

Sentimental 'Lassie' proves the 'pick of the litter'

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Lassie'

(Paramount) A stray collie befriends a lonely boy (Thomas Guiry) adjusting to life in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, where his Baltimore parents (Helen Slater and Jon Tenney) are attempting to make a go of a sheep ranch despite stiff competition from an unprincipled neighbor (Frederic Forrest). Director Daniel Petrie delivers a postcard-pretty, very sentimental boy-and-his-dog story in which the brave collie predictably helps save the ranch and brings the family closer together. Fleeting violence and brief menace to children. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'The Client'

(Warner Bros.) Indifferent thriller from the John Grisham best seller in which an 11-year-old (Brad Renfro) with information about a mob murder turns to a novice lawyer (Susan Sarandon) for protection from hit men as well as from an aggressive U.S. attorney (Tommy Lee Jones) determined to pry the truth from the boy. Directed by Joel Schumacher, the story is moderately interesting and well-acted yet doesn't adequately build



Paramount Pictures

Lassie becomes the companion of Matt Turner (Thomas Guiry) in *Lassie*. The Paramount film was produced by Lorne Michaels.

enough suspense to qualify as riveting viewing. Some violence, recurring menace and profanity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate

for children under 13.

'North'

(Columbia) Flawed comic fantasy in which a neglected 11-year-old (Elijah Wood) wins the legal right to choose new parents, then travels the globe to

audition prospective couples only to discover there's no place like home. Though there are several whimsically funny moments and Wood is splendid in the role, director Rob Reiner relies on some very lame humor as the narrative wends its fitful course into a dumb murder conspiracy against the boy that leads up to the hackneyed ending. Intermittent menace to a child. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'The Wedding Gift'

(Miramax) Maudlin British drama about a woman (Julie Walters) whose crippling disease completely baffles doctors as it progressively worsens until she finds her devoted husband (Jim Broadbent) a suitable replacement (Sian Thomas), then dies in an apparent suicide. Directed by Richard Loncraine, this fact-based BBC production centers in the pathos of the wife's weakening condition and her determination, abetted by husband, to keep up flagging spirits by making jokes about it, then cops out in the end by sentimentalizing her terminal act of matchmaking. Ambiguity of the wife's death, a flash of nudity and occasional profanity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Nuremberg book offers revealing study of Nazi trials

Nuremberg: Infamy on Trial, by Joseph E. Persico; Viking (New York, 1994); 520 pp., \$25.95.

Reviewed by James C. O'Neill

The Nuremberg Trials of 1945-46 revealed to the world for the first time the full, horrifying magnitude of Nazi Germany's wartime aggression and wholesale ethnic slaughter.

Nuremberg: Infamy on Trial, Joseph Persico's fast-moving recount of the events of 50 years ago, revisits the bombed-out graveyard of medieval Nuremberg. In an easy documentary style, he examines existing records and interviews hundreds of survivors. He takes us into the judges' chambers, the prisoners' cells and into the minds of the jailers and other principals on both sides of the bench.

At times he seems to know more than he possibly could. When he reports what various defendants are thinking as others are speaking or when the prisoners are alone in their cells, one wonders where he got his information.



Nonetheless, Persico's book is convincing as it recounts the day-to-day developments of the trials. The interplay of personalities, the rivalries and feuds inside and outside the cellblock and the conflicting ambitions of Allied judges and prosecutors make for lively reading. We observe the arrogant charm of Nazi air chief Hermann Goring and the smooth reasonableness of Albert Speer, Hitler's production czar who requisitioned and exploited millions of slaves laborers.

In the end 11 of the original 21 were executed. Their bodies were cremated

and the ashes disposed of so that "no grave, no urn, no relic could become a shrine to Nazism."

Three escaped the gallows by committing suicide, including Goring, who refused haughtily to die at the end of a rope like a common criminal. Two were acquitted. The rest went to jail for varying terms. Speer served 20 years and wrote two books about his life.

Thanks to the Germans' compulsive record-keeping, documentation of the Nazis' excesses and inhuman crimes provided much of the firsthand evidence the Allied prosecutors needed. But the Nazi crimes are not this book's main subject. The author seeks to focus on the court's efforts to balance retribution with justice.

In his opening remarks, Robert H. Jackson, chief American prosecutor, said: "The wrongs we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant and so devastating that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot survive their

being repeated."

Jackson's words can make us uneasy these days. The slaughter in Rwanda, Sudan, Cambodia and Bosnia and the ethnic crimes committed elsewhere remind us of the presence of the evils so triumphantly condemned at the end of World War II.

There is, however, a bit of light. The United Nations Security Council in October, 1993, voted to try to collect evidence of crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia. The U.N. body cited as its precedence for the action the affirmation in 1946 by the General Assembly of the "principles of international law recognized by the Charter of the Nuremberg Trials."

Not much, but maybe a beginning.

O'Neill is a freelance writer and publicist.

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