

'Blair Witch' Sequel Lacks Scares, Originality

By JUSTIN WINTERS
Staff Writer

Considering its unbelievable hype and successful pedigree, it's scary how good the uber-sequel "Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2" could have been.

Last summer's "Blair Witch Project" was the most profitable movie of all time, and "Book" comes to the screen, expectations extremely high, with a new director, larger budget and a whole new vision. Sometimes, more really is less.

Director Joe Berlinger, who directed the truly creepy documentary "Paradise Lost: The Child Murderers at Robin Hood Hills," makes his feature film debut by taking all that was original or scary about the first "Blair" and totally trashing it in order to make a jaw-droppingly bad homage to '80s horror.

The movie's introduction starts out, promisingly enough, on the right foot. Using real clips and news footage, it recounts the happenings of the first film while highlighting its humorous effect on the small town of Burkittsville, Md., its unfortunate location. Then, the credits roll, Marilyn Manson growls the opening tune and "Book" really begins to blow.

It tells the story of a group of "Blair" film-obsessed 20-somethings who decide to trek out to the site of the first film in order to drink and smoke weed. The group inexplicably blacks out for



The cast of "Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2" succumbs to '80s horror movie scare tactics in the misguided sequel to 1999's much-hyped smash hit "The Blair Witch Project."

five hours and wakes up in deep doo-doo, metaphorically speaking. Their oodles of camera equipment hold the only key to what happened.

Unfortunately, "Book" truly fails in every way that its predecessor succeeded. It is unnecessarily gory, while the first had little violence. Its characters, who also use their real names, do not carry an inkling of believability. The

whole film is pretty much just the characters watching a television over and over again. Nothing really happens that would ever be interesting. It doesn't even contain one mention of a Book of Shadows. Is that allowed?

Any mystery or fright that was associated with the first film has been replaced with a glossy horror movie that is similar to a bad "Friday the 13th"

entry (with the boring woods setting, stupid young people and even worse direction). The militant government wants an example of entertainment that is bad for children and adults? Look no further. This "Book" should have been left on the cutting room floor.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

'Lucky Numbers' Misses The Jackpot With Script

By ALLISON ROST
Staff Writer

Here's a tip: For those of you who might need some extra cash, don't try to rig a state lottery.

Or, if you do, at least attempt not to be as stupid as the characters in "Lucky Numbers."

John Travolta plays Russ Richards, a popular, egocentric weatherman at a local TV station in Harrisburg, Penn., who aspires to be a game show host with the fame and fortune of Dick Clark.

He adds to his wealth and local renown with a strip-mall snowmobile dealership, but the city experiences an unprecedented winter heat wave, and Richards finds himself unable to maintain his lavish weatherman lifestyle.

Enter Crystal Latroy (Lisa Kudrow), the girl who draws the lotto numbers for Richards' station, and Gig (Tim Roth), a strip club owner involved in all kinds of criminal activity.

The trio hatches an extensive scheme to rig the lottery involving asthmatic cousins and hit men, and while the crime goes as planned, the ensuing paranoia inevitably brings the whole operation down.

In this way, the plot isn't anything new, taking a page from last year's much better "A Simple Plan." However, the movie's darkly comedic twists and

turns do keep the audience guessing until the end.

The film starts out very slowly, but perks up with Bill Pullman's first appearance as an inept Harrisburg police officer. His hilarious performance brightens the second half of the film and makes it much easier to stomach than the first.

Kudrow is also excellent as the sadistic Crystal and Michael Rappaport adds his deft comedic touch in his role as a hit man, even as the writing painfully falls short.

The writing, incidentally, is the film's worst quality. Variations on the same plot have been done many times before, but "Lucky Numbers" was on its way to an entirely new interpretation before the plot got off the track.

And while the film picks up a great deal of steam in the second half, leading up to the entertaining ending, the dialogue is ridiculous and unbelievable.

The talented cast is able to salvage plenty of laughs, but there are too many places where it's obvious the audience is supposed to laugh and doesn't.

"Lucky Numbers" tries very hard to win the audience over, but lacks the necessary charm and quirkiness that have made similar comic capers so endearing.

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'Aimée and Jaguar' Paints Poignant Portrait of WWII Love

By KAREN WHICHARD
Staff Writer

With the Battle of Berlin raging, two unlikely lovers, a Jew and a Nazi, try in vain to separate themselves from the realities of day-to-day life in Nazi Germany.

Mystery, intrigue and uncertainty abound in "Aimée and Jaguar," a riveting love story set at the center of a monumental event of the 20th century.

