

Older kids may dig 'Holes'

Gerri Pare/CNS

NEW YORK — In "Holes" (Disney), unlucky Stanley Yelnats (Shia LaBeouf) is sentenced to 18 months in a camp for troubled youth when he is assumed to have stolen a basketball star's prized sneakers.

The desert camp's cruel overseer (Jon Voight) makes the boys dig deep holes all day, every day, without explanation. And Stanley's disastrous family history is played out in flashbacks that are livelier than the contemporary story.

It seems a Gypsy fortune teller (Eartha Kitt) put a multigenerational curse on Stanley's ancestor in the old country. Misfortune came when outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow (Patricia Arquette) relieved him of his treasure chest. Once a sweet schoolmarm, her affection for a kindly black man (Dule Hill) led to her change of career.

Stanley befriends pint-size Zero (Khleo Thomas), who risks death by running off, followed by Stanley. They unravel the mystery of the holes and their shared ancestral past.

Director Andrew Davis' film is based on Louis Sachar's popular juvenile novel of the same name. The film loses energy whenever it turns from the Old West to the hole diggers. Humorous scenes return to Stanley's struggling family, where his inventor dad (Henry Winkler) seeks a formula for smell-less shoes.

Several characters are one-dimensional but Sigourney Weaver is



Shia LaBeouf and Khleo Thomas star in the Disney family adventure "Holes."

Buena Vista/CNS

comically effective as the steely proprietress of the camp. LaBeouf and Thomas are appealing in their roles. The children's movie is an odd mixture of nice with nasty. But with its themes of friendship and family values, coupled with pleasing visuals and a crowd-pleasing ender, older

children may just dig "Holes."

With brief violence and an instance of crass expression, the USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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

'Monk' film has hackneyed script

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK (CNS) — A super-powered martial artist battles an army of evil neo-Nazis searching for an ancient scroll which he has sworn to protect in the high-flying but flawed "Bulletproof Monk" (MGM).

The script at times is so hackneyed that better writing can be found in fortune cookies.

Based on the popular comic book, director Paul Hunter's film stars Chow Yun-Fat as the nameless Tibetan holy man with unparalleled warrior skills. His venerable master entrusts him with the "Ultimate Scroll" which, if it fell into the wrong hands, would enable its wielder to conquer the world.

Being 1943, the scroll is just the kind of toy any red-blooded Nazi would want. A band of Adolf's boys, led by the sinister Strucker (Karl Roden), happens to be in the neighborhood and invades the Himalayan

fortress, mowing down the pacifist monks. The hero escapes with the scroll, unharmed by Strucker's point-blank marksmanship — earning him the sobriquet of "Bulletproof Monk."

In San Francisco, the Bulletproof Monk finds his scroll-protector successor in the unlikely Kar (Seann William Scott), a streetwise, good-hearted thief who has learned nifty moves from watching kung-fu flicks. Kar must prove he is the heir by fulfilling three prophecies.

With similar films having raised the bar so high, it is hard to continually excite audiences. Still, "Bulletproof Monk" boasts some ultrastylized, gravity-defying acrobatics.

Yun-Fat is magnetic as the fast-fisted sage, giving the role an appealing blend of stoic serenity and, surprisingly, disarming comic edge.

Casual violence will always be an issue in this genre. During one sequence the benevolent monk offers a tutorial on "compassion" and the

sanctity of life while he instructs his young pupil in the fine and ungente art of kicking butt — abruptly cut short by the opportunity to put his words into practice by beating the bad guys to a pulp.

The film's over-the-top violence is less offensive when taken in its comic-book context, though parents equally concerned about its video-game-like casualness devoid of moral consequences may find it more than a bit off-putting.

Due to recurring violence, minimal profanities and a few crude expressions, the USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting 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.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

USCCB rates new movies

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

'CHASING PAPI'

Fatuous comedy about three women who collide over the affections of a suave, hunky advertising executive, who has deceived each into thinking that she is the only love of his life. The film, though sporting an up-and-coming Hispanic cast, is doomed by an inane script and flat, forced humor which ultimately proves to be about as appetizing as a three-day old burrito. Some mild sexual humor. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'CITY OF GHOSTS'

A remorseful insurance scam artist (Matt Dillon) flees to Cambodia where his hardened boss (James Caan) and sneaky colleague (Stellan Skarsgard) involve him in a deadly scheme. The film captures a seedy atmosphere of dangerous intrigue but too belatedly develops the interpersonal relationships that fuel Dillon's character's search for redemption. Intermittent violence, much rough language and minimal profanity. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'MALIBU'S MOST WANTED'

An overprivileged white kid from Malibu who fancies himself as a self-styled hip-hop rapper gets a dose of urban reality in this mindless satire. The film, a vapid jumble of mildly amusing comedy sketches, is a misguided attempt to comment on the puzzling sociological phenomenon of silver-spoon youths' fascination with the subculture of gangsta rap. An instance of rough language, recurring obscenities and lewd sexual humor and violence. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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