

FUN, but not that much

SEE JIM & TÉA STICK 'EM UP, BUT DON'T EXPECT APPLAUSE

BY BRUCE NEWMAN
San Jose Mercury News

Review: Fun with Dick and Jane

MPAA rating: PG-13 (for brief language, some sexual humor and occasional humorous drug references)

Running time: 1:25

Release date: 2005

Cast: Alec Baldwin, Jeff Garlin, Angie Harmon, Tea Leoni, Jim Carrey
Writer-director: Dean Parisot

"Fun With Dick & Jane" is the perfect movie if you happen to arrive too late for the start of "King Kong" and find yourself with three hours to kill. Actually, you could see "Dick & Jane" twice in that time, although this is not a thing I would necessarily recommend.

Other than its 85-minute running time, the movie is in all other ways imperfect, which is just about what you want from one of Jim Carrey's slapdash slapstick comedies. Perfection would ruin it.

As a midlevel executive at Globodyne -- one of those companies that seem to exist primarily as a balance sheet made of smoke and a skyscraper made of mirrors -- Carrey's titular Dick receives a long-awaited promotion one day, then discovers the next that the company has been looted by the scum that has risen to the top of the Globodyne glass.

These days, Hollywood's boss of all bosses is Alec Baldwin, whose Globodyne CEO Jack McCallister is a Southern-fried version of the executives he has played in five of his last seven film roles. (If you want to see what typecasting looks like, or you just want to see some really, really good head lacquer, here's the movie marathon for you: "The Cooler," "Along Came Polly," "The Aviator," "Elizabethtown" and "Fun With Dick & Jane.") Before Dick can find a spot for the ficus in his new office, the company is bankrupt and McCallister has flown off in his chopper, leaving the employees holding the bag.

In Dick's case, the bag is pretty much empty of savings, so after he and his wife Jane (Téa Leoni) are forced to sell everything that hasn't already been repossessed, he lines up for day work outside a hardware store and she gets involved in a cosmetic drug test that goes horribly wrong. Each of these comic set pieces pushes a little further into the realm of absurdity -- at one point, Dick's family is shown attempting to bathe in a neighbor's lawn sprinkler -- but like

Carrey's face, his comedy requires a certain elasticity in our perception of reality, or it would just look like a guy trying desperately hard to impress.

Fed up with being downwardly mobile, Dick decides that if stealing is good enough for the boss, it's good enough for him. "We followed the rules and we got screwed," he tells Jane, who seems to think he's joking when he announces his intention to stick up a convenience store.

Carrey is so good at manufacturing comedy out of thin material that he turns the predictably outrageous disguises he and Jane wear during holdups into a kind of screwball fashion show. During the original incarnation of this movie in 1977, co-star Jane Fonda saw to it that there was an undercurrent of social commentary in the couple's banditry. So when Fonda and George Segal held up the phone company in that film, bystanders applauded because they were making life miserable for a monopoly.

But in the updated version, the crime spree Dick and Jane embark on is really all about getting their goodies back. The day they bring home their widescreen plasma TV is supposed to be a happy one for all of us. I suspect many Americans will somehow manage to remain dry-eyed during this profoundly touching moment.

Long before the connection between this movie and real-world examples of business malfeasance becomes explicit, the filmmakers make clear that this is an empowerment fairy tale for the employees of such corporate meltdowns as Enron and WorldCom. They could probably use a laugh and will find it in "Fun With Dick & Jane." But just one.

'Fun With Dick & Jane'

** 1/2

Rated: PG-13 (profanity, sexual humor, humorous drug references)

Cast: Jim Carrey, Téa Leoni, Alec Baldwin, Richard Jenkins

Director: Dean Parisot

Writers: Judd Apatow, Nicholas Stoller

Running time: 1 hour, 25 minutes

Hoffman takes a star turn in channeling 'Capote'

BY CARRIE RICKEY
Philadelphia Inquirer

Review: Capote

MPAA rating: R (for some violent images and brief strong language)

Running time: 1:38

Release date: 2005

Cast: Bruce Greenwood, Mark Pellegrino, Clifton Collins, Jr, Catherine Keener, Philip Seymour Hoffman

Directed by: Bennett Miller

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- » [Philip Seymour Hoffman finds life, struggle in the world of 'Capote'](#)

In the exceptional character study of author and personality Truman Capote, Philip Seymour Hoffman resembles a furlless hare in tortoiseshell glasses. Pink and supersensitive, he sniffs out the toxic secrets beneath landscapes and faces, swallows them whole, and coughs up a masterpiece about the secure, stable world of the American heartland and the rootless drifters who would despoil it.

