

'G.I. Joe' leaves reviewer feeling satisfied



Photos provided by gijomovie.com

BY ALEX BOLES
Reviewer

During the past year, the only movie I saw more than once was "Twilight." I wasn't one of those Twi-hard fans who waited in line for the midnight showing, but I did see it four times in theaters. You can judge me if you'd like.

When I saw "G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra," I knew I would end up seeing it again. The total viewing count in theaters so far is only two, but it's still playing in town, so I guess we'll see if it can beat "Twilight."

The Joes are a team of the best of the best military personnel from throughout the world led by none other than Dennis Quaid (General Hawk). They have weaponry not even thought about by the current "regular" armed forces. The opposing forces are led and created by The Doctor (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), who controls his team with a new form of technology called "nanobites." This new form of nanotechnology has the ability to destroy cities by taking out anything metal it comes into contact with. Nanotechnology is developed by M.A.R.S. Enterprises which is headed by James McCullen (Christo-

pher Eccleston) who has four nanobite warheads created. Two U.S. military personnel, Duke (Channing Tatum) and Ripcord (Marlan Wayans), are in charge of transporting the warheads to McCullen when they get ambushed by The Doctor's crew, led by the Baroness (Sienna Miller). The Joes drop in and bring on a counterattack, leaving the Baroness empty-handed after she attempts to retrieve the warheads and Duke realizes she is his ex-girlfriend, Ana. Left wondering what happened to her after their split, he and Ripcord train their way onto the Joes' team of the elite and plan to get revenge against the crew that ambushed them.

The good guys and the bad guys play hot potato with the warheads in a couple heavy artillery attacks on both sides, but eventually the bad guys gain control and threaten to destroy one of the world's most prominent monuments before attacking three major cities worldwide. During the final battle under the polar ice cap, the Baroness begins to have flashbacks of her life with Duke and questions her loyalty to the Doctor. Duke discovers the true identity of the Doctor and mounts an attack against him while Ripcord attempts

to save Washington, D.C. from being destroyed by one of the remaining three warheads. The White House is infiltrated and the movie ends with the identity of the President being a bit sketchy. Director Stephen Sommers definitely leaves the plot open for a second film.

Considering the fact that most of the actors spent a majority of their time in front of a green screen or in simulators, they did pretty well. I would even put this film above "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen." Both movies left me in awe, but "G.I. Joe" left me wanting more.

The last time I remember seeing Sienna Miller (Baroness/Ana) was as the love interest in "Stardust" in 2007. She has an unforgettable face, but she seems to have forgettable roles lately, and I think she really stepped outside her comfort zone for this one. Speaking of stepping out, Rachel Nichols (Scarlett, lead member of the Joes and Ripcord's love interest) really surprised me in this film. The only other film I remembered her from was "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2" as Julia, the over-the-top jealous actor friend of Carmen (America Ferrera). I'm glad she decided to take on an action flick role instead of falling into the cookie-cutter role

of the girl next door Hollywood has bestowed upon her.

The men's roles were pretty similar to previous roles. Quaid did his standard awesome job as a dictator (much like his role as Commander in "Yours, Mine and Ours" in 2005). Out of left field came a cameo from Brendan Fraser as one of the sergeants for the Joes. We didn't see him for long, but it was refreshing to see him still in the mix of Hollywood other than the kiddie films he's been doing lately (i.e. "Inkheart" and "Journey to the Center of the Earth"). The classic movie "10 Things I Hate About You" also bred another acting genius with Joseph Gordon-Levitt ("The Doctor/Rex"). He's definitely matured since 1999, and I would like to start seeing him in more mature roles much like that of his movie "500 Days of Summer" that releases in September.

Basically the production team picked out of a pool of the best of the best young actors, put them in front of a green screen, said "Go" and hoped for the best. The tagline for the Joes is, "When All Else Fails, They Don't," and the actors in this film really took that and ran with it. The result is a film that I would still pay to see for a third time in theaters.

Pynchon novel hooks readers

BY FRANKLIN CLINE
Reviewer

"Inherent Vice" is the seventh novel from the brilliant recluse and National Book Award winner Thomas Pynchon. It is a fast and clever noir set in a dope-filled, seedy 1970 Los Angeles that is populated by good guys and bad guys equally unworthy of trust.

It should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Pynchon's works, the detective genre, or the mind of a "Doper" — a favored noun in "Vice" — that paranoia figures heavily into this yarn. Pynchon's novels, especially the other two that deal directly with California life in the '60s, "The Crying of Lot 49" and "Vineland," are typically populated with characters that are ultimately looking out for themselves despite any butts they have to kick or sorrow they might incur. Like Zoyd Wheeler in "Vineland," private investigator Doc Sportello, the perpetually stoned, genuinely likeable hero of "Vice," finds himself surrounded by people poisoned by their own greed and foolishness. Consequently, these characters are constantly paranoid. The massive quantity of pot he smokes can't help either.

