

# These films are downers

Two new films this holiday season contain a lot of unpleasantness. "No Mercy" (R) is violent in conventional ways while "The Mosquito Coast" (PG) is more subtle and insidious with its intolerant father, Allie Fox (Harrison Ford), tormenting his family under pretense of "doing what's best" for them.

"The Mosquito Coast" is getting terrific play from the print media, with Ford this month's cover in Film Comment and American Film, to say nothing of the extensive coverage in major metropolitan daily newspapers.

But when the dust of press hoopla settles, we still have to face up to a boring two hours as Fox drags his family into the wilderness to escape the plastic decadence of contemporary America.

It's a shame because it is a loving, caring family with a loyal mother (Fileen Mirren) and two fine boys, Charlie (River Phoenix) and Jerry (Jadrien Steele). Then there's the cu-

test twins in town, April and Clover, played by 8-year-old Hilary and Rebecca Gordon. A gratuitous appearance by Butterfly McQueen rounds out the cast, along with the Fox family's faithful Indian companion, Francis Lungley (Michael Rogers), and Mr. Haddy (Conrad Roberts), the Creole boatman.

THE ACTING IS uniformly good and one must, however begrudgingly, compliment Ford for his performance. His character effectively distresses us with maniacal destructiveness directed at friend and foe alike.

The film's spurious back-to-nature theme is supposed to be the logical conclusion to Fox's pretentious wisdom about contemporary America. But it merely masks an essay in paranoia and sadism headlined by Ford's tedious insistence that each defend the family members confront his own fault.

If they had not compromised their



the movies  
**Dan Greenberg**

goal of self-sufficiency, if they had not used chemicals, then all would have been idyllic. But the setbacks were his doing, not the family's.

"The Mosquito Coast" suffers greatly from its own structure, so one tends to become bored as well as angered at Fox's irrationality, for which no real basis is ever shown.

Boredom is generated by length as well. The film is just too long, considering no real threat to their existence materializes. A trio of itinerant terrorists wander through, but they're just a convenient plot device so Allie can self-destruct his jungle paradise which, incidentally, was built far too easily.

FOX IS THE family's only danger and the scenario never satisfies us as to why he is so driven. Neither is the scenario convincing in its depiction of time.

While it is quite true that the Fox family could have built an elaborate jungle settlement complete with six-story corrugated-metal ice machine fueled by ammonia and fire, it must have taken quite a while to ferry all that equipment upstream. In hardly no time at all, they erect paradise and one giant ice machine for your viewing pleasure.

Crops grow, and the children don't, when logic tells us that time must be passing. The use of film time is so structurally weak that it just doesn't wash. When the family finally starts looking shabby, it's too late to create a sense of progression in time.

"NO MERCY" is a predictable but well-paced example of the latest in detective films — the rogue cop on a mission of vengeance.  
Chicago undercover cop Eddie Jil-



Harrison Ford is Allie Fox, who takes his family, including River Phoenix (center) as Charlie and Hilary Gordon as April, away from civilization to build their own world in "The Mosquito Coast." The adventure drama is based on Paul Theroux's 1982 best-selling novel.

lette (Richard Gere) and his partner, Joe Collins (Gary Basaraba), stumble onto something big after arresting a petty drug dealer. One usual thing and another and pretty soon Mr. Big from Louisiana, Losado (Jeroen Krabbe), murders Joe Collins while recovering his Cajun woman, Michel Duval (Kim Basinger).

Naturally, she falls in love with Jillette when he comes south to avenge his partner. After all, just because Losado bought her from her mother doesn't mean she has to love

him. Why should she? He's a mean 'un, slashing every which way with his big knife.

Basinger is sensual, and Krabbe is deadpan but effectively villainous. All the cop-film stereotypes are in attendance, but Gere is just there.

The film is fast and flashy with some neat Louisiana cafe scenes and some nice scenery as Gere and Basinger flee into the bayous. In the end, none of that can save this movie from its mundane plot and sets littered with dead bodies.

