

'Alter the Ending'

Reviewed by Alexandra Fletcher
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Chris Carrabba has been screaming infidelities and breaking up since 2001's "The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most." Just mention the name Dashboard

Confessional and the response is a chuckle from most anyone. The truth is, most listeners have cried along to Carrabba's romantic distress at one point or another. No matter how it's twisted, Carrabba drives the emotional

sleigh that is Dashboard Confessional. And despite the clichés, there is something timeless that Carrabba does with a pen and guitar.

That said, every artist is entitled to grow. But the band's latest album, "Alter The Ending," tries to reinvent the group's sound in a way too far departed from the things we love about crying in our empty apartment.

Where we would usually enjoy heart-wrenching lyrics and a melody, we hear an album overwrought with boring breakdowns and misused electronics — elements better suited to the group's independent neighbors.

The album starts off promising, with an eerie guitar riff foreign to the standard Dashboard track in the first song, "Get Me Right." The song then builds up to the standard Carrabba croon, but does so smoothly.

The album does do some good things with songs like "Belle of the Boulevard," a very standard Dashboard song that brings the melody up and down in just the right places. And "Even Now" is the kind of honest song that Carrabba is good at, a simple guitar part that slowly builds up without too much instrumentation or unneeded crooning.

But in "Blame It On The Changes" we find Carrabba is still a torn man as he sings "Can we can hold out?/Can you hold on?/Because I need you more than you know now." These are the kinds of lyrics that people make fun of him for.

The album's tracks are chock full of songs that just sound over-produced and cheesy. With the exception of a few key tracks, "Alter The Ending," is just another mediocre attempt at growth. The good news — the band chose to release an acoustic version of all the tracks that are much more in tune with all things Dashboard.

In "Water and Bridges," Carrabba sings, "But I've been paying for it since I drove my girl away." His girl is not the only one he's driving away with songs like this.

Grade: C

Download: "Belle of the Boulevard,"

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'Home in Time for Christmas'

Reviewed by Ricky Morales
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Romance novels tend to have romance in them, but this element is nowhere to be found in Heather Graham's new book, "Home in Time for Christmas."

In fact, her biggest accomplishment is writing an entire book about a relationship that isn't compelling on any level, neither romantically nor sexually.

Graham's characters never act more mature than 12-year-olds, which doesn't leave the reader with very much. There's no psychological depth in this book. There's hardly

any character development. There's barely any plot. Simply said, the book is preposterous.

Its premise is this: Melody Tarleton hits a mysterious man, Jake Mallory, with her car, Jake, whose body is "composed of pure muscle," is a patriot from the Revolutionary War who was somehow transported into the future. Although Melody is involved with a man named Mark, within a matter of a few days, she falls in love with Jake, who spends half the novel trying to convince her that he is, in fact, from the year 1776.

Everything about this book is over the top. Not only is Melody's mother an aspiring witch, but her father is also a sort of mad scientist. The family lives conveniently down the road from a medieval castle, the romantic locale where Melody first kisses Jake after 180 uneventful pages. During the novel, the family discovers that the secret to teleporting people back and forth through time, of course, is the use of red rose petals, which works because a black hole exists in their backyard.

This would all be great if this book were joking. But it isn't.

Graham slaps on dialogue that muses endlessly and immaturity on religious tolerance and faith. Despite hammering home this theme, she writes nothing profound. Everything about the book is superficial.

It doesn't even work as a good romantic escape. Those looking for interesting chemistry won't find it, and those looking for a love story will find it bogged down in meandering dialogue and juvenile observations that are painful to read.

The book's only redeeming quality is that it's possible to read — the book has a beginning, a middle and an end, and it fits together coherently. It also has a happy ending, if that counts.

Other than that, this novel just doesn't work. Unless readers enjoy a frustrating story about adults in a middle-school relationship, the book isn't worth the effort.

Grade: D-

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John Mayer's new album titled "Battle Studies" fails to put forth his full potential as an artist. He sticks to the nice guy tracks of previous albums, but there are some highlights on the album, including the song "All We Ever Do Is Say Goodbye." Courtesy of amazon.com

Album shows two sides of Mayer

Reviewed by Jim Warkulwiz
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

It's hard to read the seemingly Jekyll-and-Hyde-like guitar guru that is John Mayer.

