

'Nightmare' technically brilliant, but plot plods



Touchstone Pictures
Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* brings traditional stop-motion-animation techniques to his unique form of filmmaking.

By Henry Herx
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Leave the little ones at home if you decide to spend the money to see *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (Touchstone).

Though this exercise in the macabre uses some brilliantly facile puppet animation and its art design is stunning, the result is best described as a minor-league fantasy for holiday-burnout adults and jaded adolescents.

The story is set in Halloweentown, where Jack Skellington (voice of Chris Sarandon), its skeletal king of spooky revels, comes up with the novel idea of kidnapping Santa Claus and taking his place on Christmas Eve.

The poor guy means well as he sets off in a coffin pulled by reindeer skeletons. But his idea of Christmas cheer creates only fear in homes where he leaves bundles of scary toys made in Halloweentown.

With panic spreading from town to town, the military intervenes by shooting down the flying coffin. Jack returns home sadder but wiser in time to free

Santa for his accustomed rounds.

The center of Tim Burton's story is the dark world of Halloweentown's hobgoblins and monsters. Most of the movie's energy seems to have gone into detailing the place's grotesque characters and gruesome doings.

There are some very forgettable songs and Jack's wistful love interest — a spunky maiden stitched together by a mad doctor — doesn't work at all.

In the end, the narrative proves more tiresome than imaginative as it tries to stretch out a thin concept that probably would have worked better as a short cartoon.

But it is Halloweentown's assault on children's bright expectations of St. Nick's annual visit that makes this essentially a grown-up's fantasy.

Because of considerable menace and threatening atmosphere, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Fearless'

In the unusual story of *Fearless* (Warner Bros.), a man who feels euphoric after surviving a fatal plane crash neglects his family in the months that follow while he tries to help a guilt-ridden survivor whose baby died on impact.

Though previously terrified of flying, San Francisco architect Max Klein (Jeff Bridges) experiences no fear as he realizes the jet he is on is crash-landing. In fact, he is so calm he is able to comfort the frightened and lead 20 survivors to safety when the plane hits a corn field and breaks apart, killing most of the passengers.

Having escaped death, Max feels invincible, thrilled to be alive and on a personal rediscovery of the wonder of life that he is unwilling to share with wife Laura (Isabella Rossellini) or child Jonah (Spencer Vrooman). Laura's patience is further tried three months later when the airline's therapist (John Turturro) puts him together with survivor Carla (Rosie Perez), who is feeling just the opposite: she is filled with paralyzing fear and deep depression since her baby boy died while she lived.

Carla Rodrigo, a devout Catholic, still believes in God but is harboring a guilty secret she cannot share with her husband (Benicio Del Toro), whose main concern seems to be collecting millions in the ensuing lawsuit.

Max is determined to reach her and lessen the pain even if it means losing his own family. But it is Max who is in denial of the horror he witnessed and who needs to open up and begin grieving for his best friend (John De Lancie), who died instantly in the crash.

With a fine script from Raphael Yglesias, director Peter Weir turns in a compelling movie that rings true in presenting characters in various stages of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Some may dislike Max and find he has a savior complex. Certainly his Christmas shopping spree with Carla for gifts for their dead loved ones just doesn't work.

Yet their relationship's transforming nature is evident, one that doesn't evolve into an extramarital affair.

This is an absorbing and thoughtful movie, leaving lots of room for discussion.

Due to violent aftermath of a crash with fleeting shots of the human carnage, minor sexual innuendo and occasional rough language, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

BISHOP KEARNEY HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS BOOSTER CLUB PRESENTS:

THE STOCKING STUFFER THAT LASTS ALL YEAR LONG!

THE 1994 SPORTS BOOSTER LOTTERY CALENDAR

365 DAILY WINNERS

<p>SIX \$1000⁰⁰ CASH PRIZES!</p> <p>ONE EACH ON: • New Year's Day • St. Patrick's Day • Memorial Day • Independence Day • Labor Day • Christmas Day</p>	<p>\$100⁰⁰ CASH PRIZE EVERY SUNDAY (Except Dec. 25, 1994) Throughout 1994</p>	<p>\$50⁰⁰ CASH PRIZE ALL REMAINING DAYS (total of 308 days) Throughout 1994</p>
---	---	---

ONLY \$20 TAX DEDUCTABLE DONATION (Less than .05¢ per day)

<p>Your donation supports all of our sports and extra curricular activities</p>	<p>Great Christmas gift idea!</p>	<p>FUN to see if you've won everyday of 1994</p>	<p>EXCELLENT ODDS 1 IN 27 Chances to win</p>	<p>OVER \$25,000.00 possible to be given away throughout the year</p>
---	-----------------------------------	--	--	---

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS! Your official calendar number is a four-digit number printed on both halves of the calendar. The lower portion "tear off" will then be registered in our Sports Booster Calendar computer. The calendar portion will be mailed to you. The winning four-digit number will be randomly selected daily beginning January 1, 1994. ALL PRIZE WINNERS WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE MAILED THEIR WINNINGS.

MAIL THIS COUPON ALONG WITH YOUR CHECK FOR \$20 TO:
 THE BISHOP KEARNEY SPORTS BOOSTER CLUB
 125 KINGS HIGHWAY SOUTH
 ROCHESTER, N.Y. 14617-5596

PLEASE PRINT
 NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 DATE _____ CHECK ENCLOSED FOR \$ _____ FOR _____ CALENDARS AT \$20 EACH

The Bishop Kearney Sports Booster Club is a volunteer non-profit organization. No purchase necessary.