## Gift packages offering good wines, fair prices

Buying wine for a friend can be a chancey thing at best, whether for the holidays or for any other occasion. Tastes being so individualistic, it is too easy to purchase something that just doesn't seem to hit the mark.

Several wineries this year again have put together gift packages for the holidays, endeavoring to solicit your attention and money. For the most part they have done quite well, combining quality wines with fair pricing.

If your decision is to go toward a gift package, it is usually wise to go the commercial route. The gift packages made up by local merchants tend to be overpriced and laden with wines that have not otherwise sold from their shelves. True, these packages tend to be prettier on the surface but consider how much you want to pay for a basket and some green packing.

Most attractive this year among the commercially prepared packages is the one from Sterling. The winery offers its 1983 cabernet sauvignon and 1985 sauvignon blanc for \$22, a price that suggests no markup for the packaging.

STERLING WINES have long been among California's finest and, while I have not yet drunk these vintages, I am sure they will charm any knowledgeable wine drinker. He or she would know enough to keep these two bottles around for a while, to enable the wine to improve with a bit of age.

Just as classy in its way is the three-half-bottle (375 ml) release from Sanford. At \$20 it seems a bit pricey. However, the main attraction here is the much-awarded 1984 pinot noir, the wine that was recently awarded a Platinum in New York



wine  
**Richard Watson**

as the best of all wines entered in a huge showing. Very impressive.

And it should be noted that Sanford in general makes elegant wines in a very Burgundian manner. This could be a great sampler for someone who will use it as a buying guide with whatever money is left over following the holidays. The other two wines in the package are the 1985 sauvignon blanc and 1984 chardonnay. Not a gift for Aunt Tillie, perhaps, but most of us know someone who would appreciate this.

For \$14.50, Inglenook has a handsome hardwood box holding its 1982 zinfandel and 1985 sauvignon blanc. I have never been impressed by its efforts with the latter, but this should appeal to some. And the box will make a fine cassette tape holder when the wine is gone (or even before, if you are in a hurry). It could have a hundred other uses, I presume.

Mouton-Cadet has a three-bottle box, two 1985 whites and a 1984 red, for \$24, that should appeal to the easily-impressed Bordeaux drinker. Mouton-Cadet always is sound if somewhat unimaginative in its packaging.

GRANDIN DRUT, lauded in this column recently, offers a bottle of that fine sparkling wine (not Champagne but close to it) and two hand-

some, imprinted glasses as a set. At \$13, however, that means you are being asked to pay \$7 for the glasses and box, a dollar more than you are paying for that which should be the focus of the gift.

For the Real Thing it is hard to exceed the Perrier-Jouet 1979 Fleur de Champagne, presented either with a standard bottle or as a magnum with several glasses. The 750 ml with two embossed glasses should be found for about \$70.

The cutest, and least expensive, little package comes from Fetzer Vineyards. It sells for \$8 and contains two half-bottles of Barrel Select wines, the 1984 chardonnay and the 1983 cabernet sauvignon.

Most elegant is the two-bottle assortment of Special Selection wines from Buena Vista, a cabernet and chardonnay. At \$35, this one is a real treat. And packaged inside some pseudo-books (cardboard) are the two heart-shaped bottles that Paul Masson has won such fame with, a Rare Port and a Rare Cream Sherry. At \$14, this is a decent buy for holiday evenings around the fireplace.

Mentery Vineyards has a two-bottle set, B and G has a Beaujolais and a chardonnay package, and there are more.

We certainly do not lack fine, last-minute choices this year, for the interested wine drinker.

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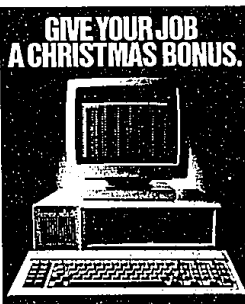
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