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News ■

Reviews ■

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PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL
GRADE: A-

Reviewed Format: Wide Theatrical Release
Rated: PG-13
Stars: Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley, Jack Davenport, Jonathan Pryce
Writers: Ted Elliott, Terry Rossio, story by Elliott, Rossio, Stuart Beattie, Jay Wolpert
Director: Gore Verbinski
Distributor: Disney

Hollywood long ago drew the commercial skull-and-crossbones sign over any movie involving pirates, and the public's stubborn lack of interest in such modern-day spins as the 1995 Renny Harlin/Geena Davis vehicle **CUTTHROAT ISLAND** and last year's Disney pirate ship/sci-fi hybrid **TREASURE PLANET** has done nothing to convince the suits otherwise (Spielberg himself directed one of his rare duds in 1991's **HOOK**). The genre's fortunes had reached such a low ebb, in fact, that folks began to wonder if recent generations of filmmakers had simply lost the art of making sea swashbucklers in the style of the Errol Flynn-starring milestones **CAPTAIN BLOOD** and **THE SEA HAWK**. Dead screenwriters tell no tales, you might say.

Movie Review
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL

Yo-ho-ho and buckets of pirate adventure fun

Dateline: Wednesday, July 9, 2003

By: MICHAEL TUNISON
Managing Editor

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ANIMATRIX

FROM THE CREATORS OF THE MATRIX TRILOGY, 9 MIND-BENDING SHORT FILMS FROM 7 WORLD-RENOUNDED ANIME DIRECTORS

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But just as all it took were **GLADIATOR** and **CHICAGO** to prove that it was possible to bring the sword-and-sandal and musical genres back to popular life, all we ever needed was one good pirate movie to revive one of the screen's mainstay genres of the '30s through '50s. As unlikely as it may seem considering its origin as a Disney theme park ride, **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL** is that movie. A strange brew of creative forces, including the director of **THE RING** (Gore Verbinski), the scripters of **SHREK** (Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio) and action producer Jerry Bruckheimer, have combined to slyly update the genre's conventions while supplying the only thing that really matters with this kind of film: a boatload of fun.

While the mere idea of a **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN** movie smacks of synergistic corporate filmmaking at its most calculated (you can almost picture the Disney board meeting where somebody pitched the idea of exploiting the **PIRATES** "brand"), in the topsy-turvy world of Hollywood the result has somehow ended up being one of the more inspired – not to mention funniest – mainstream action-adventures to come along in a while. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the studio called in the witty Elliott and Rossio, who previously scripted just about the only other memorable Hollywood swashbuckler of recent years, the Antonio Banderas-starring **THE MASK OF ZORRO**. Topping it all off is the improbable involvement of the usually anti-commercial Johnny Depp, whose hilariously off-kilter spin on his pirate captain character is an instant classic of the genre.

The half-serious plot involves a supernatural pirate craft, the Black Pearl, whose Captain Barbossa (Geoffrey Rush) endlessly plies the waves of the Caribbean on a mysterious quest. Tied into this phenomenon in a way he doesn't yet understand is young

weaponsmith's assistant Will Turner (**THE LORD OF THE RINGS'** Orlando Bloom), whose dual passions are his swordmanship and his apparently unrequited feelings

for a childhood friend, Elizabeth (Keira Knightley), daughter of the local British governor (Jonathan Pryce). Depp's shipless and crewless Captain Jack Sparrow – a stoned-out Han Solo with a brain so addled by grog and the sun that it's all he can do to walk a straight plank – arrives just in time to get caught up in things before Barbossa's men attack the city and carry off Elizabeth. Of course, the heroes must organize a desperate attempt to rescue her, an effort that eventually leads them to confront the nature of the strange curse alluded to in the film's title.

The supernatural/curse element is one of the things that separates **PIRATES** from the straight-ahead traditional swashbuckler movies of yore, which were supposed to take place in the "real" world, however absurdly romanticized. The filmmakers' savvy decision to incorporate magical ingredients (not unlike **HOOK**) actually shifts the film into the pure fantasy realm that audiences, softened up by **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** and **HARRY POTTER**, seem to have an endless appetite for these days. It's also an excuse to indulge in some delightful CGI skeletons and other effects from the guys at Industrial Light & Magic, who, we're pleased to find,



Geoffrey Rush is Captain Barbossa in **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL**.

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have been studying their Harryhausen closely. Just for the fun of it, the film nods to a few of the more memorable scenes from the venerable Disney ride – about the only direct connection, aside from the name, between the two properties.

While the film's tone is so light and cheeky that at times it threatens to sail off into pure camp, Verbinski and company have a strong enough grip on the characters to keep pulling us back into the story. Depp's show-stealing, eccentric Captain Jack is bound to get most of the attention, but **PIRATES'** cast is chock full of charismatic actors who get the film's humor and lighthearted action set pieces. Seen outside his fan-favorite **LORD OF THE RINGS** Legolas persona for the first time (in the U.S., anyway), Bloom makes a fine Luke Skywalker-type straight-man hero, while Keira Knightley (only 17 when the picture was filmed) demonstrates the special ability of poised British actresses to be stunningly beautiful without ever seeming like a bimbo or token sex object. The wryly funny Jack Davenport (**THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY**) also manages to make an impression in what might have been the thankless role of the Royal Navy commodore who happens to be Will's chief rival for Elizabeth's affections.

It's hard to imagine such an enjoyable screen adventure won't continue on in some shape or another, and the way Disney has affixed the **CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL** subtitle to the film can be taken as a hint that somebody is already envisioning sequels if **PIRATES** catches on with audiences. Indeed, despite how well things are resolved at the end of the story, one is left with the sense not so much of something ending, but of a larger adventure beginning. Speaking as one fan, the reviewer can hardly wait.

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