

'Time Code' tops list of early summer movie slate

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

(Movies based on ★★★★★ scale)

The Big Kahuna-R
Stars: Kevin Spacey, Danny DeVito, Peter Facinelli
Director: John Swanbeck

In a performance that whiffs of Lester Burnham, Kevin Spacey waxes philosophical in a business suit during "The Big Kahuna," a short, contained film that catalogs the clash between secularism and religion through the medium of an industrial lubricant seminar in Wichita.

It's not as confusing as it sounds, as Spacey, Danny DeVito and newcomer Peter Facinelli play salesmen of differing belief systems and generations. What makes it so interesting isn't Spacey's Larry or DeVito's wise and weary Phil, but Bob, played with the right amount of indignation by Facinelli, a taller version of Tom Cruise.

Bob, you see, is a born again Christian. And his beliefs, and how they clash with that of the responsibility-minded and company-loyal Larry, don't reveal themselves in the opening scenes. But director John Swanbeck lets the pot simmer to a proper temperature, as Phil and Larry angle to land the one big contract that will validate their career and Bob learns the ropes.

When the president of the company never shows, the play is in Bob's hands to land the contract, who inadvertently talked to him for hours. It leads to a confrontation and a moral message that might have been delivered a bit better, but still found its way home.

Spacey and DeVito are on top of their game, Facinelli holds his own and the screenplay from Roger Rueff, which is based on his play, is subtle enough to reveal more than the rounded edges of characters. ★★★

Dinosaur-PG
Running Time:
Stars: D.B. Sweeney
Directors: Ralph Zondag, Eric Leighton

Visually, Disney's newest animated feature, "Dinosaur," is so impressive that an untrained eye sees "Jurassic Park," without the humans. To put a \$120 million budget and these creatures into a story so thoughtless borders on travesty.

What is it, this obsession we have to humanize animals? Or, at the very least, to consistently



Courtesy photo

SALMA HAYEK, left and Jeanne Tripplehorn star in director Mike Figgis' experimental film "Time Code." The film is exemplary of this summer's cinematic offerings, mixing big-budget action flicks, computerized feature length films and eccentric comedies.

identify with a mammal point of view? Consider that the central dinosaur, Alydar, was not raised amongst other dinosaurs, but monkeys, and therefore adopted some sort of democratic attitude the other dictatorial dinosaurs did not.

In other words, blessed are the monkeys who save the dinosaur herd from extinction. Had Disney nothing better in its story bag than a "Tarzan" retread?

Of course, the big lizards all talk, cry, laugh and howl, save the villainous Carnosaur. (It seems the bad dinos weren't evolved enough to talk). Not once in the movie do the dinosaurs eat, but there's time for a romantic hook-up. Ridiculous, really.

Human constraints destroy any authenticity the movie earns through its presentation. What "Dinosaur" would like to do, actually, is simply rewrite all of nature's order to a Mickey Mouse standard, under which dinosaurs, I presume, would still be living in present day, foraging amongst all the world's peace-loving creatures in harmony. ★★

Mission: Impossible 2 - PG 13
Stars: Tom Cruise, Thandie Newton, Dougray Scott
Director: John Woo

Because director John Woo is considered by many of his enthusiasts to be some sort of visual poet, a literary reference seems apt in describing his latest effort, "Mission: Impossible 2." Most appropriate is William Faulkner's

classic line: Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

"M:I-2" is a paper thin bore, one that Woo, along with producer/star Tom Cruise tries to divert our attention from with pyrotechnics and two slam/bang action sequences in the final 30 minutes.

It works on a pure reactionary level, like watching fireworks a month before the Fourth of the July. "M:I-2" shoots into the air, explodes violently, splashes its vibrant colors and dissipates. It's not a spy movie, it's a theme park ride at a movie studio.

