

Depardieu Plays Same Old Game In Beautiful 'Le Colonel Chabert'

A friend told me that "Le Colonel Chabert" was calculated to be a surefire hit in France because the Balzac novel it's based on appears on every French student's high school exam reading list. I gave "Le Colonel" a miss in AP French class many years ago, and I can confidently assure the teaching community that Patrick Bordier's movie gives away no secrets. It's so demagogically sketchy, in fact, it may inspire viewers to read the novel to find out what they missed.

MARYA DEVOTO
Movie Review
"Le Colonel Chabert"

Gerard Depardieu and Fanny Ardant are regally beautiful as the title character, lost and certified dead at the Battle of Eylau in 1807, and his troubled wife, whose precarious marriage depends on denying the truth of his miraculous return almost 10 years later. They alternately spar, exchange melting looks and negotiate fiercely through most of the movie.

Since that's about all the action there is in this movie, the murky cloud that surrounds the characters' motivation is frustrating; dramatic crises arise out of nowhere and disappear just as quickly.

The repeated lengthy closeups of Depardieu and Ardant suggest psychological depth that the rest of the screenplay doesn't support. You're left to wonder whether a look at the novel might supply what's missing.

What works for Gerard Depardieu in other movies comes off here as the Gerard Depardieu schtick: he frowns, he roars, he breaks into laughter at the human comedy. Most of all, he looks battered. But then, he doesn't have too much else to do. There are a lot of shots of him pacing in his long black cloak, looking like a bad omen, or like Salieri dressed up to haunt Mozart in "Amadeus."

In general, you won't get bored looking at "Le Colonel Chabert," though. From the opening shots of frozen corpses on the field of Eylau to the creases in Ardant's

neck as she embraces her ambitious, faithless second husband, le Comte de Ferraud (Andre Dussollier, who played the suave violin dealer in "Un Coeur en Hiver"), "Le Colonel" is filled with poignant visual detail.

Fabrice Luchini is particularly vivid as Derville, the lawyer whose passion for legal innovation leads him to represent both Chabert and his wife — he can't bear to give either of them up. Chabert's flashbacks to Eylau also have a very French kind of dispassionate passion about them. You think they're too purely visual to be moving until you find your heart pounding along with the horses' hooves. And France, as usual, looks great.

Still, it's hard to help concluding, as Gertrude Stein did about Oakland, that there's no there there, at least for those who haven't done their homework. Maybe the appropriate accessory for "Le Colonel Chabert" is not popcorn but a penlight. You can use it to check your Cliff Notes for subtext during those long, long closeups.

BAD GUYS STEAL SHOW FROM 'RANGERS'

If you thought kids were evolving into a remote, tech-literate species, "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" should reassure you. "Morphin" may suggest a daunting level of high-tech, but the futuristic terminology is window dressing.

Like the Super Friends, whose adventures this story most closely resemble, the Power Rangers are regular kids with some karate skills until they speak the word that transforms them into costumed fighting machines.

MARYA DEVOTO
Movie Review
"Mighty Morphin Power Rangers"

You'll know you're in familiar territory when you hear Alpha the Robot exclaim, "a maximum surge of evil energy is overloading our sensors!"

The plot, such as it is, is fairly basic: a crystal egg containing a 6,000-year-old evil man has been dug up at a mid-town construction site. If the Power Rangers don't get him buried again fast, he will take over the world.

The bad guy, Ivan Ooze (Paul Freeman), is a stylishly demonic fellow clearly influenced by the Joker in "Batman," Beetlejuice in "Beetlejuice," and Bela Lugosi in everything.

Ivan Ooze is a shapechanger who creates creatures powered by slimy purple goo. The same goo, marketed to kids like the once-popular jars of green slime, turns their parents into Stepford parents who toil in the ooze industry like blue-smocked cartoon Communists with flashing purple eyes.

Naturally, the Power Rangers hit a snag; Ivan Ooze beats up their mentor and drains their power source, leaving them with nothing to fall back on except their excellent karate skills.

This necessitates an interplanetary quest for a mystic monolith, complete with epic battles and a goofy ceremony where the Power Rangers acquire new animal totems.

Kids and nostalgic Generation-Xers love this stuff. Arne Oleson, who wrote the screenplay, seems to be aware that the audience is likely to consist of ardent fans and martyred parents.

