

IN REVIEW

'The Perfect Storm' proves a summer favorite

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Heady after a late season fishing trip that netted a big catch, the six men aboard the Andrea Gail head directly into "The Perfect Storm" (Warner Bros.).

Director Wolfgang Peterson ("Das Boot") has taken Sebastian Junger's non-fiction best seller and fashioned it into an absorbing tale of men against the sea, in October 1991 in Gloucester, Mass.

A commercial trawler, the Andrea Gail, has just returned from another poor catch and Capt. Billy Tyne (George Clooney) is determined to end his losing streak by boldly going back one more time in search of swordfish off Newfoundland. It's a dicey proposition so late in the season but his crew of five all need the money badly enough to risk the trip.

Heading back out are Bobby (Mark Wahlberg) who needs the cash to settle down with girlfriend Christina (Diane Lane); Murph (John C. Reilly) who's supporting an estranged wife and small son; newcomer Sully (William Fichtner), who instantly picks a fight with Murph; lovelorn Buggy (John Hawkes); and Jamaican Alfred Pierre (Allen Payne).

When their destination doesn't deliver the goods, Tyne suggests they go even fur-



CNS/Warner Bros. Pictures

George Clooney stars as captain in the adventure, "The Perfect Storm," with Mark Wahlberg as a co-star and fellow fisherman.

ther into the Atlantic where swordfish abound.

When they head home, their vessel bursting with fish, Hurricane Grace has roared up from Bermuda on a collision course with two other weather fronts — for

a storm of unprecedented proportions. The Andrea Gail must head straight into it to get home before the fish spoil or wait out the storm until it is safe.

Meanwhile, as the storm rages, a Coast Guard seacraft and an Air Force helicopter take on the killer elements to rescue three people being tossed about on their yacht. The scene is the movie's best, contrasting the staggering power of nature let loose while superhuman efforts are made to save each individual life. One is struck by how awesome the elements can be, and how precious every human life is.

The movie, however, is not as perfect as the storm it depicts. While the book was a gripping, serious chronicle of how the op-

posing weather fronts built and converged to take their deadly toll, the film emphasizes special-effects thrills to the detriment of characterization. Only the captain, Bobby and Murph truly emerge as individuals, and Sully and Buggy less so, while the Jamaican crew member gets no definition. The incredibly courageous rescuers also remain utterly anonymous.

The result is eventful entertainment to be sure, but the movie charts a different course than Junger's book in telling its story with much happening on board the Andrea Gail that is not in the book, for reasons that the ending makes clear.

Given the ferocious noise level of the storm and an overbearing music track to boot, it's often difficult to understand the dialogue, but this is a movie where actions speak louder than words anyway. A highly sentimental tone is set at the start and returned to at film's end as the sailors' womenfolk get a little screen time.

Clooney and Wahlberg have good chemistry together as they try to guide their way through monster waves and exult each time they think they've bested the unforgiving ocean. Some of the crosscutting between the