

FEATURE

'Attack of Clones' gets mixed reviews

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Director George Lucas improves on his 1999 "Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace," but the new adventure, set 10 years later, "Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones" (20th Century Fox), ranges from occasionally dull to quite exciting.

A burgeoning separatist movement threatens the Republic, and its former queen (now senator), Padme Amidala (Natalie Portman), is the target of an assassination plot.

Jedi knight Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) and his impatient 19-year-old apprentice Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) are assigned to protect her. But the plot mostly keeps them apart, with lovestruck Anakin by a wary Padme's side while Obi-Wan is on the trail of interplanetary secessionists led by former Jedi, Count Dooku (Christopher Lee).

The narrative jumps to life in the many airborne chase scenes, the first swooping among glittering skyscrapers after a sleeping Padme is nearly done in by venomous crawling reptiles. The many action scenes are impressive and lightning paced, but tend to go on beyond their peak impact, perhaps in acknowledgment that the movie's strength is in movement as the dialogue is dreary.

Where the movie lags is during the developing relationship between Anakin and a reluctant Padme, who knows romance is a no-no for the Jedi. Christensen's line readings as the pleading suitor are stiff and unconvincing, all the more so beside the more accomplished Portman. He seems to be trying for the brooding intensity of a James Dean but can't quite get there. Christensen is fine in the physical scenes of derring-do but, again, his acting and delivery upon finding his gravely wounded mother (Pernil-



Lucasfilm/CNS

Jedi Master Yoda in a scene from the movie "Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones."

la August) are wooden.

McGregor is dashing throughout and Samuel L. Jackson brings decisive vitality to his role as Jedi Master Mace Windu. But the movie is stolen by the fully computer-generated Yoda, who has an amazing duel at the end sure to have audiences cheering.

Robots R2D2 and C-3PO are on hand as well, adding a smidgen of humor, although they are not as endearing as their first unforgettable appearance way back in 1977. Virtually wasted is Jimmy Smits as a senator in what amounts to little more than an extended cameo — and the hunky actor looks silly in velvet getups.

Using digital technology exclusively, the movie has tremendous dimensionality that puts one in mind of a 3-D Imax-format film. The locales used ranged from Australia to Italy, England, Spain and Tunisia, the scenes shot in Lake Como being especially beautiful.

The sets, costumes and vehicles are visual eye candy, not to mention new alien life forms and a trio of terrifying monsters bent on killing Obi-Wan, Padme and Anakin in a gladiatorial arena. That scene is frightening and the pace never lets up from then on to the climax, capped off by a romantic flourish and Yoda's dire words that war has begun.

In the battle of good vs. evil, this episode sows the seeds of showing how Jedi apprentice Skywalker feels reined in by Obi-Wan as his dark side gains ground, with disastrous consequences for the Republic — the subject of episode III, which will be the next and final "Star Wars" movie.

Because of stylized fantasy violence, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Home videos recommended

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'On Our Own Terms'

Provocative and emotional look at end-of-life issues hosted by Bill Moyers which explores cultural attitudes and beliefs toward death, palliative and hospice care and the rising costs of dying. Thought-provoking and impressive in scope, the four-part series is nonetheless draining as its powerful subject matter is ripe for emotional manipulation. And the sympathetic view on physician-assisted suicide leaves untreated the position that human beings have a transcendent value even in the presence of physical suffering which makes it wrong to deliberately end a human life. The intense subject matter may be too heavy for adolescent viewing.

'Snow Dogs'

Sluggish comedy about a successful Miami dentist (Cuba Gooding Jr.) who discovers he is adopted after he inherits from his biological mother a team of sled dogs in a remote hamlet of Alaska. Although a few positive points are made about adoption and family love, the fleeting explanation that the main character was conceived from a one-night stand may prompt questions from the young audience, and the slapstick comedy is only mildly amusing. Some crude humor and expressions. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Jennifer Lopez's domestic drama doesn't pack 'Enough' punch

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Jennifer Lopez's domestic drama, "Enough" (Columbia), may just be every abused wife's secret revenge fantasy. But the mediocre film doesn't have the emotional resonance needed to make a powerful impact on the audience as Lopez transforms from mousy housewife to martial-arts expert ready to get back at a possessive, abusive husband.

Director Michael Apted tempers the film's vengeful drive by having Lopez's character, Slim, find her moral compass at the last moment. Apted does a com-

mendable job navigating the film through the script's narrative plot holes and caricatured characters, especially that of husband Mitch (Billy Campbell).

The film swiftly sets up the premise in order to move on to the bulk of the story. The thriller is divided into several titled sections, beginning with "Hey," which introduces waitress Slim (Lopez) and her best friend, Ginny (Juliette Lewis), working at a low-end Los Angeles diner. The next part, "How They Met," shows Slim's first encounter with husband-to-be Mitch, whose gallant demeanor saves her from the unsavory advances of customer Robbie (Noah Wyle). The film then zips forward to show Mitch and Slim dancing at their wedding as Mitch whispers the portentous words, "You're safe with me, Slim."

It's the next section where the caricaturing begins. It's been a few years since

the wedding day, and Slim is living a near-perfect life in a huge, beautiful home with Mitch and their young daughter, Gracie (Tessa Allen). But almost without warning, the chips begin to show. Slim discovers Mitch's wandering ways. At first, he falls on his sword, admitting to the cheating. But in an audacious speech that is too bold to be believed, Mitch informs Slim that this is the way it's going to be. He'll have his amorous peccadilloes and she'll continue to play the happy housewife. And if she doesn't, he'll kill her.

Slim manages to get away, and a good portion of the rest of the film consists of her cross-country trek — with Gracie in tow — as she tries to escape Mitch's evil grasp.

Apted does provide some suspense-filled moments in the film. But the problematic narrative too conveniently sets in

motion the machinations for Slim to chart her revenge.

Slim's vengeful intentions, even though they don't quite work out the way she expected, in many ways denigrate the very real danger of abused spouses. The film says that if you are strong enough, disciplined enough and willing to learn keen self-defense tactics, you can fight back and win. Had the film focused more seriously and realistically on the danger of spousal abuse and its repercussions, it might have made a powerful impression.

Due to several intense scenes of domestic violence, bloody fisticuffs and brief crass expressions with an instance of rough language, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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