## Iron Island

International cinema is generally an accessible medium despite national and cultural barriers. It's able to transcend these obstacles—including language—by virtue of commonly understood human stories and predicaments, and, of course, the use of subtitles and dubbing.

Aesthetically, Mohammad Rasoulof's *Iron Island* is an involving, occasionally compelling film. But it's oblique allusive style and the cultural assumptions that underlie its storyline may well lock American audiences out of an understanding of it.

The title refers to a rusting hulk of an oil tanker sitting in water off the southern Iranian shore. The ship is home to scores of Sunni Arab refugees (their ethnicity is only implicit) who have been organized into a crude social order by a domineering but energetically resourceful man known as Captain Nemat (Ali Nassirian).

This ad hoc community's situation is becoming even more straightened: the ship is beginning to sink and its owner wanted to evict the refugees and scrap it. Meanwhile the "captain" is pursuing an elaborate solution.

Summarized thusly, the film sounds coherent and comprehensible, but much of this information has to be summarized and some of the most crucial matters are never clearly addressed. Even more challenging, the characters and their various efforts become more opaquely symbolic, and the film turns to allegorical, inaccessible themes, culminating in its last, mysteriously metaphorical sequence.

*Iron Island* has forceful, apparently complex performances—especially Nassirian's—but placing them into a context is difficult. Reza Jalali's cinematography is luminously dramatic, but it and the film's other formal qualities can only go so far toward allowing us into an appreciation of *Iron Island*'s significance. It plays on Wednesday and Thursday on the Emerging Cinema screen at the Market Arcade Film and Arts Center.

*—george sax*

## Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

People in my line of work like to give the impression that we've seen every movie ever made, but somehow I never got around to seeing the original *Pirates of the Caribbean* before I had to watch this sequel. I thus attributed my utter confusion through the film's 2 1/2 hour length to ignorance. Having since watched the original, I can see that it wouldn't have made all that much difference: while *Dead Man's Chest* presumes familiarity with its blockbuster predecessor, it's such a grab bag of comic set pieces, special effects and star turns that you'd probably have to see it several times to make much sense out of it. Like the *Star Wars* and *Matrix* sequels, it expands on a premise that was more or less complete to begin with, and the element it most sorely lacks is the freshness of the original. Johnny Depp's Captain Jack Sparrow is lost here among the breakneck pacing, and if he's been marginalized you can imagine what happens to bland romantic leads Orlanda Bloom and Keira Knightley. The only cast member to emerge with his dignity intact (the others presumably content with fat paychecks) is Stellan Skarsgard as Bloom's undead father. *Dead Man's Chest* is not lacking in entertainment value: there are a few stunt sequences inspired by Buster Keaton, and enough gruesomely conceived monsters (the best of them hiding an unrecognizable Bill Nighy) to give young kids nightmares for a week. Still, one comes away from it feeling less exhilarated than exhausted. (If your bladder can hold out, there's a funny moment after the ten minutes of end credits.)

*—m. faust*