

# Titan A.E. Visuals Fail to Rescue Plot

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The year is 3028. Humanity is in danger: a cruel alien race with a taste for genocide has blown up the Earth and is now cruising the galaxy, bumping off all survivors.

One foul-tempered boy holds the key to the salvation of mankind, but he needs fatherly guidance to use it.

**MOVIE REVIEW**  
"Titan A.E."

Sound familiar?

It's not a new "Star Wars" or a lost episode of "Star Trek."

It isn't even "Battlefield, Earth." "Titan A.E.," the newest release from Don Bluth's studios, borrows so heavily from other sci-fi films that it is difficult to not wonder about the whereabouts of Luke Skywalker and Captain Kirk.

In an extremely predictable story, Cale (convincingly voiced by "Good

Will Hunting's" Matt Damon) is separated from his father when the Earth explodes.

He spends the next 15 years fixing star craft and being bitter about his dad's departure. When he is offered the chance to save all humanity with a glowing map on his palm, Cale reluctantly agrees.

Cale journeys to the outer reaches of space with Captain Korso and Akima, voiced by Bill Pullman ("Independence Day") and Drew Barrymore ("The Wedding Singer").

On the way, Cale learns to forgive his dad, falls in love with Akima and discovers the lost ship, Titan, with the capacity to recreate Earth.

Not only is the plot completely by-the-book, it is implausible. Some science-fiction miracles audiences are willing to accept; Cale and Akima manage to transform a disintegrated piece of sheet metal into a near-replica of the Millennium Falcon.

Humans can fly and jet-ski through



Stunning computer-generated special effects are evident in the latest sci-fi animated film "Titan A.E." However, the film's impressive visual effects are not able to salvage a predictable and implausible plot.

deep space with little effort. This is all perfectly believable, thanks to years of "Star Trek" reruns.

The rest of the movie is a little harder to swallow.

Since the Drej, which look remarkably like shiny blue Praying Mantises, have no explicable reason for obliterating Earth, it is ponderous that humans

were so well-prepared for it. To believe that they had built a ship with the ability to form a new planet, complete with every known species upon it, is just plain silly.

"Titan" had the potential to outshine "Dinosaur" with its use of computer-generated animation. Most impressive were the ice fields surrounding Titan,

which gleamed with metal-like luster. The digital renderings of the spacecraft, planet surfaces and even the Drej were sharp and almost life-like.

Why, then, did animators choose to make Cale and his companions look more like Saturday morning cartoons than super-heroes?

The two-dimensional characters look

out of place on the high-tech world they live in.

Despite its great team of writers and animators, "Titan A.E." is not on caliber with the magical fantasy films it seeks to replicate.

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# 'Boys' Leaves Little to Enjoy

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When a supporting cast is by leaps and bounds more talented than the leads in a film, one would hope that these characters would be used as much as possible.

No such luck for the snoozer "Boys and Girls."

In the newest Freddie Prinze Jr. ("She's All That") teen flick to hit the screen, and hopefully leave it dutifully, "Boys" proves two painfully true items to Hollywood.

First, Prinze cannot act his way out of a paper bag. Second, please, oh please,

stop putting him in films until he can.

In "Boys," Prinze plays a nerd who spends his entire high school and college years running into the same gorgeous girl, played by Claire Forlani ("Meet Joe Black"). They become good friends, and even more later on, as they go through the same old complications every young adult has to go through.

Director Robert Iscove ("She's All That") should be permanently banned from talking to Prinze anymore. The problems in "Boys" run so deep that not even the best editor in the world could have fixed them.

The main crying scenes, which happen in a coffee shop and on a hilltop, were so embarrassing and laugh-inducing that the audience, and I for that matter, quickly wished for them to stop.

There is even a oh-so-bad choreographed dance scene that involves bubbles and the song "Car Wash."

