

Documentary explores the unknown world of women's wrestling in 1940s

BY C.G. WALLACE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In an age of Marilyn Monroe and circle skirts, a group of women in industrial-strength bathing suits grappled, bodyslammied and tough-talked their way into the wrestling world.

With names such as The Fabulous Moolah, The Great Mae Young, Ella Waldek and Gladys "Kill'em" Gillem, these were the real first ladies of wrestling, who toiled in the 1940s and '50s.

Those early years are recounted in the documentary "Lipstick & Dynamite, Piss & Vinegar: The First Ladies of Wrestling," which Atlanta filmmaker Ruth Leitman sees as a

story of women's empowerment.

Leitman said she asked one of the wrestlers if she was a feminist, and the answer summed up the practical outlook shared by her subjects. "I wasn't out there burning my bra," the woman replied. "I needed it to hold me up."

For Waldek, wrestling was a way for her to get off her family's Washington farm and see the world. She began wrestling in 1949 and retired in 1979, in between logging thousands of miles in dusty gyms, small-town arenas and armories.

"As far as people accepting us, we always were ladies first. Outside the ring we were dressed to the nines," said the 75-year-old Waldek,

who now lives in Pinellas Park, Fla.

"We knew we were first, but the idea of being pioneers never crossed our mind."

These women, still very much the entertainers they were in their youth, would like another day in the spotlight and hope the film brings them some recognition.

One of the challenges of the film was finding footage of the matches. There was little interest in documenting the fights.

David Meltzer, a San Jose, Calif.-based wrestling expert who publishes the Wrestling Observer Newsletter, said he would have liked to have seen such footage in the film, but conceded it probably doesn't exist.

Talented cast, wise writing are a perfect fit in 'Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants'

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

No handsome prince comes galloping along to rescue the four teen heroines of "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," though they all find love in unexpected places. And none of them lives out a sticky, gooey, pop-star fantasy, though they all get chances to shine.

"Sisterhood" is instead the rare movie that depicts young women realistically: excited, confused, impetuous and determined as they try to figure out who they are. The people behind the film — and more importantly, author Ann Brashares, who wrote the book on which it is based — had the exceptional wisdom to realize this is exactly the kind of depiction audiences have been sadly missing.

The talented, eclectic foursome of actresses (Amber Tamblyn, Alexis Bledel, America Ferrera and newcomer Blake Lively) bring the

characters beautifully to life, and they have a comfort together that makes you believe they've truly been friends forever.

The film isn't just for teen girls, though. Women of any age can appreciate the steadfast support these characters show for each other.

Lena (Bledel from "Gilmore Girls"), the quiet, reserved artist, is going to visit her grandparents for the summer on the Greek island of Santorini.

Angry Goth girl Tibby (Tamblyn, who starred in the recently canceled series "Joan of Arcadia") is stuck at home in Bethesda, Md., clerking at a behemoth discount store that's a thinly veiled version of Wal-Mart.

Athletic, impulsive Bridget (Lively, a blond stunner in her first major film role) is off to Baja, Mexico, to attend soccer camp following her mother's suicide.

And articulate, sarcastic Carmen (Ferrera, the charismatic star of

"Real Women Have Curves") is headed for South Carolina to visit the father she rarely gets to see since her parents' divorce.

The day before they're about to split up, they walk into a vintage clothing store, where they find a pair of jeans that surprisingly fits all their varied body types, from voluptuous Carmen to leggy Bridget.

"All I know is it made every one of our butts look good," says Carmen, who's also the film's narrator.

They decide this pair of pants must be magic, and promise to share them over the summer. Each girl gets them for a week, and must pass them along to the next person with a letter detailing what she did while she was wearing them.

All four story lines turn into unabashed tearjerkers, but the film avoids wrapping them up with easy answers, which is as miraculous as the power of the pants themselves.

'Revenge of the Sith' rules the box office after Memorial Day weekend

BY DAVID GERMAIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Payback for the Sith has meant a real payday at the box office.

"Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith" beat two strong newcomers to remain the top movie with \$70.75 million over the long Memorial Day weekend, though Hollywood again failed to climb out of a prolonged revenue decline.

Debuting in second place was the animated adventure "Madagascar" with \$61 million, while Adam Sandler's football remake, "The Longest Yard," opened a close third with \$60 million, according to studio estimates Monday.

Despite the two big debuts and a strong hold for "Revenge of the Sith" in its second weekend, theatrical receipts overall were down for the 14th straight weekend compared with last year.

The top 12 movies grossed \$225.5 million, an impressive four-day haul but still 5.5 percent behind last year's record Memorial Day weekend, when "Shrek 2" and "The Day After Tomorrow" alone combined for \$181 million in grosses.

"On the one hand, yeah, 14 weeks, that's a terrible slump," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of box-office tracker Exhibitor Relations. "But I'm optimistic because this weekend proves you can still get a heck of a lot of people in theaters with the right movies."

"It takes a lot more to excite people today, and the crop of movies this year other than 'Star Wars' and the movies that opened this weekend haven't inspired

audiences to make that step and go to the theaters."

The final installment of George Lucas' "Star Wars" saga grossed \$271.2 million domestically in its first 12 days, putting it on pace to soar beyond the \$310 million total of its predecessor, "Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones."

"Revenge of the Sith" may be on track to approach the \$431 million domestic haul of "Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace," said Bruce Snyder, head of distribution for 20th Century Fox, which released the "Star Wars" films.

As with "Titanic," the modern box-office champ that brought young girls back to the theater to see it again and again, "Revenge of the Sith" is drawing strong repeat business among young males.

"We've got a lot of kids who already have seen this picture four and five times," Snyder said.

Worldwide through Sunday, "Revenge of the Sith" had taken in \$504.4 million since its almost simultaneous debut in most countries beginning May 18.

"Madagascar," featuring the voices of Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, Jada Pinkett Smith and David Schwimmer as pampered zoo animals cut loose in the wild, plugged a hole among parents eager for a movie to take the kids to see.

"There was a pent-up desire for family pictures," said Jim Tharp, head of distribution for DreamWorks, which released "Madagascar."

"The Longest Yard," an update of the 1974 tale of prison inmates taking on their sadistic guards in a football grudge match, was a key choice for young males, who make up the bulk of Sandler's audience.

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