

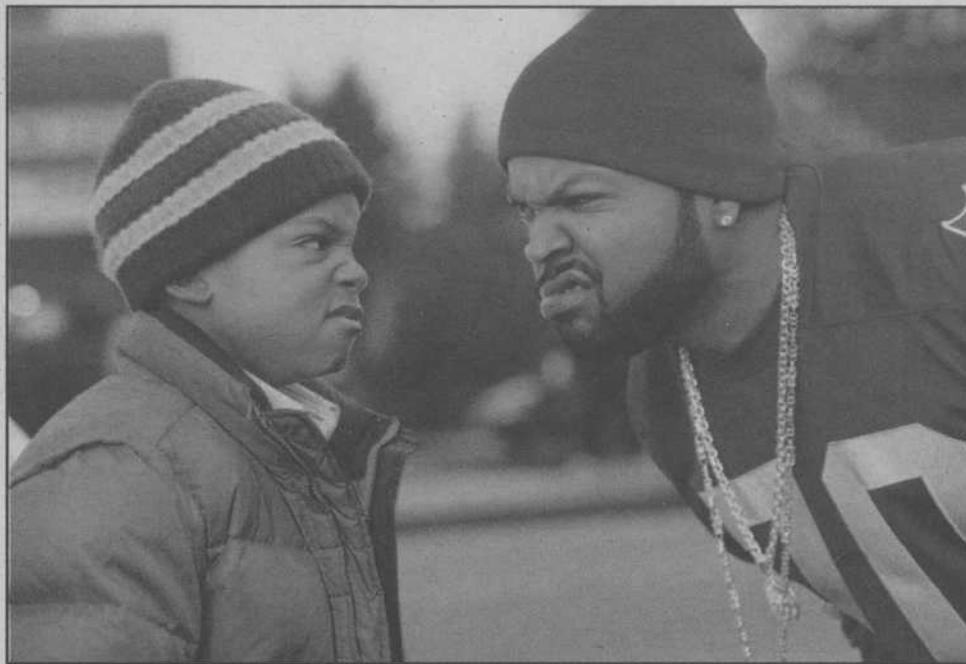
Car commercial masquerades as family flick

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

One of the movies which made it to my 10 Worst List for 2004 was Johnson Family Vacation, a two-hour Lincoln Navigator commercial masquerading as fun-filled family fare. Now we have the equally-offensive "Are We There Yet," another Ford-sponsored road adventure, one again aimed at an African-American audience.

This poor excuse for a film, which stars Ice Cube and Nia Long, features the same SUV showcased in that other extended automobile ad.

Suffering through a shameless sales pitch might not be so bad if the rest of the picture hadn't been such an



Philip Daniel Bolden (left) and Ice Cube star in the Revolution Studios' family comedy, "Are We There Yet?" Ice Cube plays a do-anything suitor trying to woo a mother of two.

Film on genocide unveiled at 25,000-seat Rwanda stadium

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) — "Sometimes in April," a movie on the 1994 Rwanda genocide, premiered Saturday at a stadium that was one of the scenes of slaughter more than a decade ago.

It was filmed mostly in Rwanda, where Hutu extremist militias and soldiers killed more than 500,000 minority Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus between April and July 1994.

More than 5,000 people — including government officials, actors, journalists and genocide survivors — attended Saturday's screening at Kigali's Amahoro stadium, where thousands of Tutsis were killed during the slaughter.

On Sunday, the movie will be shown to the general public for free at the 25,000-capacity venue.

"Sometimes in April" tells the story of a Hutu soldier who gets separated from his family — including his Tutsi wife — as he tries to take them to safety with the help of a fellow Hutu soldier.

"The film ... demonstrates the human capacity of cruelty, while illuminating the human capacity for courage," said Raoul Peck, the movie's Haitian-born writer and director.

Peck spent 18 months researching material for the film in Rwanda and Tanzania, where masterminds of the genocide are still on trial at a U.N. tribunal. The film stars Oris Erhuero and Debra Winger.

Peck said he wanted the film to premiere here as a way of thanking the Rwandans — many of them survivors of the genocide — who helped make it.

They acted and were members of the film's production crew.