Capote spans the years 1959 to 1965. It opens with the *Breakfast at Tiffany's* scribe reading a news story about the Clutters, four members of a prosperous farming family, found murdered in Holcomb, Kan., and ends with the snap of the hangman's noose that concludes his 1966 nonfiction classic *In Cold Blood*.

The implication of this stunning (in both meanings of the word) film portrait from director Bennett Miller and screenwriter Dan Futterman is that Capote himself possessed the sangfroid of those killers whose violence he harvested and spun into literary gold.

Capote's landmark chronicle, which wore the hats of crime story and writerly nonfiction, blazed the trail for *The Executioner's Song*, *Fatal Vision*, and, alas, *Inside the Mind of Scott Peterson*. But to report the events, Capote likewise wore two hats (or is it two faces?): those of befriender and betrayer. He was a charmer who pried secrets from people in the guise of helping them and a rake who exploited those secrets for personal gain.

Chin upthrust with lordly disdain, hands aflutter, voice oscillating between whisper and squeal, Hoffman gives a performance that's uncanny, both because it embodies the writer and shrewdly analyzes his contradictory traits of strength and helplessness.

Swathed in a camel's hair coat and cashmere scarf, he cuts a curious figure in homespun Kansas. The filmmakers suggest that he would have drowned in the amber waves of grain but for his human flotation device, Harper Lee (the superlative, if subdued, Catherine Keener), the film's moral compass. Lee, his childhood friend, conveniently had just shipped *her* masterpiece, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to her agent and thus was available to be Capote's intellectual lifeguard.

(Those familiar with Lee's novel and the movie it spawned probably know that Scout's neighbor, Dill, is based on young Truman.)

But Capote did not want to be saved from Perry Smith (Clifton Collins Jr., in a magnetic performance), the angel-faced, devil-hearted accused killer who captured the writer's imagination and, it is suggested, his heart.

The author's identification with Smith was so profound - "it's as though we grew up in the same house" - that *In Cold Blood* is equal parts love poem and death sentence. Capote convinces Perry that he is there to help with his defense, all the while praying for an execution that will make the story more dramatic.

Miller and Futterman tell their story with plain, uninflected film language, permitting the ambiguities to surface. Theirs is not the anti-capital-punishment tract of Richard Brooks' excellent 1967 film *In Cold Blood*. It is a story about an accomplice to crime who lived to tell the story.

Capote engages both the practical and the moral implications of Capote's achievement. At the end we hold him in exasperated ambivalence. Can we love the writer and damn the man?

No guts for 'Glory'

BY CHRISTOPHER KELLY

Ft. Worth Star-Telegram

Review: Glory Road

MPAA rating: PG-13 (violence, racial epithets)

Running time: 1:58 mins.

Release date: 2006

Cast: Mehcad Brooks, Evan Jones, Austin Nichols, Derek Luke, Josh Lucas

Directed by: James Gartner

Charting the unlikely triumph, in 1966, of a racially integrated men's basketball team at Texas Western University, *Glory Road* might as well be *Seabiscuit* without the horse, or *Miracle* without the hockey sticks. It's a very familiar underdog story, with all of those very familiar cliches: the inspirational, visionary coach who wants to shake things up; the gifted but unruly players who need to be whipped into shape; and the doubting community at large that expects things to be done the old-fashioned way. (One guess as to who proves triumphant.)

Still, comfort food has its place, especially with ingredients this satisfying. On its own unambitious terms, *Glory Road* isn't half bad. Directed by first-timer James Gartner with an appealing lack of fuss or fancy camera work, the movie begins in Fort Worth, where Coach Don Haskins (Josh Lucas) is leading his girls high school team to the state championship. Haskins soon gets a call from the honchos at Texas Western (which later became UTEP), who ask him to coach their fledgling Division I basketball team.

Haskins packs up his wife and kids and heads to El Paso, where he discovers there's no money to recruit new talent. His plan: Track down promising young blacks playing at high schools and on playgrounds across the country and give them the opportunity that most other universities have denied them because of race. Haskins and his athletes -- both black and white -- are greeted with skepticism and later with outright derision, especially once they begin to climb in the national rankings.

Glory Road unfolds with a breezy mixture of comedy, sports action and self-righteousness: You laugh at the teammates' earnest efforts at bridging the racial divide, as the movie congratulates you for your liberal enlightenment. It's the same half-savvy, half-cynical approach that propelled *Remember the Titans* (Jerry Bruckheimer produced both films), and it certainly goes over smoothly.

