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PETTY DISASTER

The improbable stoner flick of the year features dogs on horseback BY CHUCK ADAMS

THE TAILS OF ABBYGAIL: DREAMS COME TRUE: Written and directed by Terri Lynn Link. Cinematography, Daron Stetner. Music, Dennis Butcher. Starring Abbygail, Girlfriend, Barn Kitty. Kid Vid Entertainment, 2008. G. 35 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Everyone knows that making a film is tough work. But never was it as tough as it was for writer/director/producer/narrator Terri Lynn Link while making *The Tails of Abbygail: Dreams Come True* (the first in a series of 13 installments). Link and her Oregon crew assembled an all-star cast of Jack Russell terriers, sheep dogs, pink poodles, horses and mama cats and had them act out their parts using trick photography and very careful edits.

The story centers around Abbygail, a Jack Russell terrier whose dream is to go "out there," into the wilds of the Sandy River Gorge. Within five minutes of the film's start, Abbygail accomplishes her dream.

The rest of the film follows Abbygail and her friend Girlfriend, a Bernese mountain dog, as they go swimming in a pool, mount and ride a horse, go fishing in a garden pond, pilot a rubber raft (with a skull and crossbones Sharpied to its hull, turning it into a pirate ship) and other (mis) adventures.

Mama Cat does give a very important life lesson when she takes responsibility for her children. "As a single mom, I don't have anyone else to watch my kids, so I need to stay home," she says, declining Abbygail's invitation to go on adventures. Is this a cautionary tale for pre-teens to avoid unwanted pregnancies or a glorification of the dedication of single moms? Probably a little bit of both.

Mr. Bales, aka Pirate Dog, has trouble

focusing on his lines. Perhaps that's because his eye-patch keeps switching eyes from left to right to right to left after each cut. That would make any dog confused. Later, Pirate Dog opens up to the camera in one of the most tender scenes yet when he confides in Champ, the rescue dog, that he is afraid of the dark. Champ promises to keep this dirty little secret just between himself and Pirate Dog.

Tales of Abbygail professes to be for the "heretofore ignored demographic" of two-to-eight-year-olds, but Link has a tendency to overstuff her narration with verbiage while the static shot of a dog looking left for the biscuit, then looking right for the biscuit (avoiding a direct look at the camera) gets old real quick. I felt the inner brat inside me get bored and start burning a hole in the couch. That is, until I lit up.

Other points to consider:

Animal Cruelty: Despite the closing credits disclaimer, "No animals were hurt or injured during the filming of this movie ... Only Loved," the film's ethics are questionable. Offenses include shivering dogs who aren't allowed to shake off while filming, small dogs placed on top of tall horses so they can't get down and dogs in party hats.

Instilling Fear in the Hearts of Children: The lesson the dogs learn in regards to strangers: "What do we do if a stranger comes near us? We scream and we run for help!"

While I can't recommend this film for children, it does have the potential to be an opener for a *Cats & Dogs/Pineapple Express* double feature. **EW**

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Terri Lynn Link posing with Abbygail

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