



'Dawn of the Dinosaurs' skates on thin ice

Scrattie, Sid and company stumble onto a lost world of dinosaurs in the latest installment of the 'Ice Age' franchise

BY PETER HARTLAUB
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If you're a paleontologist, chances are good you've given up on movies altogether. First, there was last year's *10,000 BC*, which suggested that woolly mammoths helped build the pyramids in Egypt. And now we have *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, a film that will lead children to believe that the Jurassic period came after mammoths and saber-toothed tigers walked the earth.

The animated family movie genre isn't supposed to be documentary filmmaking. (Seen any helium-balloon-powered houses flying through the air lately?) But it's harder to forgive a 140 million-year mistake when the finished product is mediocre. If the third *Ice Age* were a bit better, there would be little need to dwell on the inconsistencies.

Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs will satisfy its young fan base and is bound to make a tonne of money. At this point, though, the series is no longer an artistic pursuit; it's a business deal. It's doubtful that the makers of the prehistoric adventure picture added dinosaurs because that story needed to be told — or even made sense in the context of the franchise. They did it because a T. rex looks good on the movie poster.

The film begins with mammoth Manny (voice by Ray Romano) and his pregnant wife Ellie (Queen Latifah) getting ready to settle down. This causes friction with Sid the sloth (John Leguizamo), who

Film Notes

ICE AGE: DAWN OF THE DINOSAURS

DIRECTED BY: CARLOS SALDANHA AND MIKE THURMEIER

WITH THE VOICES OF: EUNICE CHO (DIATRYMA GIRL), KAREN DISHER (SCRATTE), HARRISON FAHN (GLYPTO BOY), MAILE FLANAGAN (AARDVARK MOM), JASON FRICCHIONE (ADULT MOLEHOG MALE), BILL HADER (GAZELLE)

RUNNING TIME: 94 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: CURRENTLY SHOWING

wants his own family, and Diego the sabertooth tiger (Denis Leary), who is dealing with unspecified aging issues. Sid finds some dinosaur eggs, and pretty soon the friends discover another world under the ice, which is bright and lush and filled with dinosaurs.

Of the group, Sid has the best story arc. His attempts to nurture three young tyrannosaurs are good for some entertaining physical comedy. Scrattie also returns, this time with a love interest. The interludes in the first two

films involving the rodent-like creature's attempts to get a nut were always a nice homage to the classic Warner Bros cartoons; this time there's a strong Pepe Le Pew vibe. (Scrattie's scenes also tend to look the best in 3-D.)

But too much of the rest of the comedy is uninspired. With most of the characters from the first two films, plus a few new ones in the dinosaur world, there's barely time to adequately explore anyone's predictable conflicts. The last half of the movie is a constant state of characters getting rescued — there are rescues within the rescues — interrupted by the occasional slapstick bit or one-liner, too many of which seem to be genitalia-related.

"Let me tell you about the time that I used a clam shell to turn a T-Rex into a T-Rachel," a weasel character declares in the middle of the film. That's one of three penis-themed jokes that we counted — which is probably three penis jokes too many in a movie that doesn't feature Harold and Kumar going to White Castle.

At least the weight-related humor involving elephants is kept to a minimum. Before her career ends, Queen Latifah deserves to be in at least one film where no one makes a single fat joke.

Mammoths Manny, below left, and Ellie, below right, discover a new world beneath the ice in *Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, while Scrattie, above, once again finds himself in harm's way.



OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Drag Me to Hell

Sam Raimi may have made megabucks directing the overrated *Spider-Man* trilogy, but good-natured, in-your-face horror is where his heart lies, and *Drag Me to Hell* is a welcome return to his *Evil Dead* days of joyous moviemaking. Alison Lohman is in charge of bank loans but refuses to oblige an old woman who turns out to have infernal connections. It's all (ahem) downhill from there. Justin Long plays Lohman's boyfriend, and has about as much success withstanding Pure Evil as he did in *Jeepers Creepers*.



