

News Briefs

'Analyze This,' 'Forces of Nature' held on top

LOS ANGELES — The romantic tale "Forces of Nature" and the comedy "Analyze This" held on to the top two box office slots, fighting off a challenge from the opening of "EDtv," final figures showed Monday.

"The Mod Squad" debuted at No. 4 amid scathing reviews, and the low-budget animated film "Doug's 1st Movie" followed in fifth.

"Forces of Nature," with Ben Affleck as a groom-to-be who falls in love with the free-spirited Sandra Bullock on the way to his wedding, brought in \$9.4 million in a weekend that saw a 20 percent drop from last year's earnings for the same weekend.

"Analyze This" with Robert De Niro as a neurotic mobster collected \$8.7 million for second, with "EDtv" trailing in third with \$8.3 million.

The Ron Howard-directed comedy featured Matthew McConaughey as a goofy video store clerk who agrees to have every minute of his life captured by television. The film and the other two new releases of the weekend were all based on TV pro-

jects or TV shows.

"The Mod Squad," an updated version of the 1960s TV show about three youths who become undercover cops to stay out of jail, opened with \$6.1 million for fourth place. "Doug's 1st Movie" followed with \$4.5 million.

Navigator pleads guilty after discarding tape

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — A Marine navigator pleaded guilty Monday to obstruction and conspiracy charges for destroying a videotape made during the flight of the jet that clipped a ski gondola cable in Italy.

Capt. Joseph Schweitzer, 31, admitted throwing the tape into a fire two days after his EA-6B Prowler radar-jamming jet struck the cable, killing 20 people in February 1998.

"It was a stupid thing to do, and I regret that," Schweitzer told the military judge, Col. Alvin Keller. "It was a rash decision."

The charges carry a maximum of 10 years in prison. A military panel will be chosen as early as Tuesday for a sentencing hearing. Keller said the victims' relatives can testify about how the tape's disappearance affected

their quest to determine what happened in the crash.

"Joe is the type of guy who wants to stand up and take responsibility," said Dave Beck, Schweitzer's attorney. "There were some bad mistakes made after the accident, and they made bad decisions."

The jet's pilot, Capt. Richard Ashby, 31, of Mission Viejo, Calif., was acquitted by a military jury at Camp Lejeune of manslaughter and other charges on March 4, outraging Italian authorities.

Manslaughter counts against Schweitzer were dismissed after the acquittal. But Schweitzer and Ashby both faced the obstruction of justice and conspiracy charges because of the disappearance of the videotape.

Jury being chosen for Wyoming murder case

LARAMIE, Wyo. — Potential jurors in the trial of a man charged with beating to death Matthew Shepard were warned Monday to expect intense media scrutiny, the possibility of three weeks away from their families and graphic evidence.

"Murder is not a pretty subject," prosecutor Cal Rerucha

told a group of potential jurors. "These pictures are very graphic."

Russell Henderson, 21, is charged with first-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated robbery in last October's death of Shepard, a gay college student.

Defense attorney Wyatt Skaggs also warned jurors to expect disturbing testimony, but he told them they should not be swayed by national opinion in the case. In the aftermath of the killing, some dismissed Laramie as a small-minded backwater.

"We've got to begin by disregarding the guilt thing, that we have to punish somebody to show the nation we're not some dusty old cow town," Skaggs said.

Rerucha and Skaggs said the case should not be decided on the fact that the victim was gay.

"Whether we are black or white, rich or poor, Catholic or Protestant or even atheist, whether we have power or no power, whether we are straight or whether we are gay, we are equal because the Wyoming constitution tells us we are equal," Rerucha said.

"If any of you cannot follow that element of the constitution, you cannot sit on this jury."

Grain freighter ashore near Tongue Point

ASTORIA — A 718-foot freighter with 50,000 tons of wheat aboard is aground near Tongue Point east of here, the U.S. Coast Guard said Monday.

The U.S.-flagged ship, the Liberty Spirit, went ashore while anchored, the Coast Guard said. It said there is no sign of an oil leakage.

The ship came ashore at about 2 p.m. near Tongue Point east of Astoria. The Columbia River bar was closed to shipping, and currents and high winds put the ship ashore while it was waiting for it to open, the Coast Guard said.

It is said to contain about 43,000 gallons of fuel oil, about a tenth of the amount on board the New Carissa when it went ashore near Coos Bay Feb. 4.

The Liberty Spirit was headed for Pakistan.

Two tugs from Astoria were at the scene at dusk and two more were en route from Longview, Wash.

Witnesses said the ship was nosed into the Tongue Point peninsula, headed west.

Pulse

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