

CABLEVIEW

By J.T. YURKO

'El Diablo' doesn't take the Old West too seriously

Wow, finally a lightweight, all-out pleasant summer movie coming from, of all places, HBO Pictures.

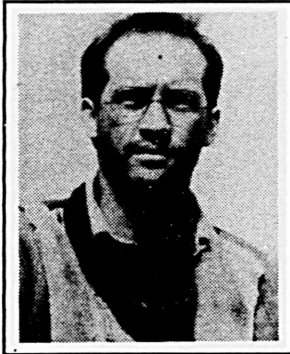
Steven Spielberg and Co. may have fumbled the ball with the Wild West motif in "Back to the Future III," but HBO's "El Diablo" (July 24 and 28 this week) is a delight. Even if you never liked Westerns as a kid, you'll enjoy this authentically charming movie.

"El Diablo" takes place in the frontier landscape of the Old West. Only in the movie, the people of the Old West are every bit as captivated by the novels and folklore about the Old West in their own time as we are today.

As the movie opens, school-teacher Billy Ray Smith, played by Anthony Edwards ("Top Gun," "Revenge of the Nerds"), is reading a pulp Western called "The Adventures of Kid Durango" to his rapt class. As Edwards is wearing the same wire-rimmed glasses he sported in "Mr. North," we know he's not exactly Mr. Macho cowboy. But Kid Durango is.

Suddenly a legendary outlaw named El Diablo, played by Robert Beltran, really rides into town. After robbing a bank, he kidnaps young Nettie Tureen (Sarah Trigger), Billy Ray's student and crush.

Billy Ray must rescue her, but he



Anthony Edwards

doesn't know how to ride a horse or do any of that lasso stuff. So he hires Thomas Van Leek, played by Louis Gossett Jr. ("An Officer and a Gentleman"), an old black gunslinger, to teach him.

Van Leek rounds up a hilarious posse that includes a preacher who is a dynamite expert (the always marvelous character actor John Glover), a man who is missing a foot and a revenge-crazed Indian

named Dancing Bear (Branscome Richmond).

At one point, Billy Ray actually gets to meet an eccentric drunk, Truman Feathers (Joe Pantoliano), who is actually Kid Durango.

The truth-becomes-fiction-becomes-truth aspect is the unique

charm of "El Diablo." The movie also charmingly spoofs just about every Western movie convention -- shootouts at high noon, a last-minute save from a hanging, railroad action scenes, etc.

Oh happy day -- an HBO original movie that's good!

Canadian Viewers' Voice

By MICHAEL RECHTSHAFFEN

BEA'S BACKGROUND -- I am a great fan of Bea Arthur. Could you tell me something about her career, as well as where I could write to her? -- K.L., Port Alberni, British Columbia

Arthur, who stars in "The Golden Girls," has enjoyed a successful career on both the small screen and the stage for the past three decades. Born in New York City on May 13, 1923, she made her Broadway debut in 1947 in the play "Dog Beneath the Skin," but she was to attract significant attention seven years later in an off-Broadway production of "The Threepenny Opera." By the time the '60s came along, Arthur starred in a string of hits, including "Fiddler on the

Roof" and "Mame," for which she earned a Tony Award. On the TV side, Arthur was a regular during the 1956-57 season of Sid Caesar's popular variety show. Her series of guest appearances on "All in the Family," playing Edith Bunker's loud, opinionated cousin, Maude Findlay, led to her very own series, "Maude," which ran from 1972 to 1978 and netted Arthur an Emmy Award. A subsequent series, "Amanda's," was not a hit, even though it was based on the successful British program "Fawlty Towers," but then along came "The Golden Girls" in 1985, and the rest, as they say, is history. Write to Arthur c/o the William Morris Agency, 151 El Camino Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90212.



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