Hatchet

Shot three years ago, this amalgam of *Southern Comfort* and *Friday the 13th* is being rushed into theaters with little advertising, but that may not be a reason to avoid it; it is, after all, something that Sam Raimi might have made when he was a lot younger. A bunch of youngsters in New Orleans for Mardi Gras fall foul of a local psycho in this fanboy's dream of a cast including Kane Hodder (Jason in the later *Friday the 13th* films) as the unwelcoming southerner Victor Crowley, Robert Englund (Freddy Krueger), the wonderful Tony Todd (*Candyman*) as "Reverend Zombie" and special effects ace/director John Carl Beuchler. It's not clear if the Taiwan release is the US R-rated or unrated version. Starts tomorrow.



Grace Is Gone

The American love of the road movie continues as John Cusack takes his daughters way, way out of town (Florida) to find a way to tell them that their mother, a soldier, was killed in Iraq. A brief diversion sees Cusack visit his anti-war brother, but apart from that all the drama is in the anticipation of a sad revelation for the children and Cusack coming to terms with his loss. Reviewers had problems with the production qualities of this movie, but plenty of nice things to say about the cast.



Jerichow

Intriguing film about a Turkish small businessman in the east German town of Jerichow who married a woman by paying off her debts and now must hire a driver/minder — a rather unsettling disgraced soldier — to help him make ends meet. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is the frame as the wife and the minder, both Germans, get it on behind our wistful hero's back, but for this movie just takes a back seat to the worthlessness of money as a measure of self-worth.



All's Well Ends Well 2009 (家有喜事2009)

The latest entry in this Hong Kong comedy series features returning producer-star Raymond Wong (黃百鳴) and Sandra Ng (吳君如), a slew of in-jokes and middling celebrities. Ng is a stubbornly single professional woman whose marital status is blocking other family members from tying the knot. Enter matchmaker Louis Koo (古天樂). The curious thing about this film is that it was a successful Lunar New Year release in Hong Kong but has taken almost six months to get here. Does it take this long for a film with the China market in mind to get dubbed into Mandarin?



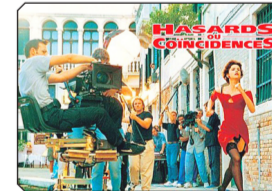
Pleasure Factory

Set in Singapore's Geylang red light district and starring Taiwan's Yang Kui-mei (楊貴媚), this undernourished tale from 2007 of prostitutes and their clients mixes artiness and docudrama to superficial effect. *Variety* magazine was the most dismissive, blasting every aspect of production, direction and acting and concluding that *Pleasure Factory* "borders on the inept." A shame, really, because the grim subject matter is full of opportunities. Starts tomorrow.



Cineplex 46th Anniversary Festival

Local distributor Cineplex thinks 46 is a number worth celebrating, and it certainly is for audiences that like a bit of eroticism and sex in their art house movie diet. The shame of it is that the films selected are very recent; what about a 40-year-old release? Still, there's good stuff here: Claude Lelouch's *Chances or Coincidences*, Eric Rohmer's *Le Rayon Vert*, *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, *Goya's Ghosts*, *Salsa*, *The Whore and the Whale*, *Sex and Lucia*, *Summer Palace* (颐和园) and a cut version of Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs*. Screening at the Majestic theater in Ximending until July 17.



Killer Bees

A German TV movie gets a minor theatrical release in which errant scientists and experiments trigger a possible cataclysm, resulting in a hunt for the queen bee before everything is lost. That's funny ... isn't the *disappearance* of bees supposed to be a serious ecological problem? Nothing in the film can match the poster, which has a human hand enveloped by angry insects and seems to have been borrowed from a US production with similar content. Original title: *Die Bienen: Toedliche Bedrohung*.



Der Bibelcode

Another German TV movie, this time ripping off *The Da Vinci Code*, in which the pope is implicated in a conspiracy that has our heroes globe-hopping with killers in tow until the final confrontation (not with the Antichrist, sadly; this is not *The Final Conflict*). Some Taiwan sources list this release as *Bible Code II*, but it should not be confused with the US documentary of the same name. One final warning: the original version runs for three hours in two parts, so Heaven knows what kind of chopped-up version is screening here.

