

ENTERTAINMENT

Technique • Friday, June 30, 2000

Fox Summer Movies

The summer film festival at the Fabulous Fox began this week. Schedule on **Page 14**

A time for walking

Two Bits Man ponders the multitude of alternatives to the Stinger. **Page 14**

See chicken, see 'Chicken Run'

By Alan Back
Col. Sanders' worst nightmare

MPAA Rating: G

Starring: Voices of Mel Gibson, Julia Sawalha, Miranda Richardson

Directors: Peter Lord, Nick Park

Studio: DreamWorks/Pathé

Running time: 85 min

Rating: ★★★★★

Life on a poultry farm is hard. You put in long hours feeding the flock, collecting eggs, and doing everything else that needs to be done to keep the place running. It's even less enjoyable for the birds, of course—but what if they start hatching breakout plans along with their eggs?

Picture that scenario and you have the core of *Chicken Run*, the latest offering from the Aardman animation team. The surreal comedy of the group's Wallace and Gromit short films gives way to more conventional cartoon humor (no penguin jewel thieves or psycho robot dogs here), but the finished product still offers a thoroughly enjoyable ride with a bird's-eye view of the action.

Ginger (Julia Sawalha) spends almost as much time in solitary confinement for her escape attempts as she does on the farm with the other chickens. She's tried everything she can think of—digging under the fence, tunneling out, sneaking away in a giant scarecrow—but all she gets for her effort is trip after trip to the hole. "No chicken escapes from Tweedy's farm!" shouts Mr. Tweedy (Tony Haygarth), as he tosses her in once more.

It's Mrs. Tweedy (Miranda Richardson) who really runs the show, though, keeping an eye on which chickens have been meeting the egg quota and sending the slackers to the chopping block. She treats her husband (who might be just a bit smarter than he sounds or looks) nearly as badly as the chickens, but at least she doesn't plan to turn him into a pot pie anytime soon.

When Rocky the Flying Rooster (Mel Gibson) crashes the gate, Ginger and the rest of the chickens take one look at



DREAMWORKS PICTURES

In *Chicken Run*, Rocky (Mel Gibson, right) and Ginger (Julia Sawalha) have to find a way off the poultry farm before they get cooked for an hour at 400 degrees.

him and see their ticket out. The fast-talking Yankee and the reserved Brit find themselves in an unlikely partnership as they map out one last strategy to save the flock from a visit to Mrs. Tweedy's pie-making plant.

What makes *Chicken Run* work, aside from the silly poultry jokes, sight gags, and excellent action sequences, is its off-the-wall mixture of cultural references. The opening sequence—full moon shining through barbed-wire fences, a lone inmate making a break for it, guard dogs barking in the distance—could have been lifted straight from a classic POW movie like *The Great Escape*. When the chickens hold planning sessions, hut 17 is their headquarters, a nod to *Stalag 17*.

The World War II sendup continues with Fowler (Benjamin Whitrow), an old rooster who's seen service with the British air force, and a pair of rats who can get Rocky and Ginger any supplies they need—if the price is right. More modern references abound, though,

including bits from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *Star Trek*, and even *The Matrix* (watch for Mrs. Tweedy to take an impossible flying leap through an upper-story window).

Stereotypes are milked for all they're worth, but to good effect. Rocky is a loud, brash, lazy Yank, while the more levelheaded Ginger has to keep him grounded in reality in order to get any work out of him. Babs (Jane Horrocks), a true dumb cluck, thinks Ginger's frequent absences are just vacations, and Mac (Lynn Ferguson) is an engineer whose mix of technobabble and a thick Scottish burr makes it impossible to listen to her without cracking up.

Chickens have their own particular reasons for crossing the road (or the perimeter fence, in this case). Whether you want plenty of bad jokes, pop culture tie-ins, or just a chance to root for the feathered folk, you should lay a few tracks across your favorite piece of asphalt to catch *Chicken Run*.

Cameron's 'Aliens' a must see classic on DVD

By Jayson Wehrend
Entertainment Staff

There seems to be an unspoken law in Hollywood: Thou shalt not make a good sequel. Practically every time a sequel comes out it can't live up to the original. Apparently, James Cameron didn't pay attention in film class because he completely disregarded that tradition when he made *Aliens*. He took what was essentially a horror film and turned it into one of the definitive sci-fi movies of our time.

The storyline in a nutshell: Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) is found in suspended animation 57 years after killing the first alien. Reoccurring nightmares and a promise to kill all of the aliens prompts her to return to the planet where it all began. Accompanying her on this mission are a squad of heavily armed colonial marines and the company businessman, Burke (Paul Reiser). From a relatively simple story, Cameron fashions an intense action experience.

