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Durango Kids

US : 2000 : dir. Ashton Root : : c80 min
prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

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Cast unknown

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Radio Times review:

"There's an old-fashioned feel to this time travelling adventure. Set in the town Ouray, Colorado, the action shifts between 1891 and the present day, as four school pals encounter bandits while searching for lost gold and the solution to an age-old mystery. ** "

"Fantasy. Four schoolchildren journey back in time in search of stolen gold and the solution to a mystery. ** "

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001"]

Hmmm. The only "old-fashioned" element to this tediously contemporary effort lies in the coding of the liberal tokenism, which is more 1980s than late 90s. Four kids this time, so two white boys, Taylor and Spencer (one of them a swot), one white girl, Katie, who's the most mechanically able of the bunch, and a fat black boy, Cameron, to provide the comic relief. A very 80s recipe, trust me on this one. It is of course the girl who's the whiz with computers, a touch of demographic nonsense which places it a decade later. It's part of the current agenda that computers are for *girls* too, not just boys, so we get a lot of that pushed at us now. Spielberg was simply quicker off the mark than most by making Ariana Richards, and not her brother, the "computer nerd" in "**JURASSIC PARK**".

It's difficult to overlook the racial coding (evident in much children's output now) when one of the express goals of the adventure is to facilitate an 1890s inter-racial romance (preposterously enough) between a modern day white youth and a black girl of the day. The rest of the action concerns the four younger kids (arriving on dune buggies through an abandoned mineshaft) thwarting a bank robbery which led to the town of Ouray becoming a ghost town in the present day. Or something of the sort.

The baddie proves to be the town sheriff, who is spookily enough also the principal at the kids' school, and thus doubly to be thwarted. The children head off the bank robbery, and are promptly arrested by the sheriff as a gang of junior desperadoes from back east. Thrown into jail, they have their weepy little moment, before being rescued by the inter-racial courting couple, lauded by the townsfolk as heroes, and returning to the present day as bosom pals.

It's all too innocuous to give serious annoyance, and the children are certainly not as brash and abrasive as many in recent American kids' films but, even taken as a fantasy romp for the under-12s, it is all so lame and safe in execution that it could not raise a gasp from a hyper-sensitive five-year old. It is the filmic equivalent of a heavily-supervised "adventure playground" where all the kids must be sheathed head to toe in protective apparel first. No-one, adult or child, sustains so much as a mild contusion in the whole "adventure".

"Is it true that cannibals don't eat clowns because they taste funny?"

This is the sharpest piece of dialogue in the film, and it is thrown out to confuse a getaway gang while Cameron, the fat black boy, unharnesses the horses from their wagon. Duhhhh.

I have to put my hands up and admit that I'm not predisposed to enjoy *any* American film with such anodyne sensibilities. To my palate it is *all* junk, and this merely conforms to type. So it goes entirely without saying that the four principals are decked out in knee-length shirts, shin-length "shorts", and utter lines such as "I am *so* outta here". It goes without saying that by the end of the film the Alpha Boy (Taylor) is walking off arm in arm with the Alpha Girl (Katie) and we just somehow *know* they will marry one day. Talk about by-the-numbers scripting.

So call me old-fashioned, but wasn't the Wild West supposed to be a bit, well, wild? Weren't the bad guys supposed to be a bit... bad? And isn't the whole point of post-Civil Rights Act America supposed to be that in earlier times folks were meaner and more prejudiced about such things as miscegenation? If you're telling kids that nobody would have raised an eyebrow at such affairs in the 1890s, how are they to make sense of the 1990s? This is time travel stripped of all rationale and internal logic. A dull day out in a Western theme park.

I am *so* outta here.

See subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL, FOLLOW THE LEADER (children's gangs), KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS, TEEN LOVE, WESTERNS**, and under **SCIENCE FICTION** for other time travel yarns, though there is nothing in this plot which even approximates to SF.