Just don't expect the movie to tell you something you couldn't have figured out by staring at a Wheaties box for two hours. The seven black recruits, for instance,

are played by a group of charismatic actors, including *Antwone Fisher's* Derek Luke, and they each have exactly *one* character trait: the arrogant hothead, the wilting violet, the black revolutionary intellectual and so on. What links them all is a certain saintly manner -- even when these guys sneak across the border for a night of carousing, one of them ends up meeting his soul mate.

Is this progress? Nearly 40 years after the seminal race-relations drama *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Hollywood is still serving up "noble Negroes" -- black characters who aren't allowed to be especially human or flawed, lest they turn off the white viewers in the audience, or make the movie's "inspiration" feel less inspirational.

But coming on the heels of a movie like *Crash*, where black and white characters were allowed to be saints and scoundrels (often in the same breath), the naivete of *Glory Road* is a tad embarrassing. The screenplay, by Chris Cleveland, Bettina Gilois and Gregory Allen Howard, raises a few provocative questions: Was Don Haskins truly a moral hero -- or just a canny guy who saw opportunity where others didn't and exploited it all the way to a national championship?

(Lucas' able but unilluminating performance doesn't exactly tell us what made the guy tick.) And is there truly a "white" style and a "black" style of basketball, as the black players on the team assert -- and if so, which one is better?

Except, just as quickly as these knotty, intriguing ideas are tossed out, they're pushed aside or elided entirely; this is a movie about the underdog spirit that's afraid of its own potential power. In the final 20 minutes, Gartner serves up a beautifully executed re-creation of the NCAA final between Kentucky and Texas Western, which pays heed to both teams' fierce commitment and on-court intelligence. (Jon Voight lends subtlety and grace to the one-note part of Kentucky's racist head coach, Adolph Rupp.)

But if *Glory Road* sends you out on a high, what mostly sticks with you are the missed opportunities. Like last year's *North Country*, it takes a story about hard-won equality and burnishes it into feel-good fantasy. There's probably a great movie to be made from this material, about the anguish of being young, black and immensely talented in a country that treats you with suspicion and enmity. Instead, *Glory Road* takes the low road and settles for putting a lump in your throat.

Momma's back, trying again for the big laughs

BY DAVID HILTBRAND
Philadelphia Inquirer

Review: Big Momma's House 2

MPAA rating: PG-13 (brief vulgar language, boxing violence)

Running time: 1:39

Release date: 2006

Cast: Marisol Nichols, Michelle Parylak, Nia Long, Elton LeBlanc, Martin Lawrence

Directed by: John P. Whitesell

You would have thought one movie would be enough to squeeze all the comedic possibilities out of the ruse of Martin Lawrence masquerading as a fat, elderly woman.

But *Big Momma's House 2* provides so many fresh occasions for hilarity: Big Momma at a spa frequented by (what else?) Victoria's Secret models; Big Momma at the beach in a clingy yellow bathing suit and blond braids, re-creating the scene from *10* with Bo Derek jogging in the sand; Big Momma doing backflips in a cheerleader's outfit.

Now how much would you pay for a ticket? What's that? You're going to wait for *BMH2* to come to cable? Good call.

The concept of this fatuous sequel can be summed up as Big Momma does Mrs. Doubtfire. Lawrence returns as FBI agent Malcolm Turner. This time, he dons the fat suit, the support hose, and the wig to go undercover as a nanny in the home of a man suspected of hacking into our government's most top-secret agencies.

After the requisite conflict, Big Momma begins to bond with the family's troubled kids, particularly the punky teen Molly (Philly native Kat Dennings). Espionage inevitably takes a backseat to Big Momma's domestic duties.

Meanwhile, Malcolm's very pregnant wife, Sherri (Nia Long), begins to think her man is catting around, especially after finding the world's largest thong under their bed. It looks like a lace catapult.

Molly's stress-causing parents are played by Mark Moses (*Desperate Housewives*) and Emily Procter (*CSI: Miami*). The whole movie has the look of a Battle of the Network Stars. Malcolm's FBI confederates, for instance, are played

by Marisol Nichols (*In Justice*), Zachary Levi (*Less Than Perfect*), Sarah Brown (*General Hospital*), and Dan Lauria (*The Wonder Years*).

BMH2 is a harmless, genial outing, a comedy that is amusing without ever rising to the level of funny. You sit through the film with a smile on your face, waiting for the laughs that never come.

King Kong: thumbs up

APE DESERVES CONSIDERATION FOR AN OSCAR; HUMANS AND ANIMATION ARE UPLIFTING IN THIS OVERSIZE REMAKE

BY BRUCE NEWMAN
San Jose Mercury News

Review: King Kong

MPAA rating: PG-13 (frightening adventure violence and some disturbing images)

Running time: 2:30

Release date: 3:07

Cast: Naomi Watts, Andy Serkis, Jack Black, Adrien Brody, Jamie Bell, Thomas Kretschmann

Written by: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson (based on a story by Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace)

Directed by: Peter Jackson

"King Kong" is a sensational two-hour movie buried inside a very good three-hour one. Picking up where he left off with his "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, director Peter Jackson has run the original 1933 "King Kong" through his epic imaginarium and given us the year's most thrilling entertainment.