I realize it sounds like either a ripoff of "The Big Lebowski" or a boring and callous novel were it not for the fact that nobody — despite plenty of imitators — can create characters as ugly, bizarre and ultimately charming as Pynchon's. "Vice" is populated with insane characters with insane names: Bigfoot Bjornsen, an elitist cop who might be working for the bad guys named for his favorite method of opening a door; Dr. Blatnoyd, a coked-out dentist who might or might not be in love with a cyborg; and my favorite, Fritz Drybeam, a pre-Internet (ARPA-net, anyone?) hacker who looks into the digital age and sees a total disfiguration of space and time as we know it.

Unfortunately, because the

book is relatively short and there are so many characters, many of them are not given an opportunity to make an impression beyond an amusing, if somewhat twee, name and some odd personality tic — see above. I wasn't sorry to see any of these characters go at the end of the book, with the exception of Fritz because of the shock and awe with which he would have embraced technological advances as well as Doc. Doc is the main man not only because he's fun in just about every scene — albeit at different states of (un)consciousness — but also because he's one of the most "good" characters Pynchon has ever created. It's fitting that Doc has been placed in one of the smoggiest, foggiest cities in America, and not just because it recalls an atmosphere full of thick dope smoke. It also is a tangible, constant reminder of the moral grey area in which we all operate, or, at least, Pynchon's characters are forced to.

Although it is not the best of his novels, "Inherent Vice" might very well be his most commercially viable one, something that's easy to tell if you don't mind judging a book by its cover. The neon green and magenta lettering would look at home on a far more innocuous dime-store novel or throwaway pulp fiction, but the contents within are far more rewarding, despite their faults. It does make sense that Pynchon would release something that's far easier to pick up, much less read, than his last two tomes, "Mason & Dixon" and "Against the Day." It took 50 years of writing, but Pynchon has finally made a book that would be as at home in airport bookstores as it no doubt will be to all those literary critics salivating even now at the thought of analyzing it. "Inherent Vice" is certainly a novel worth reading, if only for the stature of its author, and is a fine place as any to begin to familiarize oneself with the works of one of the greatest American writers.



Photo provided by purevolume.com

Act three of rock opera intrigues

BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

Many times when a movie releases its third or fourth sequel, the franchise begins to falter and fizzle out. The good writers have all left and the few remaining original cast members are just phoning it in. This is not the case with the third installment in the planned six-part rock opera epic released by the band The Dear Hunter. With the release of "Act III: Life and Death," we once again find ourselves immersed in the band's century-spanning genres of influence, including progressive rock with smatterings of ragtime, jazz, and swing for good measure.

To understand the complexity of the latest album you must see where it all began. The Dear Hunter began as a side project for front man Casey Crescenzo, who at the time was a member of The Receiving End of Sirens, a post-hardcore group from Boston. Following his departure in 2006, Crescenzo focused all of his efforts on his debut EP, "Act I: The Lake South, the River North," recording most of the album on his own. This was only the entry point for his planned six albums. The story arc follows the birth, life and death of a character known as "The Dear Hunter" or more simply "The Boy." "Act I" chronicles his conception and birth by his mother, a prostitute known as Ms. Terri. This album showcased the many styles to expect from the band in later releases.

The band received its greatest critical praise from its first full-length release "Act II: The Meaning of, and All Things Regarding Ms.

Leading." The story picks up several years later and begins with the death of Ms. Terri. The Boy learns of his mother's profession from her contemporaries, and eventually he falls in love with another lady of the evening known as Ms. Leading. Through her, the Boy learns about jealousy and the intricacies of love and lust. The album closes with the two parting ways and the Boy contemplating his future.

Much like "Act I," "Act III" begins with a grand opera-influenced track, urging the Boy to "come away young man where the grass is red, and you need a mask to breathe." It's the early 1900s and war has broken out in Europe. Our protagonist, just coming of age, heeds the call to arms. As the album segues into "In Cauda Venenum," the music becomes much harder, and between the passion exuded and the interspersed horns, the listener is hooked.