The story, as if it mattered, involves a stolen artificial virus and its antidote. The villain is former IMF agent Sean Ambrose, played with a muddied accent by Dougray Scott, in a performance as off as his denim get-up at the end of the movie. Ambrose, for reasons never fully explained, blows up a plane before the opening credits, and steals the viral antidote off an ancient scientist.

The camera then zooms to Ethan Hunt (Cruise), doing his best still rings impression on the steep face of red rocks in the American Southwest. Woo is all over this scene, and every scene hereafter, with his trademark pans and slow motion photography.

The mission, should Ethan choose to accept it: get the antidote back with the help of master thief Nyah Hall (Thandie Newton). Newton's looks are about as porcelain pretty as they come, and her Nyah, who also sports an indistinct English accent, comes off as a Bond Girl in deep freeze. So when she and Ethan ruffle the bed sheets after a

near-death car chase, it's far below the mendoza line in terms of chemistry.

Regrettably, the rest of the "M:I:2" hinges on that low heat, because Nyah's connection to Ambrose (she's his ex-lover) is her only reason for being in the movie. Angst-ridden Ethan (Cruise grinds his jaw to show angst) plunges her into the fire of danger, and, well, dangerous events unfold.

The final hour of Woo's creation is better than the first, when he breaks out of story and strides confidently into kung fu poetics. There's a motorcycle chase like you've never seen before, and beachfront fist war. But the reported problems the production have become evident in the disjointed presentation; Cruise may have claimed it was entirely John Woo's movie, but it doesn't kick itself into gear for a long time. ★★½

Road Trip - R
Stars: Tom Green, Breckin Meyer, Amy Smart
Director: Todd Phillips

Has there been so many road trip movies that the only possible title left is "Road Trip?" There's an unwritten rule that says a movie's title should never match dialogue. "Road Trip" goes one step further, calling a spade a spade.

In reality, it's not much of a trip, but a series of gross-out gags that happen to occur on it. The movie has so many sideways and segues to other plot lines, it sure doesn't feel like much of road trip, either. But writer/director Todd Phillips along with Scot

Armstrong, have written a few of the funnier scenes in the 2000 movie season to date. They have an eye for bad taste, which will have to do in place of the epic feeling one gets in watching, say "Planes, Trains and Automobiles."

But none of it is particularly smart, and Tom Green, smart and strange comedian that he is, plays it pretty straight by playing stupid. The rest of the male cast, headlined by Breckin Meyer, comes off as mostly good-natured, occasionally horny collegians.

While that everybody-has-a-little-good-in-them mantra is closer to reality, the sweetness dampens the spirits a little bit. "Road Trip" wants have its cake and eat it, too. But it takes more writing talent than first-timer Phillips has to offer at this stage in his career. ★★

"Time Code" - R
Director: Mike Figgis
Stars: Salma Hayek, Saffron Burrows, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Stellan Skalsgard

Investive, original and addicting, Mike Figgis' filmed experimentation with digital cameras - four movies run, completely unedited, all at once in different quadrants of the screen, following characters that will eventually converge into one - marks the future of filmmaking as one with voyeuristic possibilities.

The story isn't exactly heavy stuff - the day-to-day inner workings of a movie company, but side stories with lovers Hayek and Tripplehorn, who's on the verge of a breakdown, and Burrows, as the solid ground amidst a town of infidelity, give enough credence to the style, which begs for a second or third viewing.

"Time Code" includes Figgis' own soundtrack, which, if you're paying attention shifts the tone of the film, along with the movement of the cameras. A tiny subplot toward the end that turns the premise on its head gives the movie its final proper tone: Art is just that. Figgis has his tongue pressed firmly against his lens in this movie, and yet, the images of Burrows, especially toward the end, are moving. In five years, they'll dig this out and study it. As fluid as a movie can be. ★★★★★

"The Virgin Suicides" - R
Stars: Kirsten Dunst, James Woods
Director: Sofia Coppola

"The Virgin Suicides" paints

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