

Film capsules from USCCB

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

'HOUSE OF THE DEAD'

Relentless gorefest, based on a popular video game, about party-seeking college coeds trapped on an island infested with flesh-eating zombies and stockpiled with ammo. Director Ewe Boll ignores plot in favor of protracted, ultraviolent scenes. Extended topless nudity and graphic carnage, lewd humor, pervasive crude language. The USCCB classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'PIECES OF APRIL'

Tender drama about a young woman (Katie Holmes) who tries to mend the tattered relationship with her cancer-stricken mother (Patricia Clarkson) by hosting Thanksgiving dinner at her dilapidated tenement, only to discover that her oven is not working. While appearing not to have enough narrative to prove engaging, director Peter Hedges serves up an emotionally satisfying meal with a positive message about family and forgiveness. Some crude and profane language, a scene involving marijuana, some images of nudity. 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.

'THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE'

Revolting splatterfest about teen slackers (including Jessica Biel and Eric Balfour) marooned in rural Texas and hunted by a chainsaw-wielding maniac. Director Marcus Nispel treats mutilation and mayhem as entertainment, assaulting viewers with unabated gore fueled by a dehumanizing sadism and objectification of women. Excessive violence including a graphic suicide, an instance of drug abuse, pervasive crude and profane language. The USCCB classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Runaway Jury' uninspiring

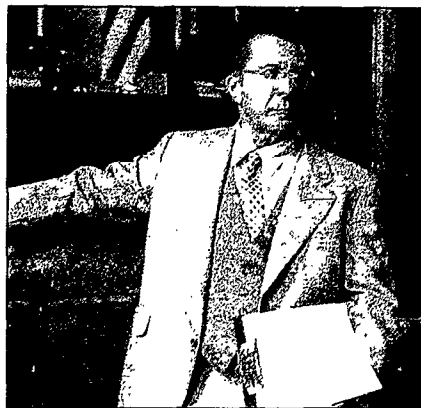
Gerri Pare/CNS

NEW YORK — A juror and his girlfriend conspire to buy a verdict for the highest bidder in "Runaway Jury" (20th Century Fox).

Based on the John Grisham novel, the lawsuit in the movie was switched from the tobacco industry to the gun industry after Big Tobacco began to lose cases. But, as often happens in a book with many characters, the film must pare down the characterizations to quick thumbnail sketches. Although director Gary Fleder sets a fast pace and has a great cast, these characters simply aren't emotionally involving enough to make us care deeply.

Gene Hackman plays Rankin Fitch, a ruthless jury consultant who promises the rich CEOs that with their lawyer (Bruce Davison) obeying his instructions in jury selection, they will get a not-guilty verdict and prevent class-action suits that could bankrupt the industry. Fitch's staff researches each potential juror and intimidates or blackmails them for the "right" verdict.

The wild card is juror Nick Easter (John Cusack), whose background cannot be traced by Fitch's minions.



20th Century Fox/CNS

Dustin Hoffman stars in a scene from "Runaway Jury."

A widow, represented by attorney Wendall Rohr (Dustin Hoffman), is suing the gun manufacturer whose firearm a disgruntled employee used to murder 11 employees.

Fitch and Rohr are contacted by Nick's girlfriend who proposes that for millions Nick can swing the jury for whoever takes the offer. They are persuaded to listen when she proves Nick is able to manipulate the jurors to do things such as bursting forth with a pledge of allegiance in the courtroom and Rohr finds his

Movie Reviews

witnesses suddenly compromised.

Despite the director's pacing, the sense of urgency isn't there, so the suspense isn't sizzling. The film plays like a competent police procedural as the pieces in the puzzle fit together. The ending is too easily accomplished to be very credible, with its characters shown in a more favorable light than deserved.

There are scenes in a church, with a cabbie's rosary prominently positioned, and in a store featuring candles to honor different saints, but the supposed moral victory is hollow.

Due to a cynical view of the legal system, some violence and minimal rough language and 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.

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

'Brother Bear' visually stunning

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — A Native American boy on the cusp of manhood learns his place in life's circle by becoming a bear in the delightful animated fable "Brother Bear" (Disney).

Directors Aaron Blaise and Robert Walker combine timeless themes with stunning scenery to craft an allegorical tale about love, forgiveness and man's fellowship with nature.

Traditional hand-drawn images are more inviting than the digital imagery in films like "Finding Nemo."

At Kenai's coming-of-age ceremony, Tanana, the tribal shaman, bestows on Kenai his totem — a symbol to guide him through life. Tanana presents him with a carved bear — the symbol of love.

Kenai can't mask his disappointment over such a seemingly unmanly totem. Humiliated, he impetuously steams off, ready to prove his bravery by stalking a bear who had stolen a basket of fish during the rite.

Kenai's brothers rescue him from the beast and the eldest pays the ultimate sacrifice. When Kenai hunts down and kills the bear, he is transformed into the creature. His other brother arrives at the scene and see-



Buena Vista Pictures/CNS

The talkative bear cub, Koda, entertains his extended family with tales of adventure in the animated Disney movie, "Brother Bear."

ing the bear standing over Kenai's spear and shredded clothes, assumes the worst and takes up the vendetta.

Following Tanana's counsel for returning to his human form, Kenai learns to live according to his totem.

The real scene-stealers include a pair of dimwitted moose with Canuck accents and two bighorn rams, whose bada-bing braggadocio suggests that their herd's migration passed through stone-age Brooklyn.

The transformation tale is underpinned by an almost Franciscan spir-

ituity which imparts a strong message about the interconnectedness of all living things, reminding us of our responsibility to live in harmony with the rest of God's creation.

The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences.

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