

# MOVING PICTURES



George Perez (from left), Will Wheaton, Sean Astin, Keith Coogan and T.E. Russell are misfit students at an exclusive boarding school that has been taken over by terrorists in "Toy Soldiers."

## How 'Toy Soldiers' is told makes for a good movie

My apologies to C. & P.S. of Rochester Hills for erroneously listing "The Five Heartbeats." You're both quite correct, it is an R film. Thanks for the rest of your very nice letter. To all those who avoid R-rated films, my apologies, and don't hesitate to check box office listings and verify that this column was correct.

On the surface of it, the "Toy Soldiers" (B+, R, 112 minutes) plot isn't too promising. Colombian drug lord Enrique Cali (Jesse Doran) is extradited to the U.S. His son, Luis (Andrew Divoff), leads a terrorist seizure of the private boys school, The Regis, attended by the son of the federal judge with jurisdiction over the Cali case.

But the FBI is one step ahead of Cali and removes the judge's son. Unfortunately, for Cali's plan, the FBI left behind five "problem" students whose pranks have long bedeviled Regis Dean Parker (Louis Gossett, Jr.) and the school's headmaster (Donholm Elliott).

Obviously these five are more than a match for the terrorists who have taken their school hostage.

It's not the story so much, as how it's told, and "Toy Soldiers" turns out to be an entertaining, fast-paced adventure story with good performances by all concerned, including the five troublemakers, led by Bill Tepper (Sean Astin) who is the obvious ringleader, and keeps Joey Trotta (Will Wheaton), Snuffy Bradberry (Keith Coogan), Ricardo Montoya (George Perez) and Hank Giles (T.E. Russell) inspired by his personal courage. If you analyze "Toy Soldiers" too much, however, it spoils the fun of the adventure so just go and try it, you'll like it.

"OSCAR" (D, PG, 105 minutes) proves that it is impossible to mix Runyon's "Guys and Dolls," Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro," Abbott and Costello and the Three Stooges, particularly when the lead of this excessively obvious and exaggerated farce is badly played by Mumbles Stallone.

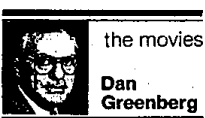
Until the last 10 minutes or so when a strange tropical brain fever destroyed the mind of director/scenarist Michael Lindsay-Hogg, "The Object of Beauty" (A-, R, 100 minutes) is an excellent, compelling film.

Despite an inappropriate conclusion, it is highly recommended as a fine character piece about two decadent lovers, Jake (John Malkovich) and Tina (Andie Macdowell), living on the edge of the fast lane.

They are so totally committed to themselves that the world merely serves as a pleasant backdrop to provide the pleasures they regularly require — even if it's a dozen bottles of Perrier in the middle of the night.

But they can't afford it because Jake's such a despicable ass that no one will provide credit when his market trading adventures collapse. All they have left is her bronze head by Sir Henry Moore.

The statue and its value is destructive as their privileged life collapses in a welter of deceit and re-entertainment, as might be expected of such shallow folks. Malkovich and Macdowell perform so well against



the movies  
**Dan Greenberg**

### Grading the movies

A+	Top marks - sure to please
A	Close behind - excellent
A-	Still in running for top honors
B+	Pretty good stuff, not perfect
B	Good
B-	Good but notable deficiencies
C+	Just a cut above average
C	Mediocre
C-	Not so hot and slipping fast
D+	The very best of the poor stuff
D	Poor
D-	It doesn't get much worse
F	Truly awful
Z	Reserved for the colossally bad
*	No advanced screening

a posh and plush background that "The Object of Beauty" truly is a fine film despite its ending.

FEW RECENT films have been as suspenseful and mind-joggling as "A Kiss Before Dying" (B+, R, 90 minutes). Writer/director John Dearden's ("Fatal Attraction") latest contribution to screen entertainment.

The story centers around the wealthy Carlsson family, secretly victimized by Jonathan Corliss (Matt Dillon), a psychopathic killer who always seems to be one step ahead of everyone else as he becomes involved with one of the Carlsson daughters — they're both played by Sean Young.

Jonathan picks on the daughter, who is a sort of Mother Theresa of the Streets, she takes care of everyone but herself.

The film's momentum and tension is generated by foreshadowing, music pounding in deep tones and the clarity of editing which makes a complicated plot easy to follow. Occasionally it's predictable, but on the whole, "A Kiss Before Dying" is nerve-racking, tense and good entertainment. (Reviewed by Kimberly Tyler.)

#### STILL PLAYING:

"Awakenings" (B, PG-13, 121 minutes).

Robin Williams and Robert De Niro as doctor and catatonic patient call to mind too many other films. The doctor's special care and sensitivity lead to temporary recovery but film lacks spark expected from these talented actors.

"Career Opportunities" (\*, PG-13). The night-shift at a Target Store is Jim's last chance. Whoopie!

