



The Witnesses presents a disturbingly realistic picture of the confusion and trauma of the early years of AIDS.

astonishingly good as a soldier who goes AWOL when he returns to his home in Texas and the military extends his tour of duty on the day he's set to retire. Abbie Cornish, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and former male model Channing Tatum deliver raw and memorable performances. Apart from a few ill-advised forays into cinéma vérité, Peirce proves that her long hiatus from filmmaking hasn't diminished her uncanny eye for detail or her compassion for misfits and struggling working-class Americans. Opens March 28. **A-**

—SB

Taxi to the Dark Side

Last month this disturbing documentary scored an Oscar upset over the higher-profile films *Sicko* and *No End in Sight*, and it's easy to see why: Alex Gibney presents an airtight case against the U.S. government for engaging in unforgivable acts of torture in the Mideast, then fooling the public into thinking that justice was served by incarcerating a handful of soldiers who were just following orders. Be warned: These images and accounts are both haunting and infuriating. Opens March 28 at Cinema 21. **A**

—Jim Radosta

10,000 BC

Director Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*) takes us way back in time with this epic adventure tale. Through good special effects, nice cinematography and predictable storytelling, *10,000 BC* offers an escape into a time when mammoths lived on Earth and tribes believed in spirits and myths. The hero of this story, D'Leh (Steven Strait), sets out to rescue his beloved

Evolet (Camilla Belle), who has been kidnapped by warlords. The weird accents and plain dialogue are sometimes a strain, but ultimately the movie is entertaining and should be seen on the big screen rather than DVD. **B-**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

The Witnesses

Excellent acting is the hallmark of *The Witnesses*, which opens March 21 at Hollywood Theatre. This is not unexpected from André Téchiné, the director of *Wild Reeds*, but it's especially noteworthy in this fast-paced, emotionally intense AIDS drama set in France, circa 1984. The filmmaker has said he wanted to chronicle the pandemic as it began in France, and *The Witnesses* does so admirably.

Manu (Johan Libéreau) is an alluring gay youth ready to experiment with his sexuality, a plan that doesn't exclude anonymous sex in the city's parks. He's picked up by a charming older doctor, Adrien (Michel Blanc), who becomes obsessed and introduces him to a married couple. The husband saves Manu from drowning, and the two begin an intimate relationship that Manu brutally ends when he comes down with "the disease" and tries to shut himself off from the world.

This is the core plot of the film, but it fails to capture the mix of beauty and terror that pervades it. Several vivid subplots, a kind of candor with characters that presents flawed people non-judgmentally and a disturbingly realistic picture of the confusion and trauma of those early years of AIDS make this a superior addition to Téchiné's filmography. **A**

—Gary Morris 10

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