

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING FOR DATE 18-24, 2011

The Journal TVview



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Noah Wyle leads an army of Davids in TNT's 'Falling Skies'

"Falling Skies" premieres Sunday
on TNT.

See Page 4 for more details.

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Double Take: *Super 8*

Josh: A love-letter film, done well
Matt: Scream along with the kids

Josh: A simplistic way to explain "Super 8" is to say it's a well-crafted love letter to all of Steven Spielberg's great films of the 70s and 80s. The film's director is J.J. Abrahams, who is the mind behind "Cloverfield" and the show "Lost." He's by far the best modern director for building suspense and interest about bizarre circumstances. The result of combining these elements is that we get an excellent, heart-felt family drama about a boy and his father coping with loss and a thrilling sci-fi mystery/adventure about the contents of a wrecked train. The two plots work surprisingly well together and leave you with a satisfying film experience.

The movie's strength is recreating Spielberg's "child-like wonder" style of filmmaking, where the content can be intelligent and dark, but still family-friendly and very accessible, with a few caveats, including some humorous drug references. The film also hosts a big cast of surprisingly good children ac-



Josh
Moniz
&
Matt
Voigts

tors. I like that the film treats them like regular actors instead of gimmicks, and that it pays off with them being strong enough actors to carry the film.

My only real issue with the film isn't exactly a negative all together. Towards the end of the film, the great family drama comes to forefront and resolves in a satisfying way. But, it does so at the cost of reducing the "what's in the train" storyline. This is ok, because the family drama is the better part of film, but it's disappointing that the mystery angle doesn't finish out strong. That's not to say how it resolves is bad, just not quite up to par with the rest of the film.

Matt: I can't promise you this movie won't give your kids nightmares. It's a movie 14-year-old me would have loved beyond all reason and that would have kept 12-year-old me up at night. Either way, it would have been an indeli-



Even the cast of *Super 8* is astonished by how refreshingly good this film is.

ble memory and one I would have been glad to experience at the theater with my family. So don't say I didn't warn you, but if I had children, we'd all be going back to the theater to watch this movie right now. I'd also be buying a heck of a lot of night lights.

The director Steven Spielberg, as of late, has lost touch with his inner child. The producer Spielberg, however, has hired the right people to plagiarize the look and feel of his early output wholesale, right down to the occasionally maudlin sentiment and the rusty, deep texture of "ET"-era film grain. It has a sort of tension I recall from watching movies that were perhaps a little too old for me on grainy VHS tapes, movies that scared me as a kid but became the stuff I love as an adult. And really, one of the things the movie

does quite well is keeping the tension high while allowing the character-based humor of our young protagonists to remind us the movie's all in good fun.

Snips of conversation here, the bluntness of children there, the sounds of a car that recall the train crash, another character yelling at his mother at just the right time — there's a lot subtly going on that keeps the right emotional and visceral tensions present on an almost subliminal level. Though unlike Josh, I ultimately found the action more interesting. That train crash is perhaps the best I've ever seen on film, and arguably the best individual movie scene of 2011 thus far.

Josh: What I really liked about this film was that it was done in a simple and straight-forward manner,

but it wasn't dumbed down. Few directors have successfully pulled that off lately. The film's smartest move was to limit two sides of overall plot to one plot thread each. The drama side only focuses on a handful of people's reaction to the family tragedy. The mystery side adheres to the just the mysterious content of the train and what it's doing to the town.

Also, the pacing in this film was fantastic. The deep emotional scenes are shot very efficiently, so we can only spend a few minutes of film time on them without losing content. This allows the film to then hope to the next action sequence to keep the excitement constant.

Matt: The negative: given all the plot elements, it's almost impressive how the movie avoids venturing larger statements about art and life — on the drive to tell stories, on coping with fear and grief, or even on Spielberg's influence on cinema. While often subtle on a technical level, I thought the characters' emotional journeys seemed resolved too definitively, making the movie seem to offer little resonance for, say, the familial grieving process as experienced outside the context of an alien invasion.

It doesn't have to be like this. For an easy example that is also wicked fun, see

Joe Dante's "Matinee," which follows a group of Florida military brats excited to see a B-movie about a nuclear ant monster, the controlled thrills of which are paralleled and contrasted with the very real threat of nuclear annihilation posed by the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Josh: This film will find its way into your movie collection as a great movie you can watch again and again.

Matt: And here I thought they didn't make 'em like this anymore...

Josh: 8.5/10, Matt: 8/10

Synopsis:

A group of kids making their own film witness a mysterious train wreck that brings swarms of soldiers to their hometown. As they try to discover the truth behind the strange occurrences, they must also confront the painful personal problems in their lives.

Cast: Joel Courtney, Kyle Chandler, Elle Fanning, Noah Emmerich and Ron Eldard

Director: J.J. Abrams
Writer: J.J. Abrams

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