

Treasure Planet is wonderful futuristic spin on a classic

BY KURT ANTHONY KRUG
CORRESPONDENT

I have to admit that I was very skeptical about Disney extrapolating the great Robert Louis Stevenson's epic tale, *Treasure Island*, into outer space.

Then I remembered Disney's take on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which they substituted cuddly Simba for the brooding Prince of Denmark. Perhaps you remember it? Disney did this back in 1994 with *The Lion King*.

Well, they pulled it off again. Lightning does strike twice. This is just one of those rare times when I'm happy to have been proven wrong.

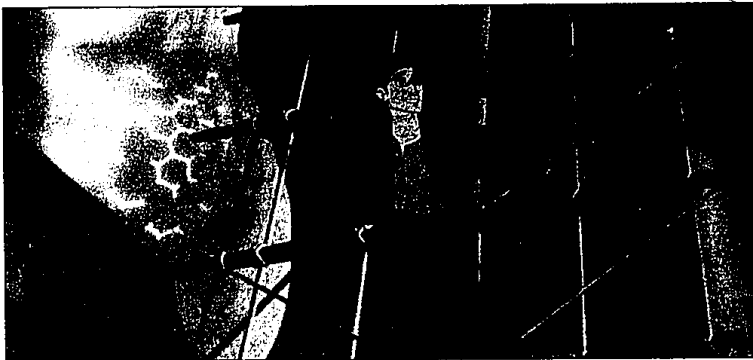
In fact, setting *Treasure Island* in the final frontier was a stroke of creative genius on the part of Disney "imagineers" Ron Clements and John Musker, who co-wrote, co-produced and co-directed *Treasure Planet*, as they did other beloved Disney animated films, including 1997's *Hercules*, 1992's *Aladdin* and 1989's *The Little Mermaid*.

The basic concept is still the same: Jim Hawkins (voiced by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, 10) things I Hate About You, TV's *3rd Rock From the Sun*) finds a treasure map of Captain

Flint's (who is an alien) spoils, which in this case is a globe that produces a 3-D holographic navigational map, and sets out to find it, only to run into trouble along the way in the form of pirates led by Long John Silver. Instead of stashing his loot of a 1,000 worlds on an island, the notorious Flint stashed it on a faraway planet.

For the most part, the characters are the same, if not in name in some cases, then in substance. Straight-laced first mate Mr. Arrow (renowned stage actor Roscoe Lee Brown, who happened to have a role in 1996's *Muppets Treasure Island*) is a bulky-looking alien. Long John Silver is now John Silver, who is a cyborg (half-man/half-robot) cook voiced by Brian Murray (Bob Roberts), whose band of ne'er-do-wells and scoundrels are a variety of aliens this side of the Mos Eisley Cantina from the original *Star Wars*, including one who has a face on his head and stomach, which can separate.

There's also the villainous Skroop, a giant alien spider played by nasty-voiced Michael Wincott, who is no stranger to playing villains as he has in *Along Came a Spider*, *The Crow*, *Robin*



Jim Hawkes, voiced by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, joins the crew of an intergalactic adventure in Disney's *Treasure Planet*.

Flood: Prince of Thieves, and Disney's 1993 live-action version of *The Three Musketeers*.

The cast is rounded out by the no-nonsense commander of the RLS *Legacy*, Captain Amelia (Academy Award winner Emma Thompson, *Howard's End*) who also happens to be a feline, and dog-

faced astrophysicist Dr. Doppler (David Hyde Pierce of TV's *Frasier*). Thompson and Hyde Pierce really play well off one another; I certainly hope they together again in a live-action film.

The movie filled with nods and winks to Stevenson's original novel, which has had

numerous incarnations on the big and small screens since its publication in 1883 (including a live-action version by Disney in 1950). There's also an *Aliens*-inspired scene between Jim Hawkins and Skroop.

The animation is phenomenal, classic Disney. It's refreshing to see a movie that

not only looks good but also has a story behind it, something rare in this day and age.

Kudos to Clements and Musker. This is the definition of a family film.

Rated PG: some intense action scenes for younger viewers, flatulence jokes
Rating: 8.5 out of 10

Die Another Day marks 40 years of 007

BY KURT ANTHONY KRUG
CORRESPONDENT

The latest James Bond thriller, *Die Another Day*—the 20th in the action movie franchise—actually starts off with a story, but halfway through it's sidetracked by the spectacular over-the-top action sequences 007 is known for.

