

is apparently a lot in an invertebrate's body that looks a lot like it is a vertebrate doing a crabwalk. The heart of vertebrate is in the front and the nerve column is toward the back; in an invertebrate the reverse is true. It is very much like we evolved from a common ancestor, but some of our cousins walked with one

side down, some with the other. And they adapted and so did their descendents until you had two different evolutionary paths. The observation that there was something of an inversion that separated us from arthropods was propounded in 1830 Paris by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. An opposition to the theory was led by Georges Cuvier. He didn't include the bit about evolutionary paths because this hypothesis preceded Darwin's. The theory has sort of hung around the halls of biology for the intervening time as a crackpot theory that some people stubbornly held to. The vast majority of these long-standing crackpot theories shall always be crackpot theories. The ideas of Imanuel Velikovsky do not bear close scrutiny and yet are still championed by some. Then you get the odd crackpot theory like that the continents seem to fit together like a huge jigsaw puzzle. I remember back as a ten-year-old we made globes by blowing up balloons and pasting on continents. And I did notice at the time that if I deflated my balloon South America nestled comfortably into Africa. And ten-year-old Mark said "I bet the Earth is expanding and the hard outer crust broke up." Wrong guess, but I was looking in the right direction. It was only about seven years later that it became accepted that the pieces really did fit together and rolling convection currents and not expansion had broken up the outer crust. But when I was a kid, the idea that the continents fit together was nutty stuff. Just like this inversion. Anyway, this story about the inversion theory which still refuses to die is documented in the September 30 SCIENCE NEWS. And it is just nutty enough that it might be true. But it is interesting to think that a little flip could have changed the destiny of a species so drastically. [-mrl]

2. JUMANJI (a film review by Mark R. Leeper)

Capsule: A diabolical board game unleashes a world of action, adventure, and horror in a surprisingly satisfying family film. One at a time the game releases the threats from a story-book African safari into a small New England town. This could have been played for laughs, but a generally witty and well-written script turns this film into a real action ride.

Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

I was not expecting big things from JUMANJI. The coming attractions make it look like taking the basic concept of HELLRAISER--the plaything that releases a world of horror--and crossing it with something like THE ZEBRA IN THE KITCHEN, where animals on the loose cause havoc. And in the final analysis perhaps that is not too inaccurate a description. But there is considerably more wit and a whole lot more style to this tale.

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After an opening scene in the 1860s with two children trying desperately to rid themselves of a mysterious box, it is rediscovered in 1969 by Alan Parrish. Parrish (played by Adam Hann-Byrd) has problems enough. He is bullied by his peers and dominated by a dictatorial father who seems to run much of the town and cannot relate to a child. But young Alan does not know trouble until he plays the game and on his first move is sucked into "the jungle" where he remains for twenty-six years. Only it really is a jungle and twenty-six years really does pass. The disappearance remains an unsolved mystery. And with a whiff of IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, much of the town has degenerated as a result. Now a new family has moved into the house, Aunt Nora (Bebe Neuwirth) and the recently orphaned Judy (Kirsten Dunst) and Peter (Bradley Pierce). The two children unwittingly start the game again and release (among other things) the missing Alan (now played by Robin Williams). Unfortunately, each roll of the dice also releases some safari hazard into the real world. Most of these dangers escape the house and into the town. Like the towns in GREMLINS or NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, it is slowly to coming to realize that something strange and very dangerous is happening. And the only way to save the town is to finish the game so all the horrors can return to the game board. Yet with each roll of the dice some new disaster

escapes the game into the real world. Each might be bad, but the cumulative effect is startling.

The visual effects from Industrial Light and Magic are impressive but not altogether realistic. The digitized animals are clearly just that and in addition, the monkeys look more like Curious George than real monkeys. They are never totally convincing but as storybook safari dangers they work just fine. This is a film in which many scenes involving the magic of the game have a very nice look.

The visuals could overwhelm the characters, but the script by Jonathan Hensleigh, Greg Taylor, and Jim Strain, based on the book by Chris Van Allsburg, never lets that happen. After a shaky start with Robin Williams looking like the castaway from "Monty Python's Flying Circus," he gives some real humanity to his role and does not indulge in the usual Williams schtick. Kirsten Dunst is fairly good but JUMANJI must be child's play after her meaty performance in INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE Bebe Neuwirth manages some nice touches as Aunt Nora. It is the kind of role that usually goes unnoticed--friendly adult supervision in a film for children--but someone in the script department was looking out for her. Joe Johnston was a good choice for director with a sense for integrating human performances with visual effects. He was the art director for visual effects on THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and RETURN OF THE JEDI. As director he made HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS and the underrated ROCKETEER. He manages very well here, though his direction was weakened for me by some slapstick late in the movie.

