

'Deal' is stale, unappealing

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — A cynical teenager renounces romance only to find herself falling for her close friend in the coming-of-age clunker "How to Deal."

Full of lame dialogue and vanilla performances, this vacuous ode to adolescent angst rates on the fun scale just slightly above taking your cousin to the senior prom.

Pop star Mandy Moore plays Halley Martin, a stubbornly independent 17-year-old who has vowed never to fall in love — a logical stance, taking into account the festering emotional wounds inflicted on her family by cupid's arrows. Her parents, Lydia (Allison Janney) and Len (Peter Gallagher), have recently finalized a bitter divorce. Len, a popular local DJ, has just announced over the airwaves that he will be eloping with the radio station's much younger traffic reporter. And watching her soon-to-be married sister, Ashley (Mary Catherine Garrison), and future brother-in-law plan their wedding is about as blissful as a cockfight.

Adding still more fuel to the fire, Halley's best friend, Scarlett (Alexandra Holden), has defected to the other side, cooing giddily over Steve (Dylan Baker). Yet when Steve dies tragically during a high-school soccer game, Halley is pushed further toward a radical emotional teetotalism.

The only chinks in her otherwise impervious amour armor are her



New Line Cinema/CNS

Mandy Moore and Nina Foch star in a scene from "How to Deal."

Movie Reviews

feelings for Steve's buddy, Macon Forrester (Trent Ford), a rebel without a comb who gleans life lessons from "Star Wars." Macon's Jedi charm works its magic on Halley, though she struggles to keep the relationship strictly platonic. As Halley's life unravels, Macon begins to challenge her fears of commitment, opening the melodramatic floodgates to predictable epiphanies about vulnerability and the inherent risks involved in love.

The basic theme, that the human heart must risk being broken in order to love, is in itself truthful, but

told in such an unappealing manner even wisdom sounds stale. Unfortunately, this puppy-love story is for the dogs.

Due to an implied sexual encounter, brief sensuality, drug abuse, as well as an instance of rough language and some profanity, 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.

'League' lacks extraordinary plot

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — A team of Victorian-era superheroes is enlisted to prevent a madman from triggering a world war in the lavish — but disappointing — action film "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen."

Despite an intriguing premise and imaginative effects, Stephen Norrington's comic book-inspired film is the most recent example of Hollywood genuflecting at the altar of excess — justifying megabudgets with tedious, over-the-top action sequences at the expense of a well-crafted story and three-dimensional characters. The result is a sensory-overload thrill ride that could do with a little more plot and less pyrotechnics.

The film opens in the fog-shrouded London of 1899. The Fantom, an anarchist with Masonic connections, has set in motion sinister machinations, sowing the seed of interna-

tional discord and providing the spark needed to ignite the tinderbox of turn-of-the-century Europe.

In an effort to avert global bloodshed, a clandestine organization recruits a veritable who's who of Victorian literature, each with singular skills and checkered pasts to hunt down and stop the Fantom before his plot to sabotage a conference of European leaders meeting in Venice plunges the world into war.

Serving as ringleader is legendary adventurer Allan Quatermain (Sean Connery), a shadowy expatriate haunted by the death of his son. Joining him are the famed underwater explorer Nemo (Naseeruddin Shah), captain of the legendary Nautilus submarine; the dapper immortal Dorian Gray (Stuart Townsend); vampire Mina Harker (Peta Wilson); Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Jason Flemyng); and the invisible man (Tony Curran).

Rounding out the Brit brigade is

the quintessential American, Tom Sawyer (Shane West), only here he's traded in his paint brush for a Winchester and works for the U.S. Secret Service.

Before all is said and done, Quatermain and Sawyer schmaltz their way through a hokey father-son-bonding subplot, Mina goes a little batty, and a witch doctor leaves the door open for a sequel.

Due to much action/adventure violence, some frightening supernatural effects with gore and a few instances of crude language with sexual innuendo, 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.

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USCCB rates video releases

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are video capsule reviews from the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

'BAND OF BROTHERS'

Ambitious, well-crafted World War II 10-part series about a paratrooper division in the U.S. Army named Easy Company which landed in France on D-Day, fought the Battle of the Bulge and captured Hitler's Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden. Based on Steven E. Ambrose's nonfiction best-seller, the film meticulously recreates the dark, anxious atmosphere of the battle and the rigid hierarchical command of the Army, but the long sequences of the fighting are harrowing and sometimes explicit. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America.

'GIANT' (1956)

An adaptation of Edna Ferber's saga of life and love in Texas oil country from the turn of the century to the early 1950s, with Dennis Hopper as the clean-cut, intense son of Texas patriarchs Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson, while James Dean is the martillate cowhand who strikes it rich. The plot is less important than its themes of changing times, the generation gap, racial prejudice, the waste of war and marital incompatibility. The USCCB classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.

'WINGS OF DESIRE'

Art-house film follows the lonely work of two angels (Bruno Ganz and Otto Sander) who wander about and above Berlin listening to the joys and travails of people. One angel chooses to shed his wings for the chance of expressing human emotions and love for a woman. The film is by turns ponderous, playful, reflective and philosophic. Subtles. Some sexually suggestive material. Fleeting nudity and some profanity. The USCCB classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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