first runs

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THE A-TEAM: D: Joe Carnahan; with Liam Neeson, Bradley Cooper, Jessica Biel, Quinton Jackson, Sharlto Copley, Patrick Wilson. (R, 131 min.) The A-Team is a product that begs to be consumed alongside a jumbo tub of movie-theater popcorn, complete with the butter-slick, tummy-sick aftereffects that are sure to leave the audience with a lingering impression than anything mayhem maestro Carnahan cooks up onscreen. The cast seems to have been assembled primarily for its blinding resemblance to the stars of the original Eighties TV series about a renegade group of former Army Rangers now for hire. The plot here is negligible — U.S. Mint engraving plates going missing, and the worryingly accused A-Team must clear its name — but that piddlingness matters only in that it gets the boys from point A to point B, or rather, from one wildly ludicrous and artillery-charged scenario to the next. Still, Carnahan with cowriter Brian Bloom and Skip Woods, shows real flair with these action set-pieces, even as narrative logic and spatial coherence fly out the window. (06/18/2010) — Kimberley Jones

THE KARATE KID: D: Harold Zwart; with Jaden Smith, Jackie Chan, Taraji P. Henson, Han Wenwen, Yu Rongguang, Wu Zhenshu, Wang Zhenwei. (PG, 140 min.) John G. Avildsen’s 1984 original has become, in the fullness of time, a genuine pop-cultural touchstone. The intense remake by Zwart isn’t likely to take the gleam off Avildsen’s Kid, but it’s directed with sympathetic panache and arresting shot on location in China with an eye toward the epic by Roger Pratt. It also benefits tremendously from Christopher Murphy’s deliberate and fine script, which takes its time building up the story and then hits all the right beats until it slips up in a puddle of sappiness mere minutes before the end of the film’s lengthy running time. Jaden Smith, son of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, is fine and realistically precocious as 12-year-old Dre, who finds himself in Beijing after his mother (a smart, sassy, entirely mom-worthy performance by H.E.N.U.R.O.L. unless your mother’s maiden name is de Sade and she has an appallingly bleak vision of modern society that occasionally fixes on the historical misdeeds of the corporate rate/industrial world and the correction thereof. (04/02/2010) — Marc Savlov

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO: D: Niels Arden Oplev; with Michael Nyqvist, Noomi Rapace, Lena Endre, Peter Haber, Sven-Bertil Taube. (NR, 132 min., subtitled) No one escapes untainted in this grimly fiendish adaptation of Stieg Larsson’s bestselling novel. On the face of it, the film is something of an investigationally inclined thriller. The film quickly realizes itself as vastly intriguing, well-written, and sensationally topical. Chief among those intrigues is the disparity, some 40 years later, of a young girl from a Swedish island. She was the niece of a now-B2-year-old retired industrialist who hires Stockholm-based journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Nyqvist) to investigate the cold case. Running parallel to and finally weaving its way into Blomkvist’s own storyline is the scrutiny of the fearsomely independent and black-clad, cycle-riding female hacker Lisbeth Salander (Rapace); the girl with the dragon tattoo. Oplev’s film is deftly calculated to thrill even as it repulses. This is not your mother’s detective story. Unless your mother’s maiden name is de Sade and she has an appallingly bleak vision of modern society that occasionally fixes on the historical misdeeds of the corporate rate/industrial world and the correction thereof. (06/18/2010) — Marjorie Baumgarten

GET HIM TO THE GREEK: D: Nicholas Stoller; with Jonah Hill, Russell Brand, Sean Combs, Elisabeth Moss, Rose Byrne, Colin Meyerny. (R, 108 min.) Get Him to the Greek is episodic and spasmodically funny: Good jokes and gag parts perk up otherwise rambling and sometimes misbegotten sequences. The film feels like a collection of sketches instead of a narrative. It’s like the amiable, sex-infused whirl from which junior A&R guy Aaron Green (Hill) has been deputized to chart a bizarre, way slow the proceedings down for meager payoffs, but instead the script only calls for violent mayhem as a way of proving that the A-Team is the world’s best team. — Marjorie Baumgarten

KILLERS: D: Robert Luketic; with Ashton Kutcher, Katherine Heigl, Tom Selleck, Catherine O’Hara, Catherine O’Hara, Sylvia Sidney. (PG-13, 100 min.) Heigl reteams here with her director of The Ugly Truth where we learn she is aRelationship Jockey O — deliver rich, sympathetic performances. — Kimberley Jones

MARMADUKE: D: Tom Yam; with Lee Pace, Juda Greer, William H. Macy, with the voices of Owen Wilson, Emma Stone, George Lopez, Raugi Yu, Christopher Mintz-Plaske, Steve Coogan. (PG, 87 min.) You don’t get much flimsier than the live-actioning of a 45-year-old comic strip about a big, dumb dog. Marmaduke (amably voiced by Wilson) is the dog in question: a mammoth Great Dane mix who, in his own words, is going through his awkward teenage years. Marmaduke means well, but he’s too ungainly, too uncoordinated, too sloppy and eager to make mischief. He’s also a mutt, which docks him major points when Marmaduke’s family, the Winslows, moves from Kansas to Orange County, where the dog park division between pedigrues and mixed breeds is framed as a kind of canine clique war. There’s also an adequate story of its own, one that features a terrific supporting cast. — Kimberley Jones

OCEANS: D: Jacques Perrin, Jacques Cluzaud; narrated by Pierce Brosnan. (R, 84 min.) In the opening moments of this nature documentry from the French filmmaking team who made Winged Migration, narrator Brosnan wonders aloud about the identity — no, the essence — of the subject of this film: a story of two-thirds of the planet. (Only a French cinephile could hook on the ocean’s je ne sais quoi.) Brosnan nimbly slips into the role of an objector to hard times, and then going silent. The dazzling marine life on display speaks for itself — but it should have to. (04/30/2010) — Kimberley Jones

Places in the Heart

Places in the Heart (1984) D: Robert Benton; with Sally Field, Danny Glover, Lindsay Crouse, Ed Harris, Amy Madigan. (PG, 102 min.) Summer Film Classics: The Texas Connection – Oscar Totin’ Texas Gals. In Depression-era Texas, a suddenly widowed mother of two fights for survival by planting cotton on her land with the help of a black drifter and a blind boarder. Glover and Malkovich both earned their first wide recognition in these roles, while Field captured an Oscar. Benton’s script also earned a Best Original Screenplay Oscar. (Double bill: Terms of Endearment.) @Paramount, Saturday, 7pm; Sunday, 4:35pm.
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