The screenplay has a great number of amusing wisecracks in between the obligatory cries of "activate power beam!" and such.

Ivan Ooze has most of the best lines, like when he exclaims nostalgically, "Oh, the things that I've missed! The Black Plague... the Spanish Inquisition... the

Brady Bunch Reunion."

All in all, the bad guys are the most fun here. The costume designer, Joseph Porro, hasn't bothered to make a matched set, but seems to draw on everything from Japanese animation to Tenniel's "Alice in Wonderland" illustrations for inspiration. One villainess appears to be costumed to play the Queen of the Night at the Metropolitan Opera.

The bad guys' squabbling is livelier than the Power Ranger's squeaky-clean fellowship. The Power Rangers, no doubt for political reasons, comprise of both genders and several races.

The Pink and White Power Rangers (a Caucasian girl in a bare-midriff top and the tallest guy, respectively) get the lion's share of the lines and camera time, however, suggesting that some Power Rangers are cuter and on a more equal level than others.

The female Rangers scream for help a lot; the males never do. Otherwise, the Power Rangers seem to be relatively good role models for the 90's.

They never kill anything human, they stick together and they rattle off terms like "plasmatic morphing gem" without blinking. Adults who find them insipid might try silently rooting for the other team.

MOVIE GUIDE

OPENING FRIDAY

Belle de Jour. Luis Buñuel's 1967 classic, starring Catherine Deneuve as an icy housewife/prostitute. Rated R. Carolina, 933-8464.

The Net. A techno-thriller starring Sandra Bullock. Rated PG-13. Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600.

Operation Dumbo Drop. A family comedy, with Danny Glover and Ray Liotta, about elephant airlifting. Really. Rated PG. Plaza, 967-4737.

Waterworld. Will this epic from Kevin Reynolds and Kevin Costner - at \$166 million the most expensive movie ever made - hold water? It has an undeniably cool concept: the polar ice caps have melted, and humanity lives on the ocean, forever searching for land. But will its well-publicized production disasters (a sunken multimillion-dollar set, a hurricane, a near-fatal diving accident, and the resignation of director Reynolds during editing) spread their bad luck to the film's audience? If nothing else, it'll be a movie experience not unlike slowing down at a highway accident to rubberneck: "Waterworld" could gross as much domestically as "Forrest Gump" and still not make a profit. With Dennis Hopper, Jeanne Tripplehorn, and Tina Majorino. Rated PG-13. Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600.

NOW PLAYING

Apollo 13. Ron Howard's film, starring Tom Hanks, Bill Paxton, Gary Sinise, Kevin Bacon, and an excellent Ed Harris, is a document of one of the few times Americans have come together for a common goal: the near-disaster of a 1970 Apollo moon mission. Driven by great acting, strong direction, and a pull-out-the-stops script, it's a great film. Rated PG. Grade: A- (DH) Plaza, 967-4737.

Batman Forever. The third in this profitable series is definitely better than the second and comes close to equalling the extraordinary first film. Joel Schumacher keeps Tim Burton's dark aspects intact but isn't afraid to let the characters interact in the daylight. With Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, and Jim Carrey. Rated PG-13. Grade: A- (DH) Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600. Ends today.

The Bridges of Madison County. The best film to hit theatres since "Driving Miss Daisy." Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep



DENNIS HOPPER plays another malevolent maniac in "Waterworld."

leave behind the cheesy love of the novel and transform it into a believable and desirable whirlwind of romance. Rated PG-13. Grade: A (DH) Chelsea, 968-3005.

Casper. Casper is a top-notch animated ghost, from the creators of "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" and "Jurassic Park"; in fact, he's a lot more credible than his human costars, Bill Pullman and Christina Ricci. Stinkie, Fatso, and Stretch, Casper's uncles, provide the only real spark to the film. Rated PG. Grade: C (DH) Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600. Ends today.

Clueless. See review on page 8. Rated PG-13. Grade: C (BS) Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600.

Colonel Chabert. See review on this page. Grade: B (MD) Not rated. Chelsea,

968-3005.