The movie starts off with Bond (the debonair Pierce Brosnan in his fourth outing as Ian Fleming's British superspy) getting captured by the North Koreans in a diamonds-for-weapons trade gone sour. He is subjected to all kinds of torture: Being immersed in frigid water, stung by scorpions, beaten at the hands (say rather fists) of his captors, and burned with a hot poker.

A far cry from his ruggedly handsome good looks that makes the ladies swoon, the half-starved Bond has long, scruffy, matted hair with a beard to match, upon his release 14 months later in a prisoner exchange. He's traded for North Korean assassin Zao (Rick Yune, *The Fast and the Furious*), who has diamonds embedded in his skin from an explosion that occurred when Bond was captured. It isn't made very clear that Zao got away and was later captured by the CIA, but that's forgivable.

I really like this opening; it shows that Bond isn't as infallible and perfect as you'd like to think. It really gets better when his hard-nosed boss M (Judi Dench reprising her role) revokes his license to kill and puts him under house arrest. Bond escapes and goes rogue,

learning there's a mole in MI-6 and that he was set up in North Korea. Now he wants revenge.

It's a side of the character we haven't seen since 1989's *License to Kill* (Timothy Dalton had the role of 007 then) when he went rogue, vengeance the only thing on his mind. It takes him back to his roots as the "don't mess with me" secret agent Fleming originally envisioned him to be. It's good to see that side again; it's just a shame that it didn't last long.

INFALLIBLE OR INVINCIBLE?

The movie seems schizophrenic in the sense that we see that 007 isn't infallible and one step ahead of the bad guys as he always is.

Yet after he goes on the lam (on the heels of his 14 months in a prison camp), he sets up shop in a posh Hong Kong hotel. Not only does he know that hotel manager, Mr. Chang, is really a Chinese Intelligence operative and the masseuse sent to his suite is one of Chang's agents, he also figures out that Chang is spying on him from behind a mirror in the room. He disarms the "masseuse" and shatters the mirror, telling Chang he knew he was there all along. Huh? This seems a far cry from the 007 that spent more than a year as a POW.

Then again, he was emotionally unscathed from that experience. I know that 007 movie requires some suspension of disbelief, but come on. Be consistent!

Bond's quest leads him to Cuba where he meets CIA

agent Jinx (Halle Berry of *X-Men*, *Monster's Ball*), whose debut as a "Bond Girl" is very similar to Ursula Andress' in *Dr. No*—she comes in from a swim, scantily clad in a bikini with a knife strapped around her waist.

The next thing you know, Jinx and Bond end up in bed after a moment's acquaintance (no surprise there), followed by a fight scene the morning after.

From there, Bond is reinstated by M and supplied by the new Q (John Cleese, who was passed the torch by the late Desmond Llewelyn who was Q in the previous 007 flick, *The World Is Not Enough*) with an invisible car, among other science-defying gizmos.

This scene is a tribute to all the other 007 movies as you see Bond playing with the jet-pack Sean Connery wore during his time as 007, expressing his surprise that it still works. License renewed, Bond infiltrates would-be world conqueror Gustav Graves' (Toby Stevenson, 2001's *The Great Gatsby*) multi-million dollar corporation, along with fellow agent Miranda Frost (Rosamund Pike from the 2001 mini-series, *Love in a Cold Climate*), another Bond Girl. Bond and Graves really get off on the right foot in a spectacular fencing scene, featuring Michigan's own Material Girl, Madonna, who also supplies the movie's theme song.

TIRING ACTION SCENES

After that things get silly: Veteran Bond writers, Neal Purvis and Robert Wade, (*The*

World Is Not Enough) lose sight of what started off as an intriguing storyline. They get carried away with punny one-liners that are filled with sexual innuendo, and too many action sequences. They add more and more chase and fight scenes until it all grows tiring. The same thing with the one-liners: some of them are hilarious like Bond's "Big Bang" theory. But enough is enough. The writers have to know when to stop because it's too much of a good thing.

Another thing they have to learn is that one-liners from the 1960s during Connery's day were clever and titillating, but audiences today have grown desensitized to them, and in some ways, expect them.

What *Die Another Day* boils down to is nothing but a formulaic 007 action flick filled with pretty women, action scenes galore, and high-tech gadgets. In fact, the last few 007 movies essentially are the same: Just plug in a villain bent on world conquest and new Bond Girls.