"Aimée and Jaguar," an award-winning German film based on a true story, depicts the love between spunky Jewish writer Felice (Maria Schrader) and Lilly (Juliane Köhler), a Nazi housewife whose husband rarely appears home from the front lines.

The film, directed by Max Färberböck, expertly blends the crisis of war and persecution with Lilly's life-altering decision to forsake her husband and live with the mysterious Felice, the true love of her life.

Färberböck subtly uses Nazi radio propaganda, Allied bombing runs and

top-level Nazi party functions to paint a picture of the uncertainty felt by even the most rabid Nazi sympathizer.

The film resists the temptation to force the crimes of Nazism and the terror they inflicted into the forefront, and instead manipulates their suffocating presence as a constant backdrop, creating a profound sense of the dangers facing even the most ardent Nazi.

The crisis and drama of these historical events could easily have dominated the film, but Färberböck instead focuses on a small group of underground Jewish lesbians who do their best to live

lavishly and somehow survive the constant threat of concentration camps.

In a film dominated by the dark colors of war, the entrance of these women colors a bleak landscape with the hope that the merriment of life can pull one out of even the bleakest corner.

They are a heroic group, involved in secret dealings of resistance movements. Felice undoubtedly is its center, exuding a bold personality dripping with mystery. Much of the movie passes by without a clear understanding as to who she really is, and what her intentions are.

Felice's complicated life includes writ-

ing for the official state paper, smuggling information and flirting endlessly with danger and her boss, a top party official, all while loving Lilly, a woman who proudly proclaims that she can "smell Jews."

"Aimée and Jaguar" profoundly explores an era from which no one escaped without battle scars, all without becoming overbearing. In fact, it seems as if many humorous moments are lost in the translation - the only frustrating problem in an exceptional film.

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San Francisco Opera Center Presents Strauss' Comic Opera to UNC

Western Opera Theater brings Johann Strauss' tale of deceit, "Die Fledermaus," to Memorial Hall tonight.

By DANIELE EUBANKS
Staff writer

Prepare to delight in a bit of champagne-doused debauchery, adultery and deceit when Western Opera Theater, the touring arm of the San Francisco Opera Center, presents "Die Fledermaus" at 8 p.m. tonight in Memorial Hall.

Die Fledermaus
Memorial Hall
Tonight
8 p.m.
\$16-\$36

In English, "die fledermaus" means "the bat." The comic opera by Johann Strauss relates the foibles of Baron von Eisenstein. His friend Falke arranges a farce at a mas-

querade ball to exact revenge on the baron for abandoning him at the previous year's ball and making him walk home the next day in a bat costume.

A web of deception ensnares wives, lovers and miscreants, but of course, in classic comedic style, suffering is minimized and revelry reigns supreme.

The performance serves as the season opener of the 2000-2001 Carolina Union Performing Arts Series, which in past years has brought world-renowned artists such as Dance Theater of Harlem and Bobby McFerrin to UNC.

And the Western Opera Theater is no stranger to the series. This year marks the fifth consecutive season the Western Opera Theater has included Chapel Hill in its three-month-long national tour, and UNC keeps recruiting the company because audiences have shown a surprising affinity for opera, Carolina Union marketing manager Lyndsay Richter said.

"Looking at ticket sales the past four years, opera is one of the higher student-selling performances," she said. "About 40 to 50 percent of ticket sales are student tickets."

Students might relate to the youthful quality of the company, which serves as an avenue for burgeoning performers to gain experience and recognition, Richter said. "The cast is serious about launching their careers, so they give a good performance," she said.

"It's really a display of vocal talent - the quality is not something you'd find on the street."

Each member learns two or three different parts of the opera, and the performers shift roles periodically so they

can experiment with interpretation and keep from getting stale, Richter said. "Western Opera Theater is sort of their training ground - they're getting seasoned with road experience so they can go on to the Met or San Francisco Opera in the future," she said.

But the performers who will take the stage on Thursday night are no fledglings, said Jennifer Reil, marketing and public relations coordinator for Western Opera Theater. Usually between the ages of 21 and 34, all have completed the Merola Opera Program, required for entrance into the prestigious San Francisco Opera, and most have their master's degrees.

To create the sense of lavish opulence

that seeps from the "Die Fledermaus" stage, Western Opera Theater hits the road with two 30-foot trucks packed with sets and stage equipment, a bus for the singers, another for the orchestra and an RV for the crew, Reil said.

The production will be sung in English with English supertitles, which both Reil and Richter said might make "Die Fledermaus" more accessible.

"If you are new to opera, Western Opera Theater is definitely one of the best companies to give you an introduction to the whole notion of what opera is," Richter said.

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