The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain. Hugh Grant is full of charm and cute smirks but that's about it. This romantic comedy, about an English mapmaker in a Welsh town, is cute, but tries too obviously to achieve that effect. Also with Colm Meaney and Tara Fitzgerald. Rated PG. Grade: C+ (DH) Plaza, 967-4737. Ends today.

First Knight. Enjoyable and fun, but while Julia Ormond, as Guinevere, does an excellent job, Richard Gere seems far too shallow to pull off the depth his Lancelot requires. Sean Connery rounds out the cast as an aging King Arthur. Rated PG-13. Grade: B (NQ) Ram Triple, 967-8284.

Free Willy 2. This time the whale and the kid find love. With Michael Madsen. Rated PG. Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600.

Love and Human Remains. See review on page 7. Rated R. Grade: C+ (DM) Tonight at the Carolina, 933-8464. Moves Friday to the Chelsea, 968-3005.

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers. See review on this page. Rated PG. Grade: B (MD) Movies at Timberlyne, 933-8600. Ends today.

Nine Months. See review on page 6. Rated PG-13. Grade: B- (DH) Varsity, 967-8665.

Pocahontas. How could Disney, America's candy store, pass up the campy appeal of a legendary love story with maximum P.C. power? On the other hand, why would Disney take a story like that and make it boring? This newest animated extravaganza removes some of the real story's less "Disney" moments - like its disturbing pedophilia, or Pocahontas' early death from yellow fever. The story has a double bind: Disney can't make either the nature-loving



JULIA ORMOND makes a lovely Guinevere in "First Knight."

Native Americans or the fathers-of-our-country British settlers bad guys. This makes "Pocahontas" bloodless; the only thing that really stands out is its comic-book eroticism. Rated G. Grade: C (MD) Plaza, 967-4737.

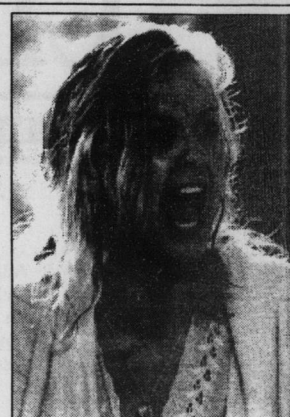
The Postman. A simple Italian postman is in love with the most beautiful woman in town, but needs the poetry of Pablo Neruda to win her heart. There are a lot of pleasures in this movie; one of them is its refusal to make a pleasantly sappy

story any sappier. A lovely, poignant film. With Massimo Troisi and Philippe Noiret. Not rated. Grade: A- (MD) Varsity, 967-8665.

Search and Destroy. With the creepy cast of the century: Christopher Walken, Griffin Dunne, Dennis Hopper, John Turturro, Ethan Hawke, and Patricia Arquette. Rated R. Chelsea, 968-3005.

Smoke. A rare and welcome example of symbiosis between a writer and a director, this drama is set in and around a Brooklyn cigar shop. Paul Auster (who wrote the minimal "The Music of Chance") and Wayne Wang (who directed the overwrought "The Joy Luck Club") reach a perfect balance. The film is a quiet and fascinating study of fatherhood, friendship, conversation, and art. With a hatful of great performances, including Harvey Keitel, William Hurt, Stockard Channing, Harold Perrineau, Jr., Forest Whitaker, and Ashley Judd - the last three of whom deliver Oscar-caliber supporting work. Rated R. Grade: A- (DK) Varsity, 967-8665.

Species. A lack of exposition and character definition make this a new kind of film: the straight-up, shameless science fiction flick. The cast, including Ben Kingsley, Alfred Molina, Forest Whitaker, and Michael Madsen, does everything it can with such bloodless material. Natassia Henstridge adds her "talents" as the sexy alien beast. It's everything a thriller should be - just don't expect any complexities. Rated R. Grade: B+ (BS) Movies at



ASHLEY JUDD plays a junkie daughter in "Smoke."

Timberlyne, 933-8600.

Through the Olive Trees. An Iranian drama by celebrated director Abbas Kiarostami. Rated G. Carolina, 933-8464. Ends today.

Under Siege 2. See review on page 6. Rated R. Grade: D+ (BS) Ram Triple, 967-8284.

Reviews by Marya DeVoto, Dean Hair, Daniel Kois, Daniel Maidman, Nicole Quinelle, and Brent Simon.

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