

There and back again, in a shell

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER



Turtle: *The Incredible Journey* is the first cinematic venture by the Save Our Seas Foundation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SWALLOW WINGS FILMS

'Turtle: *The Incredible Journey*' follows the life of a loggerhead turtle from its birth in Florida and trek across the Atlantic to its return 25 years later

The denizens of the deep, in all their mystery, often make for fascinating cinema. All the way from Jacques Cousteau to *Finding Nemo* (2003) by way of *Jaws* (1975) and National Geographic Channel documentaries, the ocean has provided an abundance of material for filmmakers. The ocean, we are told, is endlessly delightful, fascinating, terrifying and above all mysterious in its power.

Turtle: The Incredible Journey is the first cinematic venture by the Save Our Seas Foundation and is helmed by Nick Stringer, who has directed numerous nature programs for the likes of the National Geographic Channel. It is, therefore, no surprise that the film has something of a

televisual quality, though some of the spectacular underwater cinematography would be diminished if only seen on the small screen.

The film takes a look at the life of a loggerhead turtle, from its birth on the beaches of Florida through its journey along the Gulf Stream, years of danger in the wilderness of the Sargasso Sea, and arrival at the breeding grounds of the Azores before returning to the place of its birth 25 years later to lay eggs and set the wheel of life turning anew.

The director takes this story and gives it a somewhat melodramatic treatment. As the publicity material states, the film has "all the elements of a great epic: suspense, adventure,

Film Notes

TURTLE: THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

DIRECTED BY:
NICK STRINGER

WITH THE VOICE OF:
MIRANDA RICHARDSON

RUNNING TIME:
81 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY

despair and hope." The opening scene, shot from a very low angle, in which the baby turtle fights its way out of its shell and clambers the few long and deadly meters out to sea, brings to mind *Saving Private Ryan* and

the storming of the Normandy beaches. Thousands of baby turtles fall victim to crabs or are dive-bombed by cormorants, killed in their first minutes of life. The images are spectacular, the survival rate shockingly low, and Miranda Richardson works far too hard to give the visuals even greater oomph.

If anything, *Turtle: The Incredible Journey's* weakest point is this striving for an epic quality, with the voice-over sometimes adopting the breathless tones of the television commentator. One also wonders whether the film poster, with a loggerhead turtle gliding directly toward the camera, is referencing a very similar image used in promotions for *Finding Nemo*. This is clearly a film that is not missing anything in the book of publicity tricks to draw its audience. That said, the shoehorning of a storyline and the clear narration make this an excellent film for the whole family.

Despite the film's faults, the

unsentimental story told by the pictures and the facts dispensed by Richardson are fascinating, and one can only gasp in amazement at long tracking shots of giant schools of fish in a feeding frenzy, deadly fields of jellyfish, sharks and whales on their globetrotting odysseys and the strings of lowly Sargassum weed floating along the Gulf Stream, which plays such a crucial role in the lives of many marine creatures.

Above all else, *Turtle: The Incredible Journey* does one thing right. It preserves, and even deepens the sense of awe we feel at the mystery of life. While it doesn't shy away from sentimentalizing the life of the loggerhead turtle, it also is perfectly up front about the cruel challenges turtles and other ocean creatures face on the road to adulthood, and hopefully makes us cherish these creatures and our shared environment a little bit more. Extensive information about the film can be found at www.saveourseas.com/turtlefilm.



Ryan Reynolds and Sandra Bullock star in *The Proposal*, directed by Anne Fletcher.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BVI

Taming of the savage boss

When her visa expires, an alpha female sets her sights on marching her assistant up the aisle, before melting in his arms

BY MANOHLA DARGIS
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Blame the heels. In her new movie, *The Proposal*, Sandra Bullock, playing a Type A (rhymes with) witch, totters around in a pair of exquisite high heels, the kind that elongate the legs and give a woman's derriere the gentle backward thrust familiar from fertility figurines. The character, a no-nonsense, no-smiling publishing executive, otherwise favors an aerodynamic look (pencil skirts and ponytails), but the heels betray her. They throw a curve into her straight line and force her to tilt, sway and wobble. She might be the mistress — the harsh and exacting mistress — of her universe, but she's clearly been prepped for a fall.

Like most Hollywood romantic comedies these days, *The Proposal* is all about bringing a woman to her knees, quite literally in this case. The simple premise is partly telegraphed in the advertising tag line, "Here comes the bribe," which evokes wedding bells and desperation. One day at the office, Margaret Tate (Bullock), a Canadian who's let her visa expire, suddenly finds herself scrambling for a way to stay in the US and the big New York office where she rules with an iron fist clutching a designer bag. She finds the means to her salvation, yes, in more ways than one, in the pleasant form of her assistant, Andrew (Ryan Reynolds), a beleaguered Guy Friday who slavishly attends to many of her needs.

A stud-in-waiting, Andrew will soon be attending to Margaret's other desires, of course. Overlong story short: Margaret blackmails Andrew into a sham marriage proposal in exchange for a promotion. He agrees, though only after making her kneel on the sidewalk. They fly to a cute little town in Alaska, where she discovers his family lives on its own island in a mansion picturesquely surrounded by mountains. You can't see Russia from the front door, but there are loads of amenities, if remarkably no visible hired help. Mom (Mary Steenburgen) and Dad (Craig T. Nelson) are on hand, as is Grandma Annie (Betty White), the resident unfunny old-lady kook who's about to turn 90 and could use a little face time with a big pillow.

