

## INDEPENDENCE DAY DOUBLE FEATURE

---

### *Fool's Gold and 27 Dresses*

### ***Fool's Gold* \_\_\_\_ 6.5/10**

*Screenplay by John Claflin*

*Directed by Andy Tennant*

Matthew McConaughey ... Benjamin Finnegan

Kate Hudson ... Tess Finnegan

Donald Sutherland ... Nigel Honeycutt

Alexis Dziena ... Gemma Honeycutt

Ewen Bremner ... Alfonz

Ray Winstone ... Moe Fitch

Kevin Hart ... Bigg Bunny

*Tess' Attorney: [to Tess] Florida didn't ruin your life, you did. You married the guy for sex, then expected him to be smart.*

Of the twin bill, *Fool's Gold* [note the apostrophe all you readers of *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*] is the more caricatured and adult comic-book oriented [e.g. *National Treasure 1&2*, *Batman* and *Spiderhooey* and any of a dozen brands of adventure make-believe that really got their modern moviegoing boost from Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* "incredible action (or at least motion) every minute" box-office goody in 1981]. But, as most of the other action movies I've just mentioned, it's totally fun, well put together, and well acted.

You just know McConaughey and Hudson get skewered by the critics in efforts such as these, but they're quite entertaining and even believable people in this flick... and I have to give the director (Andy Tennant) snaps for pacing the dialog just so. Donald Sutherland is also in the movie, with a British accent that probably could have been more practiced, giving living proof to the notion that there is no acting job he'll ever turn down. There are some black characters who may even be real gangsta rap stars—I'm not in a position to know such things, nor do I ever intend to be in such a position—and they play the distressingly common stereotype of black hoodlums with a lot of money derived from drugs and (c)rap music.

That's my main objection to the film: this stereotype of rich black ghetto punks with zero morals and nothing of character to make them the least bit appealing. Usually, even if an actor plays a villain, the audience has reason to find him likable in a certain light; *Fool's Gold* provides not the slightest reason to care one way or the other for these overhyped nonentities. So Bigg Bunny (Kevin Hart) seems to be the rapster-cum-Caribbean kingpin du jour from whom treasure hunter Ben Finn (McConaughey) has borrowed money in search of half a billion dollars worth of sunken Spanish bounty.

That deal goes bad almost immediately as the movie rolls, hence the bad guy (Bunny) is pursuing the good guy (Finnegan) from the gitgo, with intent to commit the most extreme bodily harm. Enter Tess Finnegan (Hudson), Ben's soon-to-be divorced wife, yet who still has a strong attraction to him. Also enter Nigel Honeycutt (Sutherland), an English baron floating in the Caribbean on his \$multimillion yacht, for whom Tess is temporarily working as a steward. [I tell you, there's a lot of disbelieving you have to suspend to get thru this one.] Most of you can make up the rest of the plot.

But the music is good, a lot of Jamaican Reggae sounds, and the scenery in and around Key West is stunning. As I said, McConaughey and Hudson work well together—especially comically, but also romantically—and the writers create some unique action sequences that are thoroughly splendiferous. The intricacies of the discovery process for the sunken treasure are also interesting, tho I liked the first *National Treasure* movie much better in this realm (involving icons of American history such as the Declaration of Independence). I really don't know if there's any historical basis for the lost treasure, i.e. the "Queen's Dowry," but I doubt it.

Good clean fun, but the second movie connects better.

## 27 Dresses ----- 7.5/10

Written by Aline Brosh McKenna

Directed by Anne Fletcher

Katherine Heigl ... Jane

Judy Greer ... Casey

James Marsden ... Kevin

Edward Burns ... George

Malin Akerman ... Tess

*Casey: [after Jane turns down a drink offer from George] He asks if you want a drink. You smile and say, 'Vodka soda.' If you already have a drink, you down it. Then there's some flirting, some interoffice sex, an accidental pregnancy, a shot gun wedding, and a life of bliss. How many times do we have to go over this?*

Moviegoers will recognize the character of Casey (Judy Greer) from another always-the-bridesmaid-never-the-bride movie, *The Wedding Planner*. In that 2001 hit, she plays Penny the assistant to Jennifer Lopez, but really doesn't have much to contribute until film's end. In *27 Dresses*, Greer is a scene-stealer, with that faux loose-woman comic banter that adds just the right amount of zest to complement the rather stilted role of Jane played by the voluptuous Katherine Heigl. In terms of both entertainment value and believability, Greer's work helps give *27 Dresses* the edge over *The Wedding Planner*. Here's another quip:

*Jane: God, Casey, can't you keep it in your pants for one wedding?*

*Casey: Are you kidding? The only reason to wear this monstrous [bridesmaid] dress is that so some drunken groomsman can rip it to shreds with his teeth.*

The background for this story is that for one reason or another at an early age Jane has been totally in love with weddings. This has led her to become friends and bridesmaids (27 times) in their weddings, even selflessly planning the events. In her real job—in New York City, where else—she works as a personal assistant to the owner [George (Edward Burns)] of a prosperous, super-green company. She's desperately in love with George, indeed, not a minute goes by when she isn't dreaming of her own glorious Queen-for-a-Day to him.

In one of her volunteer-wedding jobs, she runs into Kevin (James Marsden), a well-known writer of a popular wedding journal column who is nonetheless (apparently) a complete cynic when it comes to the ceremony of marriage and the institution itself. But he is clever, smart, witty; she finds him sexy despite his panning her obsession with these marital things. The next increment of the plot has Jane's totally hot younger sister, Tess (Malin Akerman), coming back to New York from Europe to stay with Jane for a general mental-health timeout. Guess which two characters now become attracted to each other.

Okay, kind of predictable, but still a very serviceable storyline. Further, the writer (Aline McKenna: *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Laws of Attraction*) is fresh with the dialog and contemporary culture; she also doesn't go for the obvious feelgood denouement. As with those other McKenna movies, *27 Dresses* doesn't give you a storybook ending; some people's lives do not wind up enriched with love. But it's not unsatisfying either: you get the sense that what does happen has an objective logic to it... which makes it even more rewarding to the viewer. The director (Anne Fletcher) unfolds all comic and dramatic elements with exquisite timing.

Especially gratifying I think is the natural intelligence revealed in the main and even subordinate characters. The male leads are both quite accomplished and articulate—they read and they write, quite exceptional in this day and age. There's a benevolence to the story that accompanies the realness of it. It's still Hollywood, but on the road of romantic comedy, this is a classy, not flashy, fundamentally sound vehicle. [I'm thinking Audi A6. as opposed to the corresponding Bimmer or Mercedes.] It's fun, and when Katherine Heigl walks into George's office in a black evening dress, my heart stops.

###

2008 July 03

Copyright © Brian Wright | *The Coffee Coaster*™

*Independence Day Double* | *Fool's Gold* | *27 Dresses* | *Katherine Heigl*