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MOVIES

'Wild Bill' does justice to legend



JOHN MONAGHAN

It opens with a series of action scenes, spread out over some 20 years, that fueled one of the West's most enduring legends. Played by Jeff Bridges with long rangy hair, handbeard mustache, and fancy hat, Wild Bill Hickock greets each challenge with stoic coolness.

We see Bill battle a begrudged Indian, six-guns blazing as they ride toward each other at full gallop. Bill takes on a band of cocky soldiers and finally Bill, at short-iff, keeps the peace on the mean streets of Abilene only to shoot his own deputy in the process.

That "Wild Bill" can't sustain this level of energy is no surprise. Yet it does have enough vivid performances and sense of style to entertain fans of the classical Western.

striking home with the object of his obsession. "Wild Bill" is written and directed by Walter Hill, no stranger to the western genre. His "Long Riders" was an interesting experiment that cast the Camerons and Keaches as frontier brothers. Some critics hailed last year's "Geronimo" as the best western in 20 years.

The young man remains unimpressed. He is Jack McCall (David Arquette), the man history credits with shooting Wild Bill in the back during a poker game. The famed dead man's hand signals to us that, for Bill, this really is the final round.

In the celebrity-stalking '90s, the weaselly McCall takes on a new significance. He is Mark David Chapman, let off with warnings time and time again, finally

looks like it has some depth behind the fake facade of the studio booklet. Bill frequents a Chinese opium den, one in a handful of spots where Jack locates his target but finds it difficult to actually gun him down.

The success of "Dances with Wolves" might have signaled the production of more westerns. But it's guys like Hill who work hard to keep this archaic genre alive.

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We're searching for 'Tom and Huck' stories

Write and tell us about an adventure you had as a child that would make a good movie. Be brief but tell us what actor you would choose to portray "you" if a movie was being made about your life story.

The first 25 entries will receive a family-pack of four tickets to a special preview screening of "Tom and Huck" 10:30 on Saturday, Dec. 16 at AMC Old Orchard Theatre in Farmington Hills. Winners will be notified by phone.



Family feature:
Jonathan Taylor Thomas stars as Tom Sawyer in Walt Disney Pictures' live-action feature "Tom and Huck" opening Dec. 22 at metro Detroit movie theaters.

Send or fax entries, as soon as possible, to: Keely Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. To fax entries, call (313) 691-

7279. Walt Disney Pictures' "Tom and Huck" opening at metro Detroit movie theaters Friday, Dec. 22, brings Mark Twain's classic story to life. "Tom and Huck" is the story of a mischievous boy named Tom Sawyer (played by Jonathan Taylor Thomas of "Home Improvement," who, along with pal Huck Finn, are witnesses to a murder.

When the killer, Injun Joe, realizes he can be identified, the boys must make a run for their lives. Back in town, Tom's friend, Muff is framed for the crime. At a moral crossroads, Tom must find the strength and courage to do what his heart tells him is right in order to exonerate Muff — even at

the risk of jeopardizing his own life at the hands of Injun Joe.

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