

SEEN & NOTED THIS WEEK

LXG (BIG SCREEN ONE SPUD)
LAUREL CANYON (VIDEO) ONE SPUD
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN (BIG SCREEN) 2 XL SPUDS

SPUD RATING LEGEND

TWO XL SPUDS — Absolute Must See
TWO SPUDS — Worth Checking Out
ONE SPUD — Take It Or Leave It
NO SPUD 4U — Just Plain Sucks



VOLUME 203

LIFE MUST BE GETTING BACK TO NORMAL. WE MADE IT OUT TO TWO MOVIES THIS WEEK.

I've been working my ass off on a number of fronts lately. A lot of nights, a few weekends. It gets like that sometimes. So this week, I felt more than the average need for a break or two.

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN (ONE SPUD, BUT SEE IT ANYWAY)

I guess if there is any sort of theme to the summer, for us, it's been comic book heroes. The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is the second we've seen so far and it doesn't look like the last.

This movie is as pure a testimony to the advances being made in digital animation as I have seen yet this summer. It's a real lavish spectacle based on graphic novels (read comic books) Alvin Moore and Kevin O'Neill. The year is 1899 and the industrial revolution is in full swing. But of course, there's always someone around to screw it up for everybody. In this case, it's a group of what looks to be renegade German soldiers, brandishing automatic weapons and driving steel plated tanks that are way ahead of their time and looking to wipe the British Empire off the map. A powerful industrialist named M. (what else), assembles a team of all the big time freaks around to put a stop to it. The League, so to speak is headed up by Sean Connery, who plays the legendary adventurer Alan Quartermain. There's also Dr Jeckel and his hulky pal, Mr Hyde, Dorian Gray (from A Portrait Of) doing his best Johnny Depp, Captain Nemo looking like he escaped from the last Terry Gilliam movie, the Invisible Man, a hot looking vampire and a Tom Sawyer character who looks like he could be related to Owen Wilson. But, you guessed it, M has a much

more fiendish plan in mind. Actually he has a couple of them, which I won't reveal, cause you know I don't do that.

LXG, as it has been dubbed by the marketing types, is extremely visually topheavy. We stayed for the credits (we get a kick out of all the crazy nicknames that the crewpeople have) and noticed that there were, in addition to Industrial Light and Magic, no less than 16 computer animation and special effects companies involved in the making of this movie. Too bad that all those propellerheads were let down because in spite of the fact that this film is visually stunning (what isn't these days?), it was really kind of a letdown from both the character and the story perspective. It was so filled with action that you barely had a chance to get to know anybody and therefore care about them. Storywise, it completely lost its focus somewhere early in act III, and Sean Connery doesn't get to crack wise as much as he usually does in his movies. Cinemagraphically, it reminded me a lot of the Tim Burton Batman movies, which I found a bit depressing. The Hulk proved that you can make a great comic book movie and still let a bit of sunshine into the production. LXG is pretty dark and gloomy.

But the real star of this movie is not Sean Connery, although I have to admit he comes close. No the real star is the amazing submarine which Captain Nemo commands. This thing is so beautiful as comic book art come to life that it damn near made me cry. I'm not even gonna try and describe it. It really does need to be seen on the big screen to be fully appreciated. That, and just about every one of the powerful CGI and in-camera effects and digitally created scenics. This is amazing stuff to watch. Now as we all know, just being amazing to watch does not a two-spud movie make, but go see it anyway, 'cause you really have to check out this submarine.

LAUREL CANYON (VIDEO)

ONE SPUD

This movie was advertised as the "long awaited" second feature by somebody named Lisa Cholodenko, who's other feature was something called High Art which starred Alley Sheedy. She was the mall rat looking member of the Brat Pack. (St Elmo's Fire and other pretentious crud). Anyway, High Art was this little film about a lesbian photographer and drug addict, played by Sheedy, who has all the magnetism and screen presence of a three-day old slice of pizza. And though the movie was coherent and had some gratuitous nudity, it was pretentious, arty and boring.

Laurel Canyon, on the other hand, promised not to be so, since it had Frances McDormund, who is one of the better actresses around (Fargo, Almost Famous), in the lead role. Knowing all this I'm standing in the video store, scraping the bottom of the barrel here, willing to give the heretofore boring, arty and pretentious Lisa another chance.

Oh well.

Laurel Canyon is the story of a young doctor played by Christian Bale (American Psycho, Shaft 2000), who travels to SoCal to do his residency and brings his dweeby but extremely beautiful girlfriend along, so that she can write her dissertation,

something to do with the sex life of some insect. Unfortunately Christian's record producer mom (Frances), is still at the house, attempting to finish an album with some British rock band. Christian has real issues with his dope smokin', rock musician screwin', sexually ambiguous mom and who could blame him.

Anyway there's a lot of debauchery going on here and character arcs crash and burn all over the place. Laurel Canyon is not a bad soap opera movie, if that's your cup tea. But I found it just a bigger budget sequel to Lisa's arty, pretentious and boring first movie.