Give Brosnan a really good script to work with (and see that it follows through the entire movie) now that he's signed on for a fifth Bond movie; the man can act.

But the formula is wearing thin.

You'd think the writers would try something new. Especially since the Cold War is over. Especially in light of the tragic events of last year. Food for thought.

Rated PG-13: violence, sexual innuendo, sex scenes, profanity
Rating: 6 out of 10



Frank Markus (left) of Royal Oak and Hank Bennett of Farmington Hills perform in the Farmington Players' production of *A Tuna Christmas*.

Farmington Players stage quirky *A Tuna Christmas* comedy

BY LANA MUNI
STAFF WRITER

It's known as the perfect antidote to *The Nutcracker*.

A Tuna Christmas is a delightfully tacky comedy that celebrates Christmas kitsch and features just two actors who play 22 different roles. It's being presented once again by the Farmington Players beginning Nov. 30 at Barnes & Noble bookstore in West Bloomfield. Three of the 10 shows are already sold out.

"It is absolutely hilarious," said co-director Margaret Gilkes of Farmington Hills. "It's the kind of play that keeps you laughing and gives you a truly carefree feeling."

Gilkes and co-director Vicki Grulke directed *A Tuna Christmas* four years ago. They are directing it again and have brought back the same cast: The play's two actors Frank Markus of Royal Oak, and Hank Bennett of Farmington Hills.

"The entire crew from four years ago returned plus the exception of two newcomers," said Grulke.

"It is an encore presentation because so many people asked us to do it again."

A Tuna Christmas is a fundraiser for the Farmington Players which will open its new theater in January.

Written by Ed Howard, Joe Sears and Jason Williams, the comedy is set in the fictional city of Tuna, Texas—the smallest town in the second largest state of the union.

"The two men play 22 characters and one is a crotchety woman who's the city clerk and wears a dress and combat

A TUNA CHRISTMAS

Where: The West Bloomfield Civic Theatre located inside Barnes and Noble bookstore in West Bloomfield—6800 Orchard Lake Road between 14 Mile and Maple Road
Cost: \$13

When: Opens Friday November 29, at 8 p.m.; Saturday Nov. 30 at 8 p.m.; Sunday Dec. 1 (2 pm—sold out); Thursday Dec. 5 at 8 p.m.; Friday Dec. 6 at 8 p.m.; Saturday December 7 (sold out); Sunday, December 8 at 2 p.m.; Thursday December 12 at 8 p.m.; Friday December 13 at 8 p.m.; and Saturday December 14 (sold out)
Tickets: (248) 219-0800

boots," Gilkes said. "The radio station is OKKK, so it pokes fun at everything from the fictional city."

In *A Tuna Christmas* the townspeople decide that ghosts are destroying their gaudy holiday displays. (We won't give away the ending.)

Working with actors Markus and Bennett was an easy task, Gilkes said, because the men used their own creativity to bring the many characters to life.

"These two men are very talented," Gilkes said. "It's a very funny performance."

COMING ATTRACTIONS

SCHEDULED TO OPEN DEC. 6

EMPIRE

Victor Rosa is all about the mighty dollar and fashions himself as a businessman on par with Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Bill Gates. With an iron fist, he runs a successful "street pharmaceutical" business that peddles a heroin mix he has named *Empire*. His beautiful fiancée, Carmen, a Baruch College student, befriends a classmate with an investment-banker boyfriend, Jack Wimmer. Victor meets Jack, and they instantly connect. Both are hard-core businessmen from two different sides of the legal fence. When Jack offers Victor a piece of the action on the stock market, he sees his ticket out of the violent streets of the South Bronx and

jumps at the opportunity. But there is a bigger price to be paid than clean money for his gorgeous new Soho lifestyle. For the first time, Victor is confronted with a price tag that he will find difficult to pay. Stars: John Leguizamo, Denise Richards, Peter Sarsgaard, Sonia Braga, Isabella Rossellini. Directed by Ray Reyes. (Universal) Rated R. Running time: 95 minutes

ANALYZE THAT
While dealing with issues surrounding his father's death, a psychologist also struggles to help his mobster client whose life is being threatened in this sequel to *Analyze This*. Stars: Robert DeNiro, Billy Crystal, Lisa Kudrow. Directed by Harold Ramis. (Warner Brothers) Rated R. Running time: 95 minutes.

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