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VIDEO

SCAN LINES Video Reviews by Sean Axmaker

New Releases

Star Trek IV

Once again it's Kirk, Spock, McCoy and crew jetting off to save the earth, only the remedy this time is a bit odd. You see, the survival of our planet depends on Kirk and Co's efforts to rescue and transport into the future a live blue whale, a mammal species extinct for centuries due to whaling excesses of the 20th century.

With director Leonard Nimoy at the helm, *The Voyage Home* retains much of the spirit of *The Wrath of Khan*, particularly its strong character interaction, personality-based humor and giddy sense of adventure. The rough edges of the solemn *Search for Spock* have been smoothed over in this fast paced, energetic tale and the crew has a field day hamming it up as they try to fit into America of the '80s (just watch Spock try to pick up '80s slang).

It's a bit ludicrous at times, but a lot of fun and the ecological theme is nicely handled. Most importantly the focus is where it belongs—on the characters. Gosh, Jim, ain't it great to be back on the bridge?

Angel Heart

Certainly one of the more controversial films of late, *Angel Heart* is a dark, disturbing one that looks to be a murky period mystery but soon reveals itself to be more sinister. Set in the late '40s, Mickey Rourke plays private eye Harry Angel hired to track down an old client of Robert DeNiro's enigmatic Louis Cypher. (an Angel and Lucifer, get it?) It isn't long before the occult element is established, as much through the foreboding style and moody set design and lighting as through the not particularly subtle set pieces (DeNiro peels a hardboiled egg with his stiletto-like fingernails, describing how in some cultures the egg is the symbol of the soul, and takes a big chomp).

Stylistically the film is spellbinding. Rourke's performance is as mannered as expected, DeNiro's fittingly commanding and Lisa Bonet's film debut is fine. The stylized mix of sex and violence (including the 10 seconds excised from theatrical prints) contributes to the film's dark theme and may disturb some viewers.

My biggest problem with the film, however, is screenwriter/director Alan Parker's black vision of the human race. As in his cinematic interpretation of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, Parker finds little to redeem the human race. *Angel Heart* is fascinating and hard to forget but it may not be everyone's idea of fun.

Hoosiers

In Indiana, circa 1954, people take their basketball seriously, even the town of Hickory with a high school of 50 or so students. When city man Gene Hackman rolls into town with some new ideas on how to coach a basketball team, there's bound to be some friction. Alienating fathers and fans as he rejects traditional training methods and unwanted advice, his soft spoken command and integrity earn him the respect of assistant principal Barbara Hershey, who first resisted his presence, his players and finally the town basketball hero, who gave up the game last year but agrees to come back only with Hackman on the bench.

Based on a true story, *Hoosiers* is in many ways a traditional David and Goliath sports story. A small school team is turned into a well oiled machine on the court and takes the state by storm, yet director David Anspaugh and writer Angelo Pizzo don't allow the court action to overwhelm the low-key character drama Hackman gives one of his best performances of late as the reflective coach returning to the game after 12 years and Dennis Hopper scores a fine character role as the town drunk given a second chance by Hackman. Nothing in *Hoosiers* comes as much as a surprise but the strong performances, sure direction and well crafted screenplay make it fine entertainment.

Defense of the Realm

Described as a British *All the President's Men*, *Defense of the Realm* is a fictional but fascinating story of government manipulation closer to John Le Carre than Woodward and Bernstein.

Reporter Gabriel Byrne is presented circumstantial evidence damning to high ranking Member of Parliament Ian Bannen and, over the objections of colleague Denholm Elliot, runs an article which provokes Bannen to resign days before an important address to the Parliament. When Elliot, who has been marshalling evidence to prove Bannen innocent, is found dead the next morning, Byrne continues his investigation and, with the help of Bannen's secretary Greta Scacchi, finds a cover up that leads straight to the cabinet.

Paced slowly and deliberately, director David Drury gives *Defense* a studied, sure development, creating a story that snakes around as information comes to light and only gradually builds tension. With little action, and dramatic development achieved largely through dialogue and suggestion, *Defense* might prove slow for some people but it is rivetting for those who like their drama understated and unexpected.

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