

Writer finds only 'Misery' in clutches of fan

NEW YORK (CNS) — A serial romance novelist has named his heroine Misery but doesn't know the meaning of the word until he meets a wildly enthusiastic fan in "Misery" (Columbia).

Paul Sheldon (James Caan) has finally written a "serious" novel. After years of grinding out wildly successful Misery romances, he kills her off in the final novel just hitting the bookstores and drives through a Colorado blizzard to bring his agent the new manuscript.

When his car flips over on the ice — breaking his legs and an arm — salvation arrives in the form of Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates), who drags him out and, in her remote farmhouse, sets his legs. It turns out she's not only a registered nurse but his self-proclaimed No. 1 fan. Paul's initial gratitude quickly turns to alarm when she reacts furiously to the profanity he uses in his manuscript.

Soon sheer terror sets in. She's not just angry, she's mad — as in crazy — and crazy enough to kill him for disposing of her beloved Misery.

While his agent (Lauren Bacall) urges the local sheriff (Richard Farnsworth) to keep searching for him, Annie forces Paul to torch his only copy of the new manuscript and to begin another novel resurrecting Misery.

This buys a little time for the physically incapacitated Paul to think up another plot

— how to escape with his life from the mentally unhinged Annie.

Director Rob Reiner has fashioned a gripping psychological thriller from Stephen King's horror novel.

The story is plausible and Bates as the mercurial psychopath fills the viewer with pure dread. In an instant she can go from childish delight at merely being in her favorite author's presence to turning on him with brutal rage for the slightest provocation.

Caan in turn convincingly progresses from petrified victim to sly manipulator, determined to outwit and, if necessary, outlive her.

Editing and pacing are brisk, making for a taut movie with regular, reliable suspense. William Goldman's screenplay is liberally laced with wit and dark humor that makes the gruesome events more palatable.

And speaking of gruesome, the bloody climax borders on excessive, but can be understood in light of the desperate circumstances.

"Misery" is one of few Stephen King works that is improved by its translation to the screen.

Because of fairly graphic violence and minimal rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.



Columbia Pictures Industries
Best-selling author Paul Sheldon (James Caan) is held captive by his "number one fan," Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates), after his legs are crushed in a car accident in the film "Misery."

'Rescuers Down Under'

Bashful Bernard and Miss Bianca, the stars of Disney's animated 1977 "The Rescuers" are back, this time in the outback, in "The Rescuers Down Under" (Disney).

On this mission the two mouse scouts (voices of Bob Newhart and Eva Gabor) board Wilbur the Albatross (voice of John Candy) for a blizzard-blown flight from New York to rescue an Aussie lad in the clutches of McLeach, an evil eagle poacher (voice of George C. Scott).

The boy, Cody, is trying to save the beautiful bird from the snares and traps of McLeach and his snappy sidekick, Joanna the Goanna Lizard. Instead he is captured by the poacher and tricked into revealing where the eagle is nesting her eggs. Bernard and Miss Bianca rush to his aid with a little help from Jake, a local mouse scout who is — much to Bernard's alarm — smitten by Bianca.

From the nifty opening shot that tracks past exotic wildlife and stark outback scenery straight into the boy's backyard,



Walt Disney Company
Mouse agents Bernard (voice of Bob Newhart, left) and Miss Bianca (voice of Eva Gabor, center) get a hand from a kangaroo mouse named Jake (voice of Tristan Rogers) in Disney's "The Rescuers Down Under."

"Rescuers Down Under" is a fun-filled treat. Directors Hendel Butoy and Mike Gabriel's movie may not be a true Disney classic but it never flags.

The camera technique, dramatic use of angles and stylized background all add to the feeling of depth and enhance the visuals.

The emotional simplicity is right for children — McLeach is a truly nasty villain, the little boy a brave would-be hero, and the eagle a precious creature to be treasured.

The upbeat humor will hold adult interest too, especially as Bernard tries to propose in a gourmet rodent restaurant serving scraps from the real restaurant above it. Another gem is Wilbur the Albatross being

prepped for surgery in a most unorthodox hospital.

The animals' personalities and facial expressions are far better than the humans, and Gabor as the voice of Miss Bianca is fetchingly feminine.

"Rescuers Down Under" is preceded by a lively, 23-minute Mickey Mouse feature based on Mark Twain's famous story, "The Prince and the Pauper." Unfortunately, at its end a Disney character explains there will be a 10-minute intermission and urges a trip to the concession stand.

Although there are several moments of danger and menace, the USCC classification for both features is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audience.

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Preface by Dr. Linus Pauling
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