

Double dose of Santa fills screens this season

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

'Miracle on 34th Street'

(20th Century Fox) Sweetly updated remake of the 1947 holiday classic about the department store Santa (Richard Attenborough) who believes he is actually Santa Claus and ends up in court defending his claim, in the process winning over the cynical mom (Elizabeth Perkins) who hired him, and her dubious 5-year-old (Mara Wilson). Director Les Mayfield's gently values-centered but sluggishly paced family movie stresses faith in things unseen, hope for the future and a generous loving spirit that underlies the true meaning of Christmas. The USCC classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'The Santa Clause'

(Disney) Magically transformed into Santa Claus when he dons a Santa costume, a divorced dad (Tim Allen) takes a sleigh ride to the North Pole and back with his awed young son (Eric Lloyd), whose boisterous account of the experience moves his mom and stepdad (Wendy Crewson and Judge Reinhold) to seek to



Twentieth Century Fox
Richard Attenborough stars as Kriss Kringle in the remake of the 1947 holiday classic *Miracle on 34th Street*.

protect the child from a man they suspect has gone bonkers. Director John Pasquin's cutesy comic fantasy is blandly amusing without reaching any discernible level of wit or adding anything new to the enduring Santa Claus legend. A vituperative relationship between divorced parents and occasional toilet humor. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Stargate'

(MGM) Woodenly acted sci-fi tale in which an Egyptologist (James Spader) accompanies a military reconnaissance team (led by Kurt Russell) to another planet, where they discover an enslaved civilization whose evil ruler (Jaye Davidson) is prepared to destroy the visitors and explode their mother planet. Director Roland Emmerich relies on lavish production design and exceptional special effects to maintain interest in a derivative story that depends on tired movie cliches to advance its jumbled narrative. Some physical brutality, stylized shootouts, fleeting sexual innuendo and an instance of 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.

Recent children's books proffer ample fare for gift-giving

Reviewed by Barb Frazee & Margaret Krause
Catholic News Service

The following books are recommended for Christmas gift-giving.

"The Worst Christmas Ever," by Connie Pemplinger-Trounstein; Rainbow Books (New York, 1994); 128 pp., \$2.95 paperback.

Christmas traditions have always been very special for Callie Thomas, so she is distraught when her family wants to make changes since Grandma Mary has died. This is a touching and delightful story of Callie's feelings about families, friends and holidays. Ages 8-12. (MK)

"Walking Stars: Stories of Magic and Power," by Victor Villasenor; Pinata Books (Houston, 1994); 202 pp.; \$14.95.

This is storytelling at its best. Villasenor retells tale after tale of his childhood and his parents' Mexican childhood — stories in which a person or animal's spiritual — or mystical — side shines through. In each story, young people discover some inner strength they did not realize they had. The book is full of adventure, humor, hope and wisdom — sure to keep young people reading and wanting more. Ages 11 and up. (BF)

"One Cow Coughs: A Counting Book for the Sick and Miserable," by Christine Loomis, illustrated by Pat Dypold; Ticknor & Fields (New York, 1994); 32 pp.; \$14.95.

This picture book is an entertaining and educational counting book that will be a hit with any preschooler suffering from a cold or flu. The barnyard animals have all the same symptoms a sick child may encounter, including a cough,



sneeze, ache, etc. The illustrations are bright and abstract in this instructional counting book. Ages 3-7. (MK)

"With the Eyes of the Heart," by Teresa Whitten; St. Paul Books & Media (Boston, 1994); 162 pp.; \$4.95.

Jeanne Macpherson, whose self-esteem has reached an all-time low, makes a new friend when she meets a blind neighbor, Marty. She agrees to help him with his studies, and he, in turn, opens her eyes to many new things. Jeanne comes a long way down an interesting, realistic path, full of high school adventures. This is a good story that will keep young readers captivated as it explores many tumultuous emotions, including romance. Ages 11-14. (BF)

"Lives of the Musicians: Good Times, Bad Times (And What the Neighbors Thought);" "Lives of the Writers: Comedies, Tragedies (And What the Neighbors Thought)," by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by Kathryn Hewitt; Harcourt Brace & Co. (San Diego, 1993); 96 pp. each; \$18.95 each.