Also its most heartbreaking love story.

If it says something about our doomed civilization that the tenderest mercies the screen can produce are between a beautiful blond (Naomi Watts) and a 25-foot, 8,000-pound silverback gorilla, well, what a way to go. The dilemma that now confronts Oscar voters is how to justify denying him a nomination for best actor.

"King Kong" begins showing at some theaters Tuesday at midnight.

Ann Darrow (Watts) has come to Skull Island looking to break into the movie business, but when she gets there -- after an hour of fleshing out the story lines of director Carl Denham (Jack Black) and playwright Jack Driscoll (Adrien Brody) -- the natives are restless. (They may not be the only ones.) The islanders kidnap Ann, then strap her to a sacrificial altar above a river of fire that serves as a kind of 24-hour buffet for any prehistoric monsters stomping around the jungle.

By and by, Kong picks Ann up for dinner.

She's reluctant at first and plays hard to get. But when a tyrannosaurus rex moves menacingly toward her, Ann turns and for the first time moves *toward* Kong. She will never run away from him again.

This is followed by a breathtaking procession of battle sequences that begins with the big ape going Kong-fu on a family of T-rexes, using martial arts moves mixed with Hulk Hogan body slams to keep the dinosaurs from making a morsel of Ann. When she tumbles into a deep chasm filled with vines, so does the brawl to end it all, with Kong and the T-Rexes fighting as they fall.

When the fight is finished, Ann touches her hand to her heart, looks at the great ape and says, "Beautiful." And it is.

In effect, the idea that made the original movie great -- that you couldn't just put some guy in a gorilla suit and hope to persuade people to be scared -- has now come full circle. In 1933, Willis O'Brien created a scale-model ape and brought him to life using stop-motion animation. If the beast didn't exactly look real, it came close enough to thrill audiences who were willing to suspend disbelief for the tale created by directors Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack.

The new Kong is a completely digital work of art, but to make his movements and facial expressions look real, Jackson put actor Andy Serkis in a gorilla suit made of motion-capture sensors, then let computers transform Serkis' performance into Kong's.

This is the same computer animation magic that let Serkis create such a vivid Gollum in the final two installments of Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. But when Serkis' name was mentioned as a possible nominee for best supporting actor, the process of motion-capture was so new that the idea was quickly hooted down.

But actors in shape-shifting disguises frequently have been nominated in the past, sometimes for performances less expressive than the one given by Serkis (who also plays the ship's cook, Lumpy). In John Hurt's Oscar-nominated title role in the 1980 film "The Elephant Man," John Merrick cries out, "I am not an animal!" Serkis pounds his chest, and we believe he actually *is* one. No matter how Kong's performance is achieved, it is among the best given by any actor -- male or female, man or beast -- this year.

In Watts, Kong not only finds his match, but his equal. In the original "King Kong," Fay Wray remained a damsel in distress throughout the movie, but Jackson and his co-writers have let her character out of that cage, and Watts responds with a performance so rich and humanizing that we can begin to see the two of them together, sharing a climb-up in midtown.

That's where they are when Denham captures Kong and turns him into a Broadway attraction, billed as "The Eighth Wonder of the World." This doesn't last long -- though long enough to see that Black, like Brody, is woefully miscast - - before Kong escapes into Times Square. There he begins picking up blonds like a drunken sailor, looking for the one he loves.

The re-creation of New York as it looked during Kong's unruly 1933 visitation is itself a wonder. With the rest of the Manhattan skyline lowered like the hem of a glittering garment, the Empire State Building rises to its lonely summit -- an obelisk constructed by the inhabitants of some lost world. Climbing to the sharp end of what writer E.B. White once described as "this vigorous spear that presses heaven hard," Kong arrives at his destiny clutching the only friend he has ever known.

Gravely wounded, he sits atop the skyscraper, sunlight beginning to streak the morning sky. The great gargoye raises his fist to his breast, as if to pound it one last time, then stops. Kong touches his hand to his heart, his broken heart.

Beautiful.

'King Kong'

RatedPG-13 (frightening adventure violence and some disturbing images)

CastNaomi Watts, Andy Serkis, Jack Black, Adrien Brody

DirectorPeter Jackson

WritersFran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson (based on a story by Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace)

Running time3 hours, 7 minutes