

'Krippendorf's Tribe' has laughs, lacks believability

BY BARB CHURCHILL
Film Critic

"Krippendorf's Tribe" is a funny, but extremely unbelievable, family comedy.

The paper-thin story purports to tell the tale of James Krippendorf (Richard Dreyfuss), a beleaguered father and anthropology professor.

Movie Review

For the past two years, Krippendorf has been supporting his family with a grant intended to fund a study of the "lost tribe of New Guinea." Krippendorf had intended to use the money properly, yet had been diverted from his purpose because of the unforeseen death of his wife.

Of course, when it's time to unveil the tribe, various unrealistic circumstances occur. First, his new research assistant Veronica Micelli (Jenna Elfman) decides to book a lecture series regarding the "lost tribe," unbeknownst to Krippendorf. When Krippendorf gets to the lecture site, he panics, inventing a tribe called the Shelmikedmu, named after his three children Shelly, Mickey and Edmund.

The rest of the lecture goes well.

Next, Krippendorf has to invent evidence regarding his tribal "visitation." How he does this points out one of the biggest flaws in the film: He paints himself and his children as tribesmen and films "native footage," then pulls out his state-of-the-art "film-editing kit" and lets one of his sons edit the film.

Granted, comedies don't have to be believable, but this is just too, too much. No child of 10 would be able to perform these sophisticated editing tricks, much less with expensive equipment bought ostensibly out of a professor's salary.

The remainder of the comedy finds Ruth Allen (Lily Tomlin), another anthropology professor, trying to discredit Krippendorf's so-called research. Most of the remaining laughs deal with the results of Allen's search for the Shelmikedmu, as well as Krippendorf's growing sexual attraction to Micelli.

Dreyfuss does a fine job as Krippendorf. Although his character's overall situation is incredible at best, it is possible for one to believe in his position as a widowed father trying desperately to bring up his three children. Without Dreyfuss' calmness, this film just wouldn't be funny.

Elfman is a gifted comic actress, yet somehow she fails to make this role her own. Elfman attempts to por-

The Facts

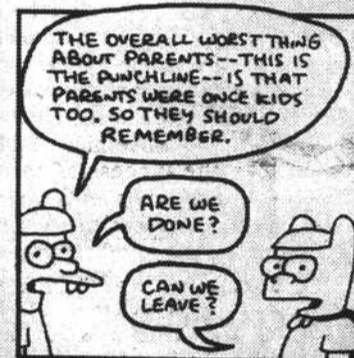
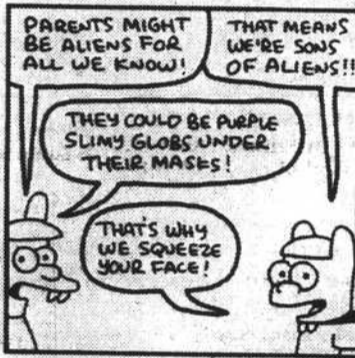
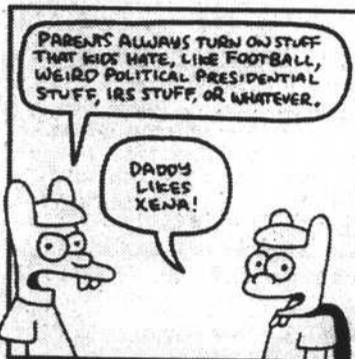
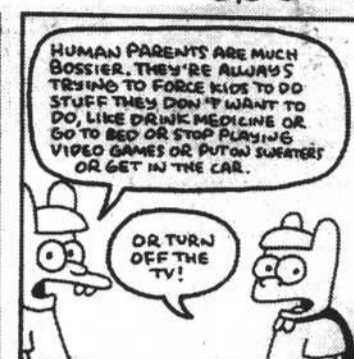
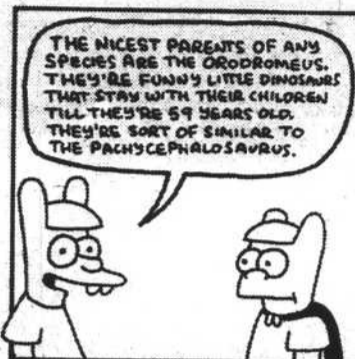
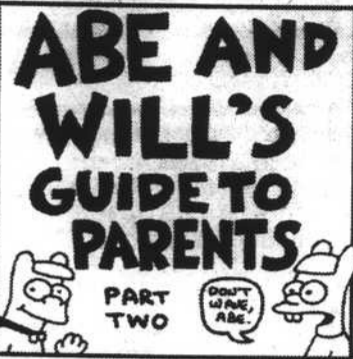
Title: "Krippendorf's Tribe"
Stars: Richard Dreyfuss, Jenna Elfman, Lily Tomlin
Director: Todd Holland
Rating: PG-13
Grade: B-
Five Words: Unbelievable anthropology farce is funny.

tray Micelli as another offshoot of the dippy Dharma character from her TV show. However, Micelli must be intelligent in order to be a research assistant, so the dippiness seems a blatant mischaracterization. And the romance between Elfman and Dreyfuss just doesn't work, as there is absolutely no chemistry between them. This attraction, if it appeared in real (rather than reel) life would be due solely to "sexual wanderlust" (i.e., both are really, REALLY hard up and have no partners) rather than anything else.

Tomlin is almost completely wasted as Allen, although she does have a few good comedic moments.

Overall, this film has some extremely big laughs out of the extremely unusual situations Krippendorf finds himself in. If you are stressed out because of midterms or need a few good laughs, go see this film.

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