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Parents should be warned that just the horror touches that will delight ten-year-olds will be strong stuff for five-year-olds. Adults are warned not to not to leave children at the theater or they may miss out on the fun. I give this one a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

3. HEAT (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This is a long but more involving than involved study of a good cop chasing a very good master criminal. Michael Mann takes his time giving a textured view of what being a cop or a robber does to each of the important characters and to the women in their lives. But except for the detail and perhaps the application of Mann's unique visual sense, this is a familiar story. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4)

Robert De Niro has been in two crime films released in relatively short order, each just a bit short of three hours long. Of the two, Martin Scorsese's *CASINO* tells what was for me the more interesting story of how organized crime lost Las Vegas. The same critics who claimed that they had seen before most of what was in that film are praising the originality of Michael Mann's *HEAT*. But *HEAT* really is a tale that has been done multiple times before. It is the story of the really good cop and the really good (well, proficient) crook and their long battle of wits and weapons. Director and screenwriter Michael Mann draws that story out to 172 minutes by showing with one good cop and two criminals what being part of that game does to their emotions and their personal life. The film begins by showing us several strands of plot with different characters. In the first part of the film the question is what do these people have to do with each other and what is happening. It turns out that one of the people we see is a police detective and the rest are criminals preparing a heist. Mann intentionally disorients the audience by showing scenes that the viewer cannot be expected to understand yet. They are all part of the story, of course, but they may not become important or even understood until much later. The gang pulls off its heist in spectacular fashion under the supervision of super-criminal Neil McCauley (Robert De Niro). It works nearly like clockwork until loose cannon Waingro (Kevin Gage) kills a man. That changes the nature of the crime. The unflappable McCauley still knows exactly what are the right things to do, but it is the beginning of McCauley's problems. Later when police detective Vincent Hanna investigates the crime he finds very few clues and the biggest one is just that whoever did the crime was very, very good. But Hanna is also good.

Thus begins the long game of the cat and the mouse as Hanna tracks down McCauley. What sets this film somewhat apart from numerous other films with similar plots is Mann's deliberate pacing. We get to see what being a police detective does to Hanna. His inability to turn off his work on those rare occasions that he can spend time with his wife and step-daughter has ripped apart his home life. McCauley, on the other hand, claims to allow no relationships in his life that he cannot break on half a minute's notice. Mann show us what these tendencies do to each man as well as to Chris Shiherlis (Val Kilmer), a member of McCauley's gang. On a small scale McCauley and Hanna have a private war complete with impressive arsenals of weapons and clever ways of tracking down intelligence about the other.

The script has some serious problems. We see Pacino called in to investigate multiple homicides that will *eventually* be tied together. But it is always the same homicide investigator, Hanna, who is called to the scene. Is he supposed to be the only homicide detective in Los Angeles? Often the script has the police just seem to be supernaturally good at their jobs. And Pacino overdoes the caring policeman bit just a bit too much. In one scene that seems to go over-the-top he grabs and hugs the mother of a murder victim to console her and prevent her from seeing the victim's body. It is an emotional scene but just does not ring true.

Robert De Niro plays McCauley as smooth and self-assured but given to explosive violence. Pacino plays Hanna as edgy and quick-witted and given to explosive violence. Michael Mann's direction is stylized with his usual exaggerated camera angles and his unusual use of color. And it too is given to explosive violence. Probably the best thing about Mann's previous film, THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS was Wes Studi's performance as Magua. Wes Studi, with a face like a corn-grinding stone, is capable of extremely intense acting. Here, however, his role seemed gratuitous and is only of interest in that it was an American Indian in a role that did not need to be played by an Indian. It is nice to see him working and in a non-ethnic role; it is just a pity he was under-used.

The set design is of particular interest here. Hanna's house seems almost totally drained of color, perhaps to make some point about the turning off of emotions. One bad piece of set design has a character who is basically a book clerk living in an apartment with a breathtaking view overlooking the city. A line in the script explains that the building is run-down but has a nice view. But I suspect there are darn few book clerks in Los Angeles with apartments that have views like that.

HEAT is a well-told crime story but tells us little new or really interesting about the lives of anyone one on either side of the law. I rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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The organization of American society is an interlocking system of semi-monopolies notoriously venal, an electorate notoriously unenlightened, misled by a mass media notoriously phony.

--Paul Goodman

