

Summer films: flop or fly?



BY WHITNEY BAKER

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest, sizzled when it came to box office performance. It grossed over \$55 million on opening day, moving up to \$135 million by the end of the weekend.

The world's swankiest pirate, Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp), over-zealous dogooder Will Turner (Orlando Bloom) and pirate enthusiast Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley) return to continue their adventures on the high seas, beginning with the results of their previous actions in the 2003 hit, *The Curse of the Black Pearl*. An arrest warrant for Will Turner and Elizabeth Swann sets the plot ball rolling on to an unforeseeable end.

Dead Man's Chest is full of the things that make an action movie bearable: good visuals, fun and refreshing action scenes and jokes to break the tension at just the right moment. Depp's outrageous performance still manages to make the audience giggle with just a wiggle of the hips and a line or two about rum. From the drunken debauchery of pirating port Tortuga to the new ship of nasties that Captain Jack and his crew encounters, *Dead Man's Chest* keeps true to the carefree spirit of the original and builds on genuine pirate lore to make for an entertaining story.

However, it does rely too much on the success of its predecessor, and that is where *Dead Man's Chest* takes the turn from a fresh and unique film to an attempt to recreate something audiences have already seen. This common "sequel sickness" takes hold in the form of stale jokes and more plotlines than stars in the night sky. The witty humor that made the first movie so popular was dug out of the bin to be reused in this one. These revisits to old jokes were enough to make one wonder whether this was the same film or not.

The biggest failing of the film was the lack of closure. As an audience, it's not a lot to ask for some amount of satisfaction from two-and-a-half hours of time spent sitting in a dark theater, but the last line delivered left the viewer with a hollow feeling and more questions than any movie should ever evoke. Rather than hyping up the third and final installment in the trilogy, the open-endedness of the closing in *Dead Man's Chest* was annoying.

While the film as a whole was an enjoyable experience, it doesn't stand out as a remarkable sequel—a feat which franchises like *Shrek* have proven to be possible.



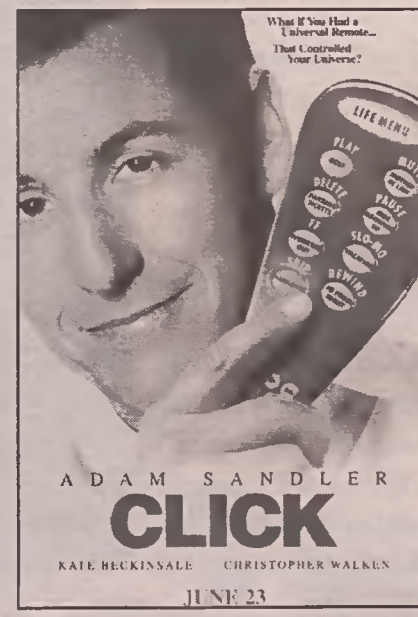
BY MARY KOHLMANN

Superman Returns opens on Clark Kent's return from a five-year journey to the hole in the sky where the planet Krypton used to be. In a classic homecoming twist, he discovers that, while he is ready to pick back up saving the world where he left off, the world has moved on. Even the Daily Planet has gone forward without Clark Kent—as has its star reporter. Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth) has a five-year-old son, a nice live-in boyfriend, and deep contempt for everything to do with Superman. Brandon Routh's 2006 Man of Steel has to fight harder to redeem himself in the eyes of those around him than he does to defeat Lex Luthor (Kevin Spacey) and his girlfriend Kitty (Parker Posey)—and that's hard enough. When Lois and her sickly little Jason are kidnapped, will Superman be able to save the ones he loves? Of course, but the ride is fun.

The movie's humor was often quick and lively, snapping along without feeling a need to pause and admire the joke. Much of the comedy is in characterization. Routh's Kent is as endearingly dorky as his Superman is smugly charming, and Spacey and Posey are nothing short of hilarious. Jason, Lane's son, also shows more honest warmth and wit than child characters are generally allowed. But particularly enjoyable were the occasional tributes to earlier incarnations of Superman, which incorporate Kal-L dogma ("It's a bird! It's a plane!") in wry but genuinely funny ways.

Superman Returns again pays tribute to its predecessors with its beautiful visuals. The revolving Daily Planet logo is constantly in our view, and the immortal red S is as bold as ever. While many scenes appear perfectly modern, in others we feel a brush of comic-book nostalgia. Lois's clothes often carry some tribute to post-war fashion. When I first saw a glimpse of her rooftop scene in a preview, I thought the film was set in the 1950s.

It was in the same preview, which was the first mention I had heard of the film, that I heard the voiceover speech Superman's father makes about sending humanity his son to save it from itself. "Superman as Christ" is a theme found throughout this film in touches ranging from the above-mentioned blatant to the subtle—when he falls in a fight, he has blood on his palms; the men trying to kill him stab him in the side. Some people with whom I saw this movie felt that this equivalency between religion and pop culture was offensive, while others found the symbolism meaningful. That one's a personal judgment call. The filmmakers did succeed, however, in making the movie feel less like an action flick and more like art.



BY AMY BRYSON

For my birthday my friends and I planned to catch a matinee movie before going to lunch. Wanting to get a good laugh, we decided to go see the new Adam Sandler flick, *Click*, but as the plot unraveled on the big screen in front of us, I looked down our row and saw most of my friends with tears in their eyes.

The plot consists of hardworking architect Michael (Adam Sandler) having a difficult time balancing work and family. He ends up finding the solution to all of his problems in the "Beyond" section of Bed Bath & Beyond, a life controlling remote. While using his newest gadget, Michael fast forwards through fights with his wife (Kate Beckinsale), fast forwards to his promotion, and ultimately fast forwards through his life. While trying to speed through the tough times, he ends up skipping the good. As the Ti-Vo-like device builds a mind of its own, Michael loses control and is forced to watch his body deteriorate, his parents age and die, his children struggle to grow up and his wife leave him for a Speedo-wearing lifeguard.

One problem I had with this movie was the blatant product placement found throughout. I felt like every screen shot and at least half of the script was based on name brands and consumer goods. Bed Bath & Beyond is only the beginning—we see Twinkies, HoHos, Bose stereos... the list goes on and on. Since when did movies become advertisements?

Despite how funny the trailer makes this movie out to be, it will definitely not be found next to *Waterboy*, *Happy Gilmore*, *Mr. Deeds* and *Billy Madison* in Adam Sandler movie collections. While the movie wasn't completely disappointing, it was definitely not the comedy my friends and I were hoping for. It had moments that made you smile or laugh slightly, but the overall tone was heavy and slightly depressing. In fact, this movie is so much unlike the typical Adam Sandler movie that many critics are calling this his midlife crisis.

This movie really hits home on an issue with a lot of emotional currency for men and women in America. Since when did an Adam Sandler movie make you ponder your life's priorities? Sandler has set a high standard for himself by each film that he makes. *Click* not only failed to meet this standard, but fell way below.