You know the rest

because you've seen (and read) it many times before. After nestling in the bountiful bosom of family and some unexpected naked slapstick with Andrew, Margaret melts. He mans the ramparts, she lowers her defenses. He thrusts, she parries. He chops wood and loses his shirt. She loses her cellphone and ditches the heels. He rescues her, scooping her out of the water after she falls from a boat. She shivers and smiles and tears up as she talks about her tragic past, revealing the sad little girl who's long been hidden behind the cruel disguise of a sensationally successful professional adult. Ding-dong the witch is soon dead and in her place, well, here comes the bride.

The director marshaling all these clichés and stereotypes is Anne Fletcher, whose last gig was the similarly obnoxious *27 Dresses*. Working from a script by Peter Chiarelli, Fletcher betrays no originality from behind the camera and not a hint of visual facility. The opening scenes, including shots of Andrew rushing through the streets while balancing coffee cups, are right out of *The Devil Wears Prada*, minus the snap. The scene in which Margaret runs around naked is borrowed from *Something's Gotta Give*, though here the point isn't that desirability transcends age but that at 44, Bullock still has an amazing body. The rest of the movie looks like many industrial entertainments of this type: it's decently lighted and as lived in as a magazine advertisement.

Bullock, who excels at playing spunky, is as appealing as usual, but the role proves as awkward as those heels. (Reynolds is equally likable, though more decorative than anything else.) She's always been better in fundamentally independent roles that allow her to grab the wheel (*Speed*) and take the spotlight (the *Miss Congeniality* flicks), an independence that persists all the way through the last-act coupling. She can smile as brightly at a man as well as the next leading lady, though, like all genuinely big female stars, she's really more of a solo act. Certainly she's no shrew in need of taming. She's just another female movie star in need of a vehicle that won't throw her overboard for sexist giggles and laughs.

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Bandslam

Good notices for this movie about a bunch of kids who enter a high school rock band competition were not enough to make money in the US. Some blamed poor marketing, but whatever the case, here is a show with attractive young folks who make the most of their differences and pull off something special. Shares a star with *High School Musical*, but don't let that make you reach for the cable guide. Aimed at youngsters, but informed by a love of rock music new and old, *Bandslam* is sure to grow on audiences.



The Milk of Sorrow

A Spanish-Peruvian co-production, this is a strange slice of contemporary neurosis and historical burden in present-day Lima. A dying woman sings of her molestation by terrorists, and after she departs her traumatized daughter is found to have lodged a potato in her private parts to protect her chastity. Later, the daughter works her way back into the world — courtesy of new friendships and a beautiful singing voice. The title refers to the breast milk of a persecuted mother that by legend harms a daughter's psychological well-being; the original Spanish title, *La Teta Asustada* ("the frightened breast"), is rather more direct. The film won several festival awards, including the Golden Bear.



First Snow

If you crave a mixture of squeaky-clean inter-ethnic teen romance and family drama, there's no beating *First Snow* (also known as, ahem, *Virgin Snow*). Korean immigrant Lee Jun-ki bumps into incredibly sweet Aoi Miyazaki a couple of times and they fall in love. The real drama of the flick comes from the latter's wretched home life, which leads to the question: Why do aberrant movie families always produce daughters who are as pure as the driven snow? Set in Kyoto, which doesn't hurt.



Overheard (竊聽風雲)

Infernal Affairs (無間道) co-writer-director Alan Mak (麥兆輝) and co-writer Felix Chong (莊文強) return with another tale of crime and compromise. Stalwart leading man Sean Lau (劉青雲) joins Louis Koo (古天樂) and Daniel Wu (吳彥祖) as intel agents who cross to the dark side, but their plan to make a quick profit leads to a nightmare of cover-ups and murder. This flick is notable for securing a release in China without having its ethical gray zone excised. More importantly, the public and critical response in Hong Kong was very positive. Koo also stars in the other, much more lowbrow Hong Kong release of the week, namely ...



On His Majesty's Secret Service (大內密探靈靈狗)

The Chinese title suggests a follow-up to the 1996 Hong Kong costume court comedy *Forbidden City Cop* (大內密探零零發, retitled 鹿鼎大帝 for its Taiwan release) featuring superstar Steven Chow (周星馳) at the beginning of his directorial career and the delightful Carina Lau (劉嘉玲). Sadly, critics said this Wong Jing (王晶) production lacks star power and momentum and could do with more technical smarts. Louis Koo is an imperial guard who gets caught up in a competition to marry off the emperor's daughter; farce follows. For the faithful there are movie references, anachronistic and gay panic gags, silly stunts and clunky props. The cast includes Taiwan's Barbie Hsu (徐熙媛, better known as 大S) in the Carina Lau role.



The Code

A Japanese nightclub singer in Shanghai has a tattoo that contains the code to a stash of treasure left behind by the Japanese during the war, and the heroic Detective Office 5 and its debonair staff must recover the treasure, led by enterprising Detective 507 (Kikunosuke Onoe, *Kaidan*). Handsome to watch, but *Variety* moaned about unnecessary complexity and sobriety, while IMDb lists no less than seven directors.

