas Cage) falls in love with a Grecian beauty (Penelope Cruz), forcing him to decide between allegiance and love. Aside from its majestic presentation, director John Madden's mildly engaging romance strikes too many false notes to have real emotional resonance. Several rather graphic battle scenes, a sexual encounter, some nudity and fleeting rough language. The USCCB classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted. (Universal)

### 'Ghost World'

Poignant tale about two recent high school graduates (Thora Birch and Scarlett Johansson) at odds with the world around them and whose friendship is jeopardized when one befriends an older jazz aficionado (Steve Buscemi). Director Terry Zwigoff captures teen angst and the alienation felt by characters who reject the sameness of popular culture and the corporate influence upon it. Implied sexual encounter, brief violence, a few crude references and frequent profanity and rough language. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted. (MGM)

### 'Maze'

Tenuous drama in which a successful sculptor (Rob Morrow), coping with Tourette's syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder, falls in love with a pregnant woman (Laura Linney) who is also his best friend's (Craig Sheffer) girlfriend. As director, Morrow fares adequately with the familiar triangular love story, although the heavily philosophical dialogue is unnecessarily clichéd and true dramatic timeliness undermines the story. A few scenes of full female nudity and recurring rough language and profanity. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted. (Columbia)

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