Seven Days... 

Friday, October 26th
Auto Interiors at Ralph’s, Worcester
Ball in the House at Sullivan School, Worcester
Blaze, Twiztid, Insane Clown Posse and Dark Lotus at The Palladium, Worcester
Cyro Baptista at Clark University, Worcester
Junior Watson at Gilrein’s, Worcester
Eagle-Eye Cherry and Leona Naess at Paradise Rock Club, Boston
Rod Stewart at the FleetCenter, Boston

Saturday, October 27th
Sugar Ray & The Bluetones at Gilrein’s, Worcester
“Family Values Tour” at The Centrum, Worcester
Arab on Radar and Cancer Conspiracy at Clark University, Worcester
Jimmy Vaughan and Keller Brothers at House of Blues, Cambridge

Sunday, October 28th
Mighty Blue Kings at Middle East Club, Cambridge
DJ Harry and The New Deal at Clark University, Worcester
Maxwell and RES at the Orpheum, Boston

Monday, October 29th
*Monster Jam 2001* at the FleetCenter, Boston

Tuesday, October 30th
OK Go and They Might Be Giants at Avalon, Boston
*Pledge of Allegiance* at The Centrum, Worcester
I2O, New Found Glory and River City High at The Palladium, Worc.

Wednesday, October 31st
Beachwood Sparks and The Black Crows at the Orpheum, Boston

Thursday, November 1st
Alice Cooper and Lemmon at the Orpheum, Boston
Blindside, Fenix TX and P.O.D. at Avalon, Boston

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**BOOK**
**Psycho**
*Directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1960)*

The best slasher flick ever made.

— Tim O’Coin ’02

**MUSIC**
Halloween Hits
Various Artists

Me like Halloween.

— Frank N. Stein ’04

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**WEBSITE**
The American Red Cross
http://www.redcross.org

“Mmmmmmm...Blood.”

— C. Dracula ’02

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**MOVIE**

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Not quite impregnable

*The Last Castle* dragged down by dull characters and a formulaic story

**BY TIM O’COIN**
CRUSADER FEATURES EDITOR

Director Rod Lurie coaxed some great performances from a stellar cast in last year’s “The Contender.” Yet “The Last Castle,” the latest effort from the L.A. critic-turnedit-filmmaker, has two equally impressive actors giving their turns strictly by-the-numbers — their characters exist more as types than real people. I do not personally fault Lurie for these deficiencies, since he has proved his ability to competently direct human drama. The fault lies with an underwritten screenplay that fails to make its central characters compelling beyond filling utilitarian roles in the plot. Like “The Shawshank Redemption,” it pits a prisoner of solid morality up against a cold and corrupt warden, yet it lacks the many nuances and personalities that made “Shawshank” so powerful and interesting beyond its simple prison-story foundation.

Three-star General Irwin (Robert Redford) serves as the righteous protagonist. He’s a living legend in the armed forces — a Vietnam P.O.W, and a veteran of the Gulf and Bosnian wars. Convicted of insubordination for defying an executive order, he’s sentenced to a decade in “The Castle,” a military prison under the command of Col. Winter (James Gandolfini). Winter likes to think of himself as an effective soldier, but in reality he’s a desk jockey in uniform. A museum of military artifacts and memorabilia, proudly displayed and obsessively maintained, adorns his office. He still sees war as a glorious pursuit, having not been exposed to the terrifying hell of the battlefield.

The colonel can’t help but be star-struck by Irwin’s arrival, and invites him up to his office for, of all things, an autograph. Upon seeing Winter’s collection, Irwin notes to another officer that only a man who had never seen actual combat would so coddle instruments of war — the general has seen such weapons spill the blood of his men firsthand. The colonel overhears, and so begins the film’s central conflict between the two men.

Of course, Irwin doesn’t want trouble — he just wants to serve his sentence and get back to his family. Yet he can’t ignore Winter’s brutal tactics in keeping the prison population under control, which the colonel steps up to thanks the general’s insulter. Irwin is not allowed to salute each other — indeed, Winter psychologically strips his prisoners of the pride, self-respect and honor of being soldiers. He encourages brawls among the inmates, and then uses them as an excuse to inflict corporal punishment, sometimes with lethal results.

In the midst of this situation, the inmates begin to see Irwin as someone one can make things right — afterall, he still has some influence with many army higher-ups. Some of the prisoners begin to look up to Irwin as a commander and role model, particularly a young Marine named Aguilar (Clifton Collins, Jr.). The general resents this, and kills Aguilar, and that starts a fight between the two men.

Unfortunately, that’s the sum of Irwin’s character — whip the troops into shape and lead them into combat against Winter. Redford plays the general as the epitome of a stoic and noble warrior, who constantly espouses what it means to be a soldier and speaks of his personal experiences with emotional distance and reservation.

Normally, it would work, if the movie focused solely on that aspect of his character. However, the film makers clearly want to make the character more meaningful than just an ideal soldier. One scene involving a visit from his daughter sheds light on a rift in his relationship with his family. We also learn the grisly details of his stay in the Hanoi Hilton, and how he was broken under torture. How do these two aspects affect his character? Very little, it seems — the story never elaborates on these events, nor does it see fit to make them important to the general as a whole. The character is as flat as a board and just about as interesting. It doesn’t help that Redford’s performance is stiff and lacking in charisma.

Gandolfini does a better job with Col. Winter, conveying an adequate sense of cruelty and coldheartedness without resorting to scene-chewing. Although the actor has displayed an impressive range on screen in prior roles, here he seems almost too restrained by comparison. Those hoping for the intensity of Tony Soprano are going to be disappointed.

The story itself focuses on the usual rah-rah nobility and honor one would expect from a movie like this, and as such feels a bit too much like this, and as such feels a bit too much like a stereotype of one man restoring nobility to a group of people and leading them against all odds to victory has been done many times before, and “The Last Castle” brings nothing new to the table in this regard.

Lurie’s direction stands out as the film’s best aspect. He visualizes the prison yard battle between the inmates under the leadership of Irwin and Winter’s forces is thrilling and well-staged. If anything, it shows that Lurie can direct good action as well as good drama (in his previous films, that is). However, the movie asks a lot of the audience in believing the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the prisoners — the weapons they manufacture would make the A-Team proud: hand-held sling shots that throw fire bombs, a catapult that hurl bricks and a makeshift bazooka that fires a canister of compressed oxygen. All of the planning for the attack, including the manufacture of these arms, takes place off-screen. I would like to have seen how the prisoners managed to accomplish all of this planning and strategizing. After all, half the fun of “The Great Escape” was witnessing the mechanics of the prisoners’ plans and then carrying them out under the noses of their Nazi captors.

I wish “The Last Castle” had had more to offer as a drama — it’s far too lean in character development to warrant greater appreciation beyond being passable entertainment. The direction adds value to the film, but in the end it’s a castle with a weak foundation.

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