"This is a major moment for me," Peck told journalists Friday. It goes beyond my own personal emotions to have this film screened in Rwanda. It is so important that Rwandans are going to legitimize it."

The film will be broadcast in the United States on Home Box Office on March 19.

"We have fulfilled the pledge we made to Rwandans of showing them the film before anyone else," Sam Martin, HBO's director of

development and production, told The Associated Press. "The story in the film is one of international importance, and it's a great opportunity to retell the world of this atrocity."

He said he hoped the story would make people think about the crisis in Sudan's western Darfur region, where government-backed Arab militiamen have driven nearly 2 million people from their homes in a campaign of killing, raping and looting.

At least 70,000 have died from disease and hunger since March. Many more have been killed.

While filming, Peck had a team of psychologists on set to help survivors deal with any trauma that may have been triggered by graphic reminders of their past.

He said he expects the film will also bring back painful memories to the Rwandans who see the film Saturday and Sunday.

"The film is very moving and hard," Peck said. "But this is the reality, we have to confront it."

Many in the audience found the film difficult to watch, but said it had an important message to tell.

"I hope 'Sometimes in April' will help our future generations understand our history and avoid a repeat of the genocide," said Martin Semukanya, a radio journalist who lost his father, sister, two brothers and many other relatives and friends during the killings.

"Sometimes in April" is one of 21 films competing for the top prize at the Berlin International Film Festival next month.

Its release follows that of "Hotel Rwanda," another film on the genocide, whose star Don Cheadle has been tipped for an Oscar nomination Tuesday for best actor.

The killing was orchestrated by the Hutu extremist government then in power. Government troops, Hutu militia and ordinary villagers spurred on by hate messages broadcast via radio went from village to village, butchering men, women and children.

The genocide ended when then-rebels led by President Paul Kagame captured the Rwandan capital, Kigali, and ousted the extremist government on July 4, 1994.

unfunny insult to the human intelligence.

None of the characters here is particularly appealing, the dialogue is just jive gibberish, the plot is obvious, and several vaguely familiar scenes look like they were lifted wholesale from classic comedies like "Home Alone," "The Parent Trap" and, especially, "Planes, Trains and Automobiles."

Nick Persons (Cube) is a Portland playa' on the make

who wants nothing more than to add Suzanne (Long) to his list of conquests. Trouble is, the curvy divorcee is a so-called "breeder" and saddled with caring for a couple of bratty "small fries," meaning her own kids. Suzanne is also an irresponsible workaholic willing to put business travel ahead of the needs of her obnoxious offspring, Lindsey (Aleisha Allen), 11, and Kevin (Philip Bolden), 7.

Her spousified adolescents, meanwhile, dream of reuniting their parents under one roof. So, it's no surprise that instead of focusing appropriately on their own developmental needs, they see it as their duty to disrupt their mother's love life by scaring-off her latest suitor. When Suzanne rushes off on a flight to Vancouver for an assignment, they are understandably angered about being dumped with Nick, a virtual stranger.


To give you an idea of how crass this supposedly PG production gets, consider what happens when he arrives to take Lindsey and Kevin from Miss Mable, their elderly babysitter. The seventy-plus geriatric propositions him right on the spot,

boasting that she is better in bed than Suzanne. FYI, Mable is played by Star trek trivia answer Nichelle Nichols, who many may remember as Lt. Uhura of the original TV series.

The plan is for Nick to drive the children up to Canada in his brand new Navigator, but what ensues is a nightmarish trip from Hell in which the SUV proves to be Ford-tough, enduring a host of internal and external abuses ranging from projectile vomit to road rage impacts to accidental immolation. Nick doesn't fare much better, for these sassy siblings are vicious, vindictive and give endless lip. The film is supposed to convince you that the trip has somehow converted a confirmed womanizer into a sensitive doormat, eager to settle-down in a dysfunctional family that has exhibited nothing but contempt for him.


Yeah, right. But way before that "happily ever after" moment finally rolls around, expect to be begging this dreadful dud/90 minute Navigator ad, "Are we over yet?"

Poor (0 stars). Rating: PG for some salty language and crude humor.



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