Crescenzo's maturation as an artist can be fully appreciated throughout the progression of "Act III." The vocal range he demonstrates is enormous, screaming one second and belting out a convincing gospel the next. The passion he exudes in every track is immense, and the fact that the album was self-produced only cements this. The story focus also has shifted from just being about love to include the loss of innocence that war brings as well as the rapid maturation the main character must suffer through to stay alive. Every track on the album deserves praise but several stand out. "The Tank" is probably the most dramatic track on the album, with its dark background vocals and driving beat. If unique

song structure is what you want, look no further than "He Said He Had a Story," in which the Boy recounts to his friends a recent trip to a local prostitute. The lyrics blend his story with the background vocals of his friends, whose questions drive the story onward. From a story progression point of view, this track also shows the Boy's recent development of loathing toward the world's oldest profession. A slower song more notable for story progression than innovation, "Father" includes an instrumental chorus that has been echoed numerous times during each of the albums. The combined bluegrass and swing influences of "Go Get Your Gun" are also noteworthy.

Even the packaging of the album shows the immense detail put into the product. In lieu of traditional liner notes, the band opted for double-sided postcards, one for each of the songs on the CD. Each card features a general visual representation of the song on one side, captured in amazing period detail and quality. On the reverse side are the songs lyrics, scrawled as if by The Dear Hunter himself in a private diary. If there is one CD you buy rather than download this year I would make it this one, as the packaging is a phenomenal companion to the music.

With this release, I am glad to say that the concept album is alive and well in modern times. One can only hope that the final half of the story will be completed in such an awe-inspiring fashion and that the band continues on its streak of originality and creativity.

New reviewer recalls 1990 hits

BY NICK FRUMSON
Reviewer

This week's theme is songs from 1990. I chose five songs from a list of the top 100 songs of 1990, the musical culture in the year the incoming freshmen were born. They include "Love Shack" from The B52's, "Free Fallin'" by Tom Petty, "U Can't Touch This" from MC Hammer, the remix of "Ice, Ice Baby" by Vanilla Ice, and "Vogue" by Madonna.

I knew some of the songs on the list but quite a few I didn't know at all. If you were curious to see what else was on that list, Google "top 100 hits from 1990." The first song I chose was "Love Shack" by The B52's. This song is a lot of fun: It's easy to dance to and has a fast beat. The song has very few words in the chorus, which mainly repeats the words

"love shack." That being said, it's a long song that is really meant for dancing. I guess you could put it on your iPod or a CD and jam in your car, but my audio ADD kicks in too early for me to get past the fourth time they repeat the chorus. On a humorous note, this song brings back memories of high school mixers, Bar Mitzvahs, and mystery punch. The music video features bright '80s colors and strange flashes of random objects like sunflowers, old people and falling wigs.

Further down the list I noticed "Free Fallin'" by Tom Petty. Although I already knew the song, I never realized who sang it. Petty has got some pipes. He has an incredible range and vocal control. In general his voice is just pleasant to listen to. "Free Fallin'" is very relaxing and

a good toe tapper but the music video is pretty weird. It depicts several time periods including a '50s scene, skateboarding in a half pipe and Tom Petty playing guitar on a mall escalator. It really is just a great song you can relax to.

Later I saw the song "U Can't Touch This" and gasped. Where to start? First off, the original song MC Hammer remixed is "Super Freak" by Rick James. I love this song, but again it's a remix with a bunch of rap verses and a simple chorus. It's catchy but boring if you are driving. Most definitely this reminds me of more high school mixers. Again, a super fun popular dance number would be incomplete without a music video. It cycles through shots of men in loose "hammer pants" to women and men wearing spandex. The dancing is pretty intense. MC Hammer could rap and I give him



Photo provided by vanillaice.com

two thumbs up for the dancing he does. "U Can't Touch This" is a perennial party favorite.

I almost lost it when I saw "Ice Ice Baby." Yet another classic song, "Under Pressure" by Queen, was covered and remixed by Vanilla Ice. It was super-popular when it came out, but I definitely am not a fan of this song. I feel like it really isn't played at dances or parties anymore, and if it is, the joke is laughing at your friends who actually have the verses memorized. The song is much more entertaining when you watch the music video.

Like the others I have reviewed this week, the music video has a "gangsta" vibe, pretty ladies, and Vanilla Ice dancing like a fiend.

The final song I didn't know very well at all. "Vogue" by Madonna is a great song. Madonna always comes out with really fun dance-oriented music, and she is gorgeous. "Vogue" is a fun, dramatic dance song that is supposed to reflect old Hollywood glamour. It refers to moving to the music and says not to worry about who you are, "black or white, boy or girl." This song was used in "The Devil Wears Prada" when Anne Hathaway's character was shown after her makeover. The music is interesting and fun, but I didn't know it was done in the early '90s. Madonna is a timeless, classy woman who is an incredible performer.

Stay tuned in the future, when I will as I review timeless films, music and more and put a contemporary critique to once-popular pop-culture.