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'Stargate' storyline underdeveloped, but futuristic thriller still entertains

By Jay Robbins
THE BATTALION

"Stargate" Starring James Spader, Kurt Russell and Jaye Davidson Directed by Roland Emmerich Rated PG-13 **** (out of five)

"Stargate" stands out as the most intriguing and entertaining science fiction movie since "Terminator 2." That acknowledgment made, the film also leaves more unanswered questions and abandons more potential than any other in recent memory.

The film opens with a flashback to the 1928 discovery of a huge solid stone ring at an excavation site in Egypt. The shocking uniqueness of the object dumbfounds the discoverers,

who wonder at its origin and purpose.

After the jump to the present, James Spader ("sex, lies, and videotape") appears as Dr. Daniel Jackson, an Egyptologist ridiculed by his colleagues for his revolutionary theories about the building of the Pyramids at Giza. Following a fiasco at a scholarly conference, Jackson is approached by a mysterious woman who gives him travel plans to an Air Force laboratory hidden in a converted missile silo.

Enter Col. Jonathan "Jack" O'Neill (Kurt Russell), whose job is military administration of the "project" - the attempt to unlock the key to using the ring, now known to be a stargate.

Somewhat predictably, the project almost instantly succeeds

under Jackson's inspiration, and the plan goes forward for him to accompany O'Neill and a platoon of commando specialists through the gate. And so on ...

The setup of the flick generates most of those problems. It leaves the audience wanting to know how the Air Force got hold of the stargate, how the researchers guessed its purpose, what the technologies they have developed can do, and more.

The fascinating new twist on the story of ancient Egypt, the pharaohs and their mythology is only mentioned in passing. Throughout the film, the most interesting elements of the plotlines get almost no time or notice.

But, even with its flaws, "Stargate" entertains and

leaves a memorable impression. James Spader convincingly portrays Jackson as an intellectual dork with no common sense and a passion for his field. Audiences enjoy even more Kurt Russell's excellent return to his "Escape from New York" persona, especially after his recent series of mediocre comedies like "Overboard" and "Captain Ron."

Director Roland Emmerich has put together a good film that rockets through its story and captures the imagination. But good could have been great with some more substance to the foundations of the storyline. "Stargate" won't fail to please, but the "what might have been" will leave its viewers feeling a little cheated at the same time.

Lucas affirms continuation of 'Star Wars' saga

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The "Star Wars" will be returning to movie screens, but you may have to wait until the end of the century to see the new editions.

When George Lucas electrified the movie world with "Star Wars" in 1977, he outlined an ambitious plan: to film a triple trilogy about intergalactic intrigue and warfare. With "The Empire Strikes Back" in 1980 and "Return of the Jedi" in 1983, he completed the first of the trilogies. He also created three of the Top 10 film grossers of all time.

Lucas then became enmeshed in other grand projects, notably making the "Indiana Jones" trilogy with Steven Spielberg and perfecting the Lucas technology empire at Skywalker Ranch in Northern California.

Now he confirms that he will continue the "Star Wars" saga, taking the story back to the era before Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia and Han Solo. As with most Lucas projects, he reveals little, but he did disclose his modus operandi on the three films:

"I'll take a year to write them, a year to prepare them, and a year to shoot them. And I'll shoot

them all at once."

Filming three major movies at once would be unprecedented. Spielberg and director Robert Zemeckis continuously shot the second and third versions of "Back to the Future."

In 1973, Alexander and Michael Salkind managed to produce simultaneously "The Three Musketeers" and "The Four Musketeers." Charlton Heston and other actors demanded extra pay, claiming they believed they were making one film only.

Lucas hasn't directed a film since his early hits "American Graffiti" and "Star Wars." He hinted that he might return to directing for the new "Star Wars."

"I'll decide after I get the films prepared," he said. Lucas has ventured into other films as executive producer, often with little success. Among them: "Howard the Duck," "Labyrinth," "Willow," "Tucker: The Man and His Dream," "The Land Before Time."

His latest is "Radioland Murders," which opened to mixed reviews and disappointing business. Lucas, who wrote the original story, explained that it

stemmed from his early fascination with radio.

"I grew up with radio," said Lucas, born in Modesto, Calif., 50 years ago. "We didn't get a television set until I was 10 years old. So for the first 10 years I was in front of the radio listening to radio dramas. It played an important part of my life."

"I listened to 'Inner Sanctum,' 'The Whistler,' 'The Lone Ranger' — those were the ones that interested me. I think they influenced me to put more emphasis on the sound track in my movies."

"Radioland Murders" is a slapstick comedy combined with a murder mystery that takes place in a radio station during an all-star broadcast launching a new network.

"This is very much in the mode of 'His Girl Friday' or the Cary Grant screwball comedies," Lucas said. "Also we've thrown in a lot of The Three Stooges. It's a kind of sophisticated comedy like 'The Thin Man' together with the off-the-wall comedy of the Marx Brothers. Plus some nostalgia about big-time radio."

'Stargate' opens in top spot in box office totals

Weekend of Oct. 28-30, 1994
All dollar figures in millions

Rank	Title	Gross to date, weeks in release, number of screens	Weekend gross
1	Stargate	\$16.7, one week, 2,033 screens	\$16.7
2	Pulp Fiction	\$30.6, three weeks, 1,494 screens	\$5.7
3	The Specialist	\$43.6, four weeks, 2,363 screens	\$4.4
4	Love Affair	\$10.8, two weeks, 1,585 screens	\$3.6
5	The Road to Wellville	\$2.58, one week, 806 screens	\$2.58
6	The River Wild	\$36.8, five weeks, 1,901 screens	\$2.57
7	Little Giants	\$12.9, three weeks, 1,954 screens	\$2.3
8	Wes Craven's New Nightmare	\$14.5, three weeks, 1,876 screens	\$2.1
9	Forrest Gump	\$266.3, 17 weeks, 1,580 screens	\$1.9
10	Silent Fall	\$1.53, one week, 1,251 screens	\$1.53

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