"Chameleon Street" (\*, R).

## ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

### DFT offers true adventure

By John Monaghan  
special writer

Five thousand people stood on the bank of a river, surveying the half mile of ice cold whirlpools, rapids and cross currents that stretched before them. Not only did Marian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack capture the crossing for their film "Grass," they braved the rushing water themselves.

The Detroit Film Theatre pays tribute to this rough-and-ready brand of filmmaking with three re-

stored masterpieces. "Tabu" (1931), the legendary collaboration between directors Robert Flaherty and F.W. Murnau, plays on Friday, followed by the Cooper-Schoedsack epics "Chang" (1927) and "Grass" (1925) on Saturday and Sunday respectively.

At the end of the silent era, a small sub-genre of films flourished, spurred by the monumental success of "Nanook of the North" (1922). This Eskimo epic, which mixed documentary with simple narrative, paved the way for others who want-

ed to record the lives of faraway people.

"I am not going to make films about what the white man has made of primitive people," said Flaherty, "Nanook" director and Michigan native. "What I want to show is the former majesty and character of these people while it is still possible — before the white man has destroyed not only their character, but the people as well."

"Tabu," which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, was an at-

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## SCREEN SCENE

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Call 832-2750 for information.

"Tabu" (USA — 1931), 7 and 9:30 p.m. May 3. For his final film, director F.W. Murnau ("Nosferatu") teamed with Robert Flaherty ("Nanook of the North") for a love story set in the South Seas. Floyd Crosby's Oscar-winning cinematography can be seen in 30mm for the first time in more than 40 years. (\$5/auditorium)

"Chang" (USA — 1927), 7 and 9:30 p.m. May 4. From Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, the team who created "King Kong," the story of a family's epic struggle to survive in the jungles of Siam. Long thought "lost," it will be shown here in a beautiful new print. (\$5/auditorium)

"Grass" (USA — 1925), 4 and 7 p.m. May 5. Cooper and Schoedsack teamed again to record the Bakhtiari nomads of Persia who, in order to survive, had to migrate each year across massive snow-covered mountain ranges. The final film in a weekend of newly restored masterworks. (\$5/auditorium)

"The Spirit of Youth" (USA — 1937), 1 p.m. May 2-3. Joe Louis stars in the autobiographical drama of a young Detroit boxer who becomes a hit in the boxing ring. With veteran black actors Edna Mae Harris and Mantan Moreland and featuring documentary footage of vintage Golden Glove bouts. Shown with the rare 1939 documentary "The Brown Bomber." (\$3.50/recital hall)

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 13671 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (free)

"The Seventh Seal" (Sweden — 1956), 7 p.m. April 29. A knight, just returning from the crusades, meets the black-robed spectre of death on the beach in Ingmar Bergman's most famous film.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information (free)

"High Society" (USA — 1956), 10 a.m. April 30. A musical remake of "The Pall-

adelphia Story," with Grace Kelly about to remarry when ex-husband Bing Crosby arrives. Frank Sinatra is the reporter covering the story who falls in love with her, too. The Cole Porter score includes "True Love" and "Did You Ever?" plus Bing and Louis Armstrong performing "Now You Have Jazz." Concluding a monthlong tribute to "Old Blue Eyes."

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Birmingham. Call 855-9090 for information. (\$5, \$3.50 twilight; call for show times)

"La Femme Nikita" (France — 1990). This stylish but empty spy film, a major hit in Europe last year, finds a female bellum turned into a French super agent. A wild opening and a few good action sequences given up this warped turn of "Pygmalion."

"The Nasty Girl" (Germany — 1990). In this Oscar-nominated film from Germany, a young woman won't give up on a

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## VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg  
special writer

Like many other major screen personalities, Nicolas Cage ("Moonstruck," "Wild at Heart") also appears in big (or videopics) budget films that are propelled by high-concept thinking and low-talent scripting.

"Time to Kill" (1989, R, color, 103 minutes), available April 25, fits the bill with what might have been a compelling story of human passion and frailty, if it were better and more clearly told.

A certain Italian Army lieutenant, Enrico (Cage), stationed in Ethiopia during Mussolini's time, develops a terrible toothache while on assignment in the back country. He starts back to base on his own in search of a dentist and, while traveling through the forest, comes upon a lovely young native woman bathing in a pond.

Enrico rapes her, falls in love with her and, then, accidentally, mortally wounds her while firing at a jungle cat which approaches their encampment at night. He later learns that

she may have infected him with leprosy.

Now the film isn't as incredible as that opening might indicate but the plot is so structured that key elements are withheld until the end.

If you do recognize the uniforms and equipment, it is possible to figure out the where and when — which is a big help — since a good deal of the characterization and concepts involve satiric slurs of Italians common in the '30s and '40s. But, given the script, they're inhabiting, these


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