

Hancock's 'Alamo' worth remembering

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK (CNS) — "The Alamo" (Disney) tells the dramatic story of the 200 men whose valiant last stand against overwhelming odds rallied the cause of Texan independence from Mexico and changed the course of American history.

Texas-born director John Lee Hancock refrains from wall-to-wall action and flag-waving jingoism, in favor of a more character-driven study, which results in a quite intimate portrait of unsolicited heroism.

The main action takes place during a time when the political turmoil in Mexico had reached a boiling

Movie Review

point. Texas was still part of Mexico, but the move to form an independent republic was gaining popularity among the territory's citizens. A year earlier the newly formed Texan militia had routed the Mexican army and captured the Alamo.

Mexico's dictator, Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna (Emilio Echevarria), leads a massive army to take back the Alamo. Assuming that Santa Anna would wait out the winter before making his move, the provisional Texas government mans the



Touchstone/CNS

Billy Bob Thornton, portraying Davy Crockett, fights off an enemy in the epic film "The Alamo."

fort with only a small contingent of poorly disciplined conscripts, ill-prepared for combat.

Vastly outnumbered, the defenders gallantly hold off the superior forces for 13 days. On the morning of March 6, 1836, Santa Anna's troops storm the fort. The siege becomes a slaughter, as every Texan is killed in less than 90 minutes.

Rather than focus solely on the bloody battle, Hancock views the siege through the prism of legendary frontiersman Davy Crockett (Billy Bob Thornton), demon-driven warrior Jim Bowie (Jason Patric) and brash, young William Travis (Patrick Wilson). Each seeks the same thing — a second chance.

Dennis Quaid plays Sam Houston, whose famous battle cry, "Remember the Alamo," rallies the Texan army to victory over Santa Anna at San Jacinto, six weeks later.

The film succeeds in conveying the factual and emotional truth of the events depicted. The characters are not portrayed as cardboard heroes,

but flesh-and-blood men whose heroism flowed from less-than-heroic hearts.

While falling short of masterpiece status, "The Alamo" is a stunning piece of moviemaking with its sweeping scope, panoramic big-sky cinematography, painstaking attention to historical detail, stirring score and uniformly top-notch acting.

Hancock's decision to divide viewers' attention among four protagonists was risky, and could easily have resulted in a disjointed narrative, but he manages to keep his respective story lines well-pruned and clearly delineated.

The Alamo symbolizes a place where American history meets American mythology. The reason its story continues to inspire is the valuable lesson it teaches: that courage and sacrifice are at the heart of freedom.

This "Alamo" is worth remembering.

Due to extended, intense battlefield violence and some crude language, 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.

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