Underlining this pretension are the two songs, which the band is attempting to record. One particularly misogynist lyric stuck in my head.

*"I left her at the side of the road
Carrying a heavy load".*

Gawd. Lisa is really no lyricist. these songs completely mystified me. Maybe they were supposed to be symbolic of something I'm just too dumb to get. But everything else about this movie was so painfully obvious that I'm almost certain it couldn't have been that.

Mostly Laurel Canyon is a kind of exposition of just how culture-locked into the sixties and early seventies some parts of Southern California still are. Yeah, that's a revelation and a half. What Laurel Canyon is mostly, is a powerful testimony to the fact that good actors can make even the most dreary and cliched of scripts worth watching, at least one spud worth anyway.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

(TWO XL SPUDS)

Finally, after a long summer of I don't know what to call it...high priced mediocrity, along comes Pirates Of The Caribbean—Curse Of The Black Pearl. This movie is an absolute Gem, in the same sort of way that Willow and The Princess Bride and The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter are gems. This is one of those movies that will blow you away on the big screen because it is so flawlessly executed. And when it comes out on DVD, you'll buy it and haul it out and watch it a dozen more times before it's your turn to push up daisies. You'll watch it whenever you start feeling that the movie industry is going to hell in a handbasket, and you'll ask yourself repeatedly why can't they just make more movies like this. You know, movies with rollicking adventure, intrigue, supernatural mystery, romance, treachery and all kinds of other skullduggery, that will keep the kids captivated for nearly three hours and will give you some of that old time 'Saturday afternoon at the movies' feel.

The Wife, who is a gem herself, had an interesting insight. She believes, (and expressed this to me as we were dashing across town to a dinner which we were late for because this movie was about forty minutes longer than I thought it would be), that most of the really good action adventure movies have one important thing in common, to wit: they never really take themselves all that seriously. When you think about it, that's kind of true. (Indiana Jones, Star Wars True Lies, etc). Pirates falls very much into that category. You find yourself watching this movie with a smile on your face and occasionally breaking into laughter. But the stupid smile never fades.

Pirates is essentially the story of a legendary pirate ship called The Black Pearl which had a curse put on it by some Inca priest. It was considered a myth until The Black Pearl's Captain, Jack Sparrow, played with flashy effeminate flair by Johnny Depp, shows up at some colonial outpost island wanting to commandeer a ship from the British fleet to go after and get back his ship. To tell you the rest of the story would be kind of pointless since you absolutely have to see the movie. Needless to say, it's complex, intriguing and filled with adventure. On an executional level, Pirates looks to be technically flawless. There is some amazing animation here. But this is really a movie about characters. Both Johnny Depp and Geoffery Rush, as the mutinous Capt. Barbarosa should, but probably won't win Oscars for their performances. Johnny Depp is probably the most adept character actor in the business right now, and this character is so intriguing and his rendering of it is filled with rich nuance, right down to the implanted gold capped teeth, cranberry bandana and braided goatee and his flawless eastside London accent. He had us completely enthralled from the get go.

The direction, by relative newcomer Gore Verbinsky, is a marvel of pure energy that never lets up falters or veers off course. This guy hasn't done a lot of movies, (The Ring, The Mexican and Mouse Hunt which are all Two Spudders), but that doesn't seem to mean a hell of a lot in Hollyweird these days, because his approach to this film is completely go big or go home, which is kind of the same expression that I imagine big boss Jerry Bruckheimer probably has on a framed cross stitch above his bed.

At the risk of sounding tedious and repetitive, Pirates Of The Caribbean is easily the most fun the Wife and I have had at the movies probably since Lord Of The Rings, and this was a hell of a lot more fun. So whatever else you do this summer, go see this movie on the biggest screen you can find. I absolutely guarantee you will love it.

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED

TUBE

There's a new Brit series hitting A&E this week called MI-5. It's slated to kick off with back to back episodes Tuesday night, from 9:00 to 11:00 PM. You can usually count on the Brits for sophisticated and well-written drama, so this might be worth checking out.

Now, very important, get your VCR instruction books out because you're either going to have to tape one of these M1-5 episodes or Keen Eddie, which is back on Fox (after the MLB All-Star break) at 9:00

VIDEO

This week's new releases include The Man Who Killed Don Quixote, which is a documentary on the failed attempt by genius director Terry Gilliam (Brazil, Twelve Monkeys, The Fisher King, The Adventured of Baron Munchausen) to make a new \$100 million version of Don Quixote with, among others, Johnny Depp. He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not, which is director Audrey Tautou's follow-up to Amelie, and which

*Norm Wilner of the Star strongly recommends. And for all you period piece lovin' spuds, a new (short) version of the famous Dickens' classic, **Nicholas Nickleby**, which apparently suffers from the relatively short length. But there are probably lots of neat scenery and costumes to oogle. Also **The Life Of David Gale**, which I'm going to check out in spite of the fact that everybody I've read says it's pretty much an abomination. That was enough to get me interested.*

Well that's all for this week. I'm goin' downstairs to watch the British Open.