

MOVING PICTURES

'Earth': Musical sci-fi?

"Positioning" is an important part of the motion picture distribution game, apparently based on the assumption that there are only so many folks out there waiting for new films.

Hence each season, particularly in the summer when schools out — 60 percent of film tickets are bought by people aged 12-14. It's important to premiere new films when the competition doesn't.

When megabucks are at stake, every little edge makes a big difference. Sometimes, of course, a largely unheralded film soaks up the dollars as did the Richard Pryor-Gene Wilder "Hear No Evil..." a few weeks ago, when it grossed \$7.2 million on its first weekend. This week distributors are showing away from competition with the latest Indiana Jones epic, so it's a good time to catch up on the old stuff.

Good luck, however, if you try to see something new this week. Trust a musical comedy entitled "Earth Girls Are Easy" (PG), with Geena Davis and Jeff Goldblum. It's all about a space ship that crash lands in someone's backyard pool.

If that doesn't stir your entertainment interests, how about Hulk Hogan in "No Holds Barred" (*) (PG-13). Family loyalty versus a most dangerous adversary. Oh, boy, moon, can we go to the early show?

In the search for box office success, Universal has produced a major collection of clichés in its latest reluctant buddies' film, "Renegades" (C+) (R) (105 minutes).

Buster (Kiefer Sutherland) is a Philadelphia cop working undercover on his own, as we gradually learn, to expose a crooked cop. Sutherland's speech pattern verges on a lisp which undercuts the macho quality so necessary for the role of "super cop."

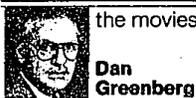
"Renegades" primary quality and best moments are fast action chases and the violence. (Now, that's a terrific recommendation!) But the film suffers from occasional lapses of pace from a number of unexplained actions and from the fact that info about Buster's background and motivation is parceled out parsimoniously.

On the other hand there are no accents about his reluctant partner Hank (Lou Diamond Phillips), an Indian in town for a museum display of his tribe's sacred spear. Violent bad guy Marino (Bob Knappner) accidentally forces Hank and Buster to team up. Boy, is he gonna be sorry.

Beyond the childish glee in violence and auto chases which end with masses of wrecked police cars, films such as this rise and fall on the success with which the buddies interact. While Diamond's grim straight face with an occasional hint of a smile and a few dry lines is a good start, Sutherland is so dull and feigns that "Renegades" lacks the sparkle of success.



Hank (Lou Diamond Phillips) and Buster (Kiefer Sutherland) begrudgingly join forces to track down and seek revenge against a savage murderer in Morgan Creek Productions' "Renegades."



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
N/A	No advanced screening

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STILL PLAYING:
 "Criminal Law" (B) (R).
 Suspense thriller about attorney who discovers his client is guilty.
 "The Dream Team" (B+) (PG-13) 105 minutes.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

Godard takes 'stab' at movies

By John Monaghan
special writer

There are two schools of thought concerning Jean-Lud Godard and rarely do they meet. Some consider his films brilliant and revolutionary while others point to the recent "Hail Mary" and "King Lear" as proof of his pomposity and incoherence.

The early films of Godard, however, show a kinder, gentler filmmaker who was able to get valid messages across while telling a story. "Contempt" (1963), his fifth film, plays in a double feature with Les Carax's "Mauvais Sang" (1987) this Friday at the Cinema Guild in Ann Arbor.

Godard began as a film critic at the film journal, "Cahiers du Cinema" before joining comrade Francois Truffaut on the filmmaking front. Their early collaborations on the short "All the Boys Are Called Patrick" and feature "Breathless" (Truffaut wrote both while Godard directed) show the team as the Lennox-McCartney of the '60s French Cinema.

Their idealistic split was as intense. While Truffaut went on to spin narratives of love, death and humanity, Godard took on a bitter edge. Many see "Contempt" as the definitive Godard film, showcasing his favorite themes of Marxism, commercialism and the prostitution of individuals in modern society.

The story involves a film director (Fritz Lang) making a film based on

Homer's "The Odyssey" in modern-day Italy. At the request of a vulgar American producer (Jack Palance), the script is rewritten to add more sex.

THE SCRIPTWRITER (Michel Piccoli) humors the producer's whims, even when they involve the writer's sexy wife (Brigitte Bardot). Godard himself pops in as an assistant to director Lang.

Nude scenes with co-star Bardot were contracted for the film. Godard cropped many of the shots to show only her headless torso, set against a bright red backdrop. "If I must treat a woman like meat," Godard seems to be saying, "she might as well look like meat."

Stardites, stymied by Godard's avant-garde antics, pointed out the film's gratuitous sex scenes, but shyed away from its content as a modern Greek tragedy. Stanley Kaufman did praise Fritz Lang — the German expressionist director of "Metropolis" and "M" — for his role as a director in "Contempt."

"Although the part quickly becomes the stereotyped mid-European sage that we all came to know in this country in the post-Hitler years... Lang nevertheless has some richness of personality."

Even the film's harshest critics were knocked out by the director's rich use of color and wide screen — often focusing on natural and city landscapes. Though the Cinema Guild has promised good color, wide screen prints of "Contempt" are virtually impossible to come by.

LES CARAX was 18 when he worked for mentor Godard on "Eve-ry Man for Himself." By 25, he had directed two films, the second of which, "Mauvais Sang" (1987), is a fascinating and original film noir, science fiction story rousing out of the Cinema Guild double bill.

In a strange poetic twist on the AIDS crisis, "Mauvais Sang" ("Bad Blood") presents us with a disease that causes death only when you kiss someone you don't really love. "Contempt's" Michel Piccoli plays an aging thug who attempts to steal a serum for the woman he loves (Juliet Binoche from "The Unbearable Lightness of Being").

The visual style harkens back to Jean-Jacques Beineix, whose color, full "Divine" in 1982 set the scene for Carax and other young directors in France. David Byrne's song, "Modern Love," highlights one of the film's many incredible tracking shots.

Perhaps a bit slow paced, "Mauvais Sang" nevertheless proves what Godard has been telling us all along — filmmakers don't have to be easily enjoyed (or fully understood) to fascinate an audience.

VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

While we tend to think of home video cassette players as an inexpensive and convenient way to screen movies, there's a tremendous range of other material readily available at your corner video store, programs which include various forms of instruction and entertainment — documentaries of all sorts, musical groups in performance, self-help programs ("How to...") and compilations of your favorite performers ("The Best of...").

In that last category, June 21 is the scheduled release date for "The Best of Gilda Radner." This hour-long video includes highlights from

her "Saturday Night Live" appearances and showcases Radner's family characteristics — Emily pillola, Lisa Loobser, Baba Wawa, Candy Blyce and, of course, Roseann Roseannadana.

"The Best of Gilda" complements Warner Home Video's series which already has released hour-long compilations of Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi and Chevy Chase at their "Best..."

Other companies are in the "Best of" game and late last month Media Home Entertainment began distributing "All the Best, Steve Allen," a very funny collection of Allen's finest moments on the "Tonight Show." Yes, Virginia, there was a "Tonight Show" before Johnny Carson and

here's your opportunity to enjoy some of it.

In July, Media will offer "Will Rogers: Look Back in Laughter," about America's famous humorist in a program of rare, archival clips of Rogers. In an interesting switch on the documentary format, these films, clips will be introduced by contemporary comedians like Dan Aykroyd, Chevy Chase, Rodney Dangerfield and Robin Williams.

On a less comic, but no less pleasant note, Direct Cinema distributes a wide range of documentaries as well as unusual entertainment pieces and quite a few Oscar-winning shorts, most notably the computer-animated

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