If you are going to watch *Aliens*, attempt to watch it in DVD format, which includes a special extended cut that comes in at a healthy 154 minutes. Naturally, a whole slew of new footage is included. Each of these new scenes is a worthy addition to the disc. Varying in length from a couple of seconds to a number of minutes, these scenes fill in some critical gaps in the narrative. Some of the highlights include learning that Ripley had a daughter and watching Newt's father get attacked by a facehugger. An entire action sequence was also added with some robotic sentry guns. These automatic weapons go through 2000 rounds trying to stop the alien onslaught. You watch as the bullets run dry, hearing the screams of the approaching aliens. Watching the sentries tear into the aliens was well worth the price of this DVD.

Video: Presented in the original theatrical aspect ratio of 1.85:1 and with a new high definition transfer, this movie has never looked better. For a movie that was made in 1986, its age doesn't show. The colors showed a pleasant range from the vibrant blues and greens of the computer screens to the muted grays and greens of the military gear. The characters' skin tones looked very natural and the black level was perfect. I was expecting it to be a little washed out given its age, but I was pleasantly surprised. In some of the darker scenes, I actually lost the black bars. The film is intentionally grainy in some scenes but otherwise the picture was clear.

See *Aliens*, page 14

Our guide to a fun, fabulous Fourth of July

Centennial Olympic Park

The park's third annual celebration offers a parade at 1:00, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra beginning at 7:00, and fireworks beginning at 9:30. Admission is free. Call 404-222-7275 for more info.

Lenox Square Mall

Activities at the 41st annual event begin at 1:00, with the fireworks beginning at 9:40. Admission is free. Call 404-233-6767 for more info.

Peachtree Road Race

Watch runners race down Peachtree to 10th Street and Piedmont Park. The race starts at 7:30 a.m. and is free for spectators. Call 404-231-9064 for more info.

Screen on the Green

The weekly summer series comes to a finale with *The Wizard of Oz*. Located at Piedmont Park; movie starts at Sunset. Admission is free. Be sure to bring a blanket to sit on. Go to <http://www.piedmontpark.org/movie.html> for more info.

Stone Mountain

Laser show starts at 9:30, and fireworks follow. Admission is \$6 per car. Call 770-498-5690 for more info.

Veruca Salt falls flat with 'Resolver'

By Jon Kaye
Entertainment Staff

Album: Resolver

Artist: Veruca Salt

Tracks: 13

Length: 48:02

Label: Velvet Records

Rating: ★★

When reviewing an album for a respectable publication, one needs to maintain a certain level of decorum. However, there is no easy way to be discreet when telling about the initial reaction that Veruca Salt's newest album offers a listener. When you first cue this disc, you will be absolutely dumbfounded at how awful it is. The once mighty band that brought us that powerful alternative rock anthem, "Seether," has completely fallen from grace on its third full-length album.

The first time you listen to this album, it will be impossible to ignore the complete lack of effort that the band put forth in the writing of the lyrics. The words, which are shallow, uncreative, and crass, are significantly below the maturity level a third-release band

should illustrate. In most of the songs, Louise Post repeats herself a ridiculously great number of times. For example, in one song, she repeats the word "imperfect" (or imperfectly) roughly twenty-two times. To reiterate the same word over twenty times in a four minute song is simply laughable. Secondly, the band feels as though it must attempt to rhyme as many phrases as possible. Unfortunately, this technique backfires as it makes most of the tracks sound contrived. Not only does Veruca Salt sound foolish with their contrived attempts at rhyming, they also sound silly with some of the places they choose to insert profanity. Profanity is unmistakably necessary in some songs to offer a proper descriptive edge. However, many of the cuts on "Resolver" have foul language tossed carelessly about to give Post a bad-girl image. Again, that backfires, because she just looks like a wannabe in her attempts to be bad.

However, if you listen to "Resolver" a few more times, you can get past the lyrics and appreciate the music. Flecked with aggressive guitar riffs and Louise Post's pungent voice, the tracks are vaguely reminiscent of Hole. While "Resolver"

is dominated with a Seether-style affinity for screaming, the disc does have a few ballads that break the monotony of an otherwise pseudo-riot-grrlish album. In fact, the only truly great cut on the album is "All Dressed Up." This song, written two years before the CD's release is a woman's outcry to a lover who ignores her. If all songs on "Resolver" could meet the standard set by "All Dressed Up," this album would score five stars; unfortunately, such is not the case.

This album takes some getting used to. On the first spin, "Resolver" appears to be one of the worst recordings in years. However, by the third of fourth spin, you can see some of Veruca Salt's underlying talent. The lyrics, while mostly unimaginative, will tend to fade into the background as you grow to appreciate the band's unique playing style. While this album is not as much a piece of garbage as it initially seems, it certainly falls short of grandeur. The majority of the songs are dull and repetitive, but nonetheless, "All Dressed Up" saves the album from complete failure. With that in mind, this album is a great triumph in mediocrity.