One can never really be sure which Mayer is going to show up to the party — will it be the sensitive and charming musician who can disarm women as subtly as he plays his guitar strings? Or will it be the extroverted, explicit tabloid king that steals your girlfriend and laughs in your face?

Once again, it seems, as an artist, Mayer would rather take the tender, nice guy route and restrain the limitless, raw energy that can come out of his hands.

Although Mayer's new album, "Battle Studies," shows some sparks of genius, most of it sounds like Mayer is simply being disingenuous — once again putting on an act and not letting his true self come out.

"Battle Studies" has the ability to pique your interest in the beginning, but it cannot sustain the level of enthusiasm it provokes throughout.

The beginning of this particular work is actually quite enticing when Mayer launches into the U2-esque "Heartbreak Warfare." This may be one of the strongest and compelling songs Mayer has ever done.

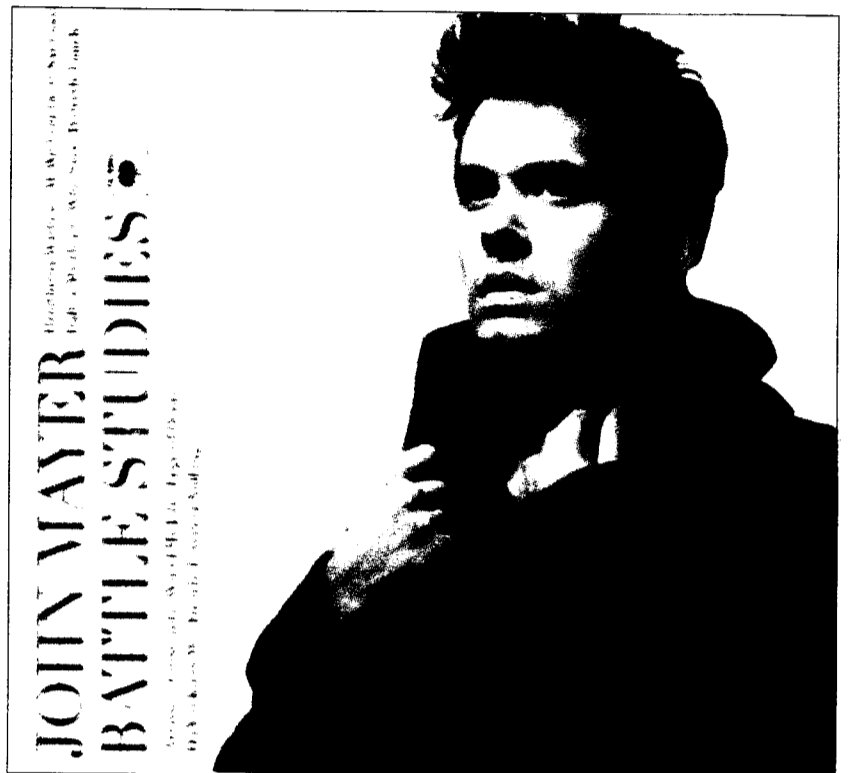
The song begins with an orchestra warm-up that morphs into the artist's effects-driven guitar.

Mayer compares a lover's quarrel to a battle scene: "Clouds of sulfur in the air / Bombs are fallin' everywhere / It's heartbreak warfare."

Another song, "Assassin," sounds like the "American Beauty" soundtrack with a thick bass line about a killer who has his female mark get the better of him, and he is killed instead. The elements in this song are things that could impress any music lover — an interesting beat, a skillful guitar solo, and great lyrics.

Mayer also strikes gold with "All We Ever Do Is Say Goodbye" as one of his better acoustic ballads. The proficiency of his guitar skills shows in his bottleneck solo in the middle of the song.

Unfortunately, one can easily see this song become more fodder for those annoying guitar guys at a party



Mayer's latest effort will grab interest in the beginning but ultimately falls flat. Courtesy of amazon.com

who play "Wonderwall" and "Hey There Delilah" over and over again because they are the only two songs they know how to play.

