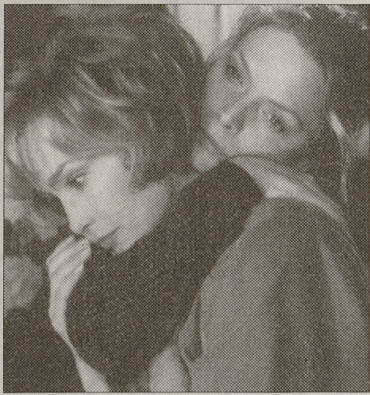


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A Thousand Acres suffers plot drought

By JAMES FRANCIS
Opinion editor

The corn fields in *A Thousand Acres* take the imagination to the horizon and beyond. The plot of the film, however, seems to have been planted with powerful seeds that were only watered in select areas, thereby stunting the growth of what could have been a



Jessica Lange and Michelle Pfeiffer star in *A Thousand Acres*.

Movie Review

A Thousand Acres
 Starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Jessica Lange
 Directed by Jocelyn Moorehouse
 Rated R
 Playing at Hollywood 16
 ★★★ (out of five)

pleasing, dramatic movie. The film opens with on-location footage of Rochelle, Illinois. Cameras span the green prairie of farm fields, white picket fences and exhausting stretches of paved roads. But underneath the beautiful countryside, exists dark storylines of marital infidelity, childhood abuse and inner-family hatred. Michelle Pfeiffer and Jessica Lange portray two sisters, Rose and Ginny, respectively. They live what appears to be normal lives in the country; they work on their farms, prepare grand meals for family dinners and share the common bond that most siblings exhibit in late-night conversations about the daily conflicts in life. Jason Robards plays the role of the girls' father, Larry. He is also the reason that so many problems arise between members of the family. At a point in the film, Robards decides to split his farm (the family farm passed on to him by his father) into three divisions, each third going to one of his daughters — Pfeiffer, Lange and Jennifer Jason Leigh, a lawyer and the youngest of the three children. Everything begins to fall apart when Leigh decides she has to think about whether she wants to take a third of the farmland agreement. Leigh's indecisiveness angers her father, and thereafter he almost completely disowns her. This problem only scratches the surface of

the disturbing family troubles revealed throughout the film. Although the various family problems make the film interesting, they also take away meaning from the attempt to develop a central plot and theme. The first half of *A Thousand Acres* seems to have interesting characters and a story that will keep the audience's attention. The latter part of the film, however, when most of the problems begin to emerge, seems to fall apart in a 15-minute resolution. With as many secrets and lies that are brought to light toward the middle of the movie, the ending of the film deserves at least 30 minutes more to allow the audience a sense of atonement, rather than simply stating, "Here's the end, hope everything works out for the best." The more notable aspect of the film was the performances. Pfeiffer is in excellent form as she battles with childhood memories of physical and sexual abuse, a life plagued by the ills of breast cancer and a marriage that is often not standing on solid ground. Pfeiffer's character transforms from an attractive, strong-willed woman to a person fighting for life until her last breath. The other actors and actresses showcase great supporting roles. Lange, Robards and Leigh add depth to the film and its disturbing family elements. But in the end, the characters seem to lose their persona; they become opposites of the people they were at the start of the film. *A Thousand Acres* is a clear representation of what embodies filmmaking — great characters, an in-depth account of tragedy and pleasing cinematography. But with so many gaps in the plot, *A Thousand Acres* does not lend itself enough land to cultivate a fine harvest.

Taking a byte from the Apple

Student makes feeble attempt to join the computer age



MICHAEL SCHAUB
columnist

I think I missed the entrance onto the information superhighway. In fact, I am somewhere on the information rural route, 27 miles from the nearest historical marker, buying a lukewarm cup of coffee at the truck stop. I escaped high school without knowing how to work any computer that did not use vacuum tubes and punch cards. Inexplicably, my computer science credit from high school was enough to satisfy Texas A&M's computer course requirement. Not that I'm complaining.

The fact is, I am quite the expert on programming BASIC on a Commodore 64. OK, maybe not an expert. But I know how to make certain phrases scroll across the black and amber computer screen. For example:
 10 PRINT "I BLAME REAGAN"
 20 GOTO 10
 Of course, I never figured out how to make it stop. Something with the escape button. Imagine the career opportunities that

await me with such technological savvy. But when I came to A&M, computer literacy became a matter of survival of the fittest. I was rendered extinct my first day. My best friend from high school moved to Vermont to attend college. We exchanged e-mail addresses. I promised myself I would learn the mysterious world of computers. So I e-mailed her my phone number, and she e-mailed me hers, and we ended up with long-distance bills the size of Vermont's annual state economy. Two years later, I use my e-mail for little more than receiving lists of jokes from my brother. But the advantage is obvious. If he were to send me jokes in the mail, it might take two days to reach me. And timeliness is the key when you spend a good part of your evenings making fun of people. My roommate for my first two years at A&M was a computer engineering major, so my life was pretty easy. He was always available to decipher techno-jargon for me:
 MIKE: Hey, Chris, my computer's broken.
 CHRIS: OK. First, you need to turn it on.
 MIKE: Is that this button here?
 CHRIS: No. That's the microwave.
 After a semester, Chris was downloading secret files from Mossad and screwing with Venezuela's defense capabilities, and I was still learning how to work a mouse — literally. After I complained to my roommate that the little arrow thingy on the screen was not moving like it should, he advised me to clean the mouse. So the next day, I disassembled the mouse with a screwdriver,

and set to work with some cotton swabs. Chris walked in and stopped in his tracks. "What," he said deliberately, "are you doing?" "I'm cleaning the mouse," I said. Chris informed me I actually did not need to take the mouse apart to clean it. Apparently you just pop the little ball out. I swallowed my pride and asked him if he knew how to put it back together again. "I don't know," he said, amazed. "I've never seen the inside of a mouse before." Eventually, I bit the bullet and learned how to "surf" the Internet, which was established in the '80s by computer scientists for the purpose of making pornography easily accessible to everyone. And pornography is the only thing I can consistently find on the Web. Even without looking for it. Just type anything into your "web browser," and you will find some site from the Netherlands featuring models doing unmentionable things with all manners of animals, vegetables and minerals. It seems like everyone has their own web site these days, anyway. My anarchic friend Matt had to set up one for his architecture class. Granted, all it has is a cover of a Minor Threat album and the words, "This is all about selfish little me ... La deee daaaaaa ..." but it is more than I can say for myself — though not much more. It was last semester when I was struck by a brilliant idea for the Internet. I was doing research for a paper on "The Merchant of Venice," when I saw a niche open up. The business majors call it "defining a need." Here it is: an adult Shakespeare site. We could have Elizabethan women and men in various states of undress, with captions like "The quality of sexiness is not strain'd, as Portia sentences Bassanio to a night of passion."



JAMES PALMER/THE BATTALION

It is a start for me. I have to find something productive to do with computers. My hilarious roommate Sara has changed the screen saver on my computer to say "Ditto Rush!" and I am getting sick of looking at it. I miss the '50s already, and I was born under Jimmy Carter. I am trying to lobby The Battalion to ditch their computer system and go back to the idyllic days of movable type. We would have an old typesetter with white hair and a green visor. Old Walt, we'd call him. It would be like a Jimmy Stewart movie. "Hey, Old Walt," I would say as I walked into the newsroom. "How's tricks?" "Not bad, Schaub," he would reply. "I got the funniest e-mail joke yesterday." A man can dream.

Michael Schaub is a junior English major.

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