What a fascinating collection of facts Krull has compiled about a wide variety of famous authors and musicians. She covers a wide spectrum: from Jane Austen to Langston Hughes, Antonio Vivaldi to Woody Guthrie. Each chap-

ter includes a caricature by Hewitt, two to four pages of sometimes unusual biographical information, and additional "notes" or "bookmarks" with little-known facts. (Example: Igor Stravinsky once wrote a polka for 50 elephants wearing ballet tutus; Johannes Brahms, famous for "Brahms's Lullaby," was such a loud snorer that no one could sleep in the same room.) These books are a great way to introduce young readers to biographies, music and literature. Ages 10-up. (BF)

"Splish Splash," by Joan Bransfield Graham, illustrations by Steve Scott; Ticknor & Fields (New York, 1994); 32 pp.; \$13.95.

"Splish Splash" is a clever introduction to poetry for primary grade students. All of the poems are about water in some form or another, so snow, ice cubes, back-yard sprinklers and more are brilliantly described in poetic verse. The illustrations are fanciful and often depict the verse in imaginative ways. Ages 5-8. (MK)

"The Image Game," by Norma Johnston; BridgeWater Books (Mahwah, N.J., 1994); 160 pp., \$13.95.

Celia Prendergast wants to attract high-school hero Brock Peters. Zack Collins, who is more interested in science and math than girls, wants his mother off his back about his lack of social life. Together, Celia and Zack concoct a scheme to help each other achieve what they think they want — only to discover they might have been wrong about themselves. This is a cleverly written, humorous story that includes, among other twists, an environmental crisis. Ages 11-14. (BF)

"World's Weirdest Bugs and Other

Creepy Creatures," by M.L. Roberts; Whistlestop (Mahwah, N.J., 1995); 32 pp.; \$2.25.

Full-page color photographs and short, descriptive passages reveal fascinating details about all kinds of bugs. Each page also contains a little-known fact: for instance, stink bugs use more than their smells to scare away enemies! Great for reading aloud or for early readers. Ages 4-10. (BF)

"Good Griselle," by Jane Yolen, illustrated by David Christiana; Harcourt Brace (San Diego, 1994); 40 pp.; \$14.95.

Written in fairy tale style, "Good Griselle" offers positive morals while telling a warm story. Griselle is tempted to do bad deeds, but maintains her strong character and showers love on an unsightly child in this beautifully illustrated picture book. Ages 7-10. (MK)

"Songs from Home," by Joan Elizabeth Goodman; Harcourt Brace (San Diego, 1994); 213 pp.; \$10.95; \$4.95 paperback.

"Songs from Home" offers a travelogue of Rome interspersed throughout the life story of Anna, a preteen. Anna and her father left America when her mother died. The two of them enjoy discovering Rome's sights, but, deep down, Anna longs to return to America for a sense of family. She tires of her life in Rome, where she has to sing for money in the local restaurants. Ages 10-14. (MK)

Barb Frazee, mother of three children, is CNS assistant foreign editor. Margaret Krause, mother of one child, is a search services librarian at Georgetown University Law Library and has a special interest in children's literature.

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RULES: ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY MIDNIGHT, DECEMBER 9. Random drawing of correct entries to be held December 12 by Catholic Courier Representatives. Entries must be returned by mail to: Catholic Courier, Movie Trivia, 1150 Buffalo Rd., Rochester, NY 14624-1899. Winner will be notified by mail. Prize is one year of Wegmans Video Rentals, membership is free and is required. Prize is not exchangeable for cash or other merchandise.

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