In the same way that those guys are screaming attention, Mayer seems to be doing the same thing. But, in this case, there is something more under the surface that Mayer doesn't seem to want to let loose.

Hearing Mayer perform blues as part of the John Mayer Trio makes it evident just how good of a musician he really is.

That's what makes the album so frustrating.

It has tracks that seem like Mayer put the time into writing, but as one listens on, people may want to get a pot of coffee because it seems like he is not even trying.

For example, "Edge of Desire," to put it bluntly, sounds anything but musically compelling, and is as if Mayer simply picks through the same three chords for more than five min-

utes—the only thing that changes between the verses and the chorus is the addition of a keyboard and a walking bass line.

This kind of song is not going to win Mayer his fifth Grammy, and he knows it, too.

In a way, this is the perception people get when they hear the Jekyll side of Mayer. Most of this attempt is just the same placid string plucking that we've come to know from Gentle John.

It is almost like Mayer seditiously knew he was teasing us with some great, powerful songs and then retreated to that controlled, intricate style of songwriting he always does.

If this was his goal, I guess the Hyde Mayer showed up after all. That was a good one, John. You got us.

Grade: C
Download: "Heartbreak Warfare," "Assassin"

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'2012' brings subpar action, no plot

Reviewed by Kristen Karas
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

It's almost unfair to try and review a movie like "2012" — not because it's bad (which it is), but because it's obvious words like "bad" and "good" were never on director Roland Emmerich's mind when creating it.

"2012" is your classic attempt at "disaster porn," a movie so preposterous you'll find yourself laughing out loud at many of its saddest moments.

The problem with rating this type of film, however, is that viewers have to know this going in. "2012" is a money-making movie, trying to cash in on moviegoers' love of watching destruction. Anyone expecting to find a thought-provoking examination of the environment or the human spirit should have seen something else.

It's somewhat useless to summarize the movie's plot, because you've seen this story before. Regular everyday-guy (John Cusack) is frustrated with his broken marriage to one-note mother character (Amanda Peet) and wishes he had a better relationship with his kids, who like their jerk of a stepfather (Thomas McCarthy) better. Meanwhile, the young, brilliant and moral scientist (Chiwetel Ejiofor) informs perfect president of the United States (Danny Glover) and evil presidential aide (Oliver Platt) that the world is about to be destroyed.

Soon the family finds itself racing against earthquakes and volcanoes while the government decides who is worthy of being saved.

Everything about this story is a giant cliché — Cusack's character learns about the approaching disaster from a

whacked-out radio host in the woods (Woody Harrelson) while the president's beautiful-but-cold daughter (Thandie Newton) finds love with the scientist. The screenwriters put absolutely no effort into giving the story any sort of originality or depth.

Why? Because this is not a movie about story, this is a disaster movie — there's no time for a story when the entire planet is falling to pieces and the CGI budget is through the roof.

So how did they do on that front? The White House is destroyed by a tsunami, giant earthquakes tear apart downtown Los Angeles, sending skyscrapers crashing to the ground as the city sinks into the ocean, and ...

Actually, you won't remember anymore about the special effects — seriously — because you have seen them before in every other disaster movie you have ever seen. The movie is a mixture of "Independence Day," "Deep Impact," "The Day After Tomorrow," and even a little bit of "Titanic." Nothing is new or spectacular.

If you are going to blow this much money on special effects and no story, the film has to have a "wow" moment that blows you out of your seat.

This college generation was raised on disaster

movies, so it's difficult these days to be moved by destructive images. The CGI is realistic, but how many times can someone watch a wave destroy an American landmark before one becomes disaffected by it?

One plus is that the movie left New York alone, sparing viewers an image of the Statue of Liberty crumbling or being drowned.

It's also hard to watch the otherwise fantastic John Cusack flounder around in this mess, delivering cheesy lines and jumping from limo to airplane to RV to bigger airplane without breaking a bone.

It's OK sometimes to see movies just for fun — it can be nice to just sit back and admire an incredible visual feat. But "2012" is a movie that delivers nothing new and nothing spectacular. It buries its story in recycled images that will leave viewers bored and unconvinced.

Grade: D

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