

AT THE MOVIES

Empire of the Sun

By DIAHANN NADEAU
Herald Special

Empire of the Sun is, quite simply, the best movie I have seen in a long, long, time. It is beautifully photographed, well directed, and features brilliant acting. It is a movie full of images to treasure, with complexities to savour and questions to confront. It is Steven Spielberg's best movie.

Empire of the Sun is based on a novel by J.G. Ballard, with a screenplay by Tom Stoppard. I have never read the book, but after this movie I certainly intend to do so. In Empire of the Sun, Spielberg uses his signature 'seen through the eyes of a child' viewpoint (but this is NOT a movie for kids) to illustrate the terrors, the horrors, and even the beauty of war.

A child's point of view is a singularly effective one, and Jamie Graham provides us with one of the most painful and tender insights we will probably ever know of war and how to survive it.

Jamie Graham is a naive, spoiled, indulged, and privileged child of wealthy parents in pre-war Shanghai. When the city is invaded by the Japanese he loses his mother because he wants to pick up a toy he has dropped (a small model of a Japanese plane, an item of enormous significance in our understanding of Jamie).

In the ensuing hours after he loses his parents Jamie finds his way back to his house, only to find it empty, with evidence that his mother was taken away while awaiting him. He searches for food, he rides his bicycle around the house, he combats thirst. Eventually he returns to downtown Shanghai to surrender, but he is rescued by two down and out Americans.

However, they end up in a warehouse full of refugees already fighting for survival.

Jamie, who has been rechristened Jim by Basie, one of the Americans, proves to be a survivor of no small talent. We next see him in the last months of the war in 1945, surviving by his wits and his size in a Japanese internment camp. Here we witness his struggle to recognize the Japanese as the enemy - he admires

their courage, their rituals, their air-force.

He is caught between being British (never having been to England), being an honorary American, and being a student of Japanese culture. Given these torn loyalties, nothing is simple for Jim. He can no longer be a child, despite his age. The movie follows Jim to the war's end, a frightening time when things seem worse rather than better.

The movie raises some complicated issues, particularly that of survival. How did those who survived Nazi and Japanese camps do it? Just what does a person have to do to stay alive through five years of a hell never imagined in anyone's worst nightmares?

Jim does make it through to the end; but at what cost? And of the adults around him, how many could look back on this time with a guiltless conscience? Mr. and Mrs. Victor, who are, in the slightest sense, substituting for Jim's parents, are reluctant and petulant caretakers, driven mostly by Jim rather than any sense of duty or obligation.

This is a totally un sentimental portrayal, a surprise from Spielberg, but it has some terribly moving scenes. Jim's idolization of the Japanese lends a poignancy to the story, making the Japanese much more than cardboard villains. And some of the images of the sun, of the war, of the bomb are likely to remain in the viewer's mind for many years to come.

John Malkovich plays the tough and negligently protective Basie, a survivor under all conditions; Miranda Richardson (Elizabeth I in T.V.'s Blackadder II), is Mrs. Victor, the reluctant mother figure and the object of Jim's first crush. Both are excellent. Christian Bale is incredible as Jim Graham; the whole movie hinges on his performance and it is a riveting and superb portrayal. The rest of the cast does not let Bale down.

I can't recommend this movie highly enough. It is painful in many ways, but the cinematography is stunning, and there is a happy ending of sorts. However, as philosopher and Holocaust survivor Jean Amery wrote: "Anyone who has suffered torture remains tortured... Anyone who has suffered torture never again will be able to be at ease in the world."

Family of the '80s

Mark your calendar for a free public lecture series, The Family in the '80s, which is being sponsored by the Oakville Branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. The series will be held at the Oakville Public Library, April 12, 19, 26. Call the CMHA at 845-5044 for details.

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Beirut survival

How does a Christian organization serve and survive in worn-torn Muslim, Beirut?

Find out by attending a talk Feb. 23 entitled The YMCA in Lebanon: an agent of change and hope in adversity. The speaker is Ghassan Sayyah, National General Secretary of the Lebanese YMCA.

The location is the Metro-Central Y at 20 Grosvenor Street, Toronto. Space is limited so call 922-7765, ext. 223 to reserve seats. Admission is free.

Our mistake

In a movie review two weeks ago about Throw Momma From The Train, an author's name was incorrect.

The author of the book Strangers on a Train should have been printed as Patricia Highsmith. The Herald regrets the error.

Norval euchre

NORVAL-Norval Community Euchre had eight tables on Thursday, Feb. 4. Winners were Eileen Jackson, Elizabeth Wallace, Fred Workman and R. Hussey.

Loze hands - Mae Toet and door prize went to Lillian Shapley and Jean Cunningham.

Lunch committee - Marg Davidson, Pearl Burt and Kay McMillan.

Bridge winners

Winners of the duplicate bridge match held at the Georgetown Legion Feb. 15 are: First, Judy Rivers and Elsie Whitham, second, George Farrow and partner, third (tie) Jeanne Servas and Norma Maynard, Agnes McGregor and Blayne Hillock.

Bridal show

Welcome Wagon will be hosting a bridal show March 6 at St. Andrew's United Church on Mountainview Road S.

Doors open at 12:30 p.m. and the program begins at 1:30 p.m. There will be gifts for every bride, door prizes, programs and displays. Over 20 sponsors are participating. For a free invitation call Debbie at 877-8591 or Cathy at 877-8653.

Wildlife display

A special show and sale at the North Halton Golf and Country Club Feb. 21 features wildlife artist Christine Marshall and her work.

She will be exhibiting her most recent originals and an extensive selection of her limited edition fine art prints from 1-5 p.m. Christine recently returned from Africa where she completed her research for future originals. A draw for an artist proof print will be held at the end of the show. For more information call 457-5356.

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Investing talks

The YMCA is presenting two investment seminars in February and March.

The first one is called Understanding the Stock Market and it will be held Feb. 28 at 7 p.m. - 10 p.m. at the cultural centre in Georgetown.

The second seminar begins March 7 at 7 p.m. at St. Joseph's Separate School in Acton. The topic is Investment Strategies. The cost is \$15 per seminar or \$25 for both sessions. Call 853-1070 (Acton) or 877-6163 (Georgetown) for more information.

Trace your roots

Scottish Genealogical Workshop, sponsored by the Ontario Genealogical Society to be held March 26 at 9 a.m. at Christ Church, Elizabeth St., at Queen St., Brampton. Speakers are Paul Smart on Scottish Genealogy and up-to-date holdings of L.D.S., and Nancy Sadek, McLaughlin Library, University of Guelph, on Archival and Special Collections. Pre-registration \$15, includes box lunch. Mail to M. McLeod, 38 Bruceville Cr., Willowdale, Ont., M2K 2C7.

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