

PAGEANT
THEATER
FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 5

The Godfather
FRI: 2pm
SAT: 6pm
SUN: 1pm
MON - TUE: 6pm

The Godfather PART II
FRI: 6pm
SAT: 2pm
SUN: 5pm
WED - THU: 6pm

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REEL WORLD




Call of the mild

A domesticated version of Jack London's wild novel

A grumpy, growly Harrison Ford sporting a David Letterman beard stars alongside a CGI dog in this latest cinematic take on Jack London's classic *The Call of the Wild*.

by
Bob Grimm
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newsreview.com


The Call of the Wild
Starring Harrison Ford. Directed by Chris Sanders. Cinemark 14, Feather River Cinemas. Rated PG.

when alone—in the scenes where it's just humans sitting around or a bunch of dogs fighting one another off on their own—things look OK.

Ford plays John Thornton, a character who shows up much deeper into the novel than he does in the movie. In the book, Thornton was one of the many men prospecting for gold in the Yukon. In director Chris Sanders' film, he's a grieving, boozing loner who has left his wife after the death of their son. He rescues Buck from sled-team drudgery and bonds with his new four-legged prospecting partner. (Chewbacca was essentially a big walking dog, so who better than Han Solo to play a drunk guy who talks to his dog a lot?)

Buck, the big house dog who was kidnapped from his California home and sold into pulling a mail sled in Alaska, is a curious enough technological creation. Buck doesn't look bad; he just doesn't look and act

"real." And he's intelligent in unrealistic ways, such as figuring out that booze is bad for John, and stealing his bottles. Again, this is the stuff of cartoons.

Another big departure from the novel is the portrayal of Hal, a brief negative presence in the book, but a full-blown villain in the movie. As played by Dan Stevens, with a mustache-twirling spin, Hal has an extended stay in the film, and he's a little over-the-top. Karen Gillan might have been fun as his spoiled sister Mercedes had she been given more than five minutes in the movie.

The scenery of the Yukon is breathtaking as shot by famed cinematographer Janusz Kamiński, so that's a plus. And as Ford narrates the movie with his huffy grumble, his onscreen persona has a surprising nuance. (He smiles sometimes!) He makes much of the movie watchable, even heartwarming in places. But then Buck the dog bounces around like Scooby-Doo and kills the moment.

Because the violence has been toned down and the film is coming in with a PG rating, I'll give it a mild recommendation if you are looking to take the kids out to the theater. Heck, my parents took me to see *The Adventures of the Wilderness Family* and low-grade Disney movies like *The Apple Dumpling Gang* when I was a kid, and I dug the hell out of them. This movie slips into that category of clumsy family fare that will please the kids and allow the parents to watch comfortably knowing that nobody gets fully naked or rips somebody's tongue out. (Hey, it might even inspire a nice "Say kids, see how bad alcohol is?" conversation on the ride home.)

For adults with no kids, however, *The Call of the Wild* probably won't do the trick. □