With a story that really has no plot and lead characters that are fit for modeling but not acting, Jason Biggs ("American Pie") and Amanda Detmer (TV's new "MYOB") are the diamonds in the rough that give the audience something to smile about. They play the requisite best friends who truly make good use of their few minutes onscreen.

So, if you plan on being a famous teen-flick director someday, make sure a good script is in place before anything else. Young adults might be naive at times, but they aren't stupid.

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# 'Shaft' Remake Short, But Sweet Action Pic

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Who's the man with the number one box office smash? Shaft?!

You're damn right. But before you go dusting off those vintage bellbottoms and afro wigs, be advised: this isn't your parents' action flick.

Though he dared to resurrect one of the greatest cultural icons ever to grace the silver screen, director and producer John Singleton ("Boyz in the Hood," "Rosewood") wisely chose to leave the 70's nostalgia in the closet, right next to the polyester leisure suits.

However, despite the major upgrade, "Shaft" (2000) does resemble the 1971 original in two important regards.

First, Singleton pays homage to the vision of legendary director Gordon Parks ("Shaft", '71) by sticking with what works and keeping it simple.

All the elements that made the first "Shaft" a success - great action, smart characters, and a no-nonsense plot - can be found in the updated version.

Second, Shaft is still one bad mother - watch yo' mouth! The incomparable Samuel L. Jackson plays the nephew of the original John Shaft (Richard Roundtree), and leaves no questions as to who's the man.

In a word, Jackson is cool. He matches Roundtree's swagger and street smarts, while also injecting a degree of suavity that only he can pull off.

Jackson's versatility as an actor is in full display, playing a character who is as comfortable uptown as he is down-

town - and dedicated to kicking ass in all territories.

And there is plenty of ass to go around. Crooked cops, small-time drug dealers, sleazy informants and a homicidal heir all do their worst, but to no avail. Yet, even though the outcome is pretty standard, there are some nice twists along the way.

The story begins with a racially-motivated murder outside a New York City bar. Despite his captain's objections, detective John Shaft is on the case, and he quickly fingers the brash Walter Wade (British actor Christian Bale) for the crime. However, his suspect turns out to be the son of a real estate tycoon; and, after being released on bail, promptly flees the country.

A jaded Shaft stays with the force, hoping to bring Wade to justice by finding the sole eye witness (Australia's Toni Collette), who disappeared from the crime scene. Two years pass, and Shaft bides the time by fighting the drug war alongside fellow officer Carmen Vasquez (Vanessa Williams).

On the same day that he arrests uptown Dominican drug lord Peoples Hernandez, Shaft also intercepts Wade's private jet, with comedic assistance from rapper Busta Rhymes.

Hernandez and Wade meet in a holding cell. Wade is given bail again and eventually hires the drug dealer to find the missing witness for him.

There are several exceptional scenes in this film, including a beat down, a flashback, and the penultimate shootout. Some of the lines from these scenes are sure to endure in popular vernacular.

But even though Jackson comes through righteously, Shaft at times runs the risk of being overshadowed by his stellar supporting cast.



Samuel L. Jackson plays Shaft in the update of the 70's hit.

Tony winner Jeffrey Wright delivers fire and philosophy with a dead-on Dominican accent in his role as Peoples. And Bale is so truly detestable that - considering his recent lead in "American Psycho" - he's may be in real danger of being typecast. Also, Ms. Collette, whose role in "The Sixth Sense" yielded an Oscar nomination, is conflicted and convincing as a troubled, young waitress.

And to top it all off, Roundtree, Parks, and UNC alum Lawrence Taylor ("Any Given Sunday") make cameos!

Indeed the film's only major weakness is the soundtrack is not completely fluid, and, on a few occasions, makes it difficult to distinguish the dialogue.

The short duration (98 min.) shouldn't affect the viewer's elation.

From cinematography to settings, and from writing to gun fighting, this is an enjoyable, balanced film.

So, be cool, baby. Times may change, but Shaft remains. And it's still his duty to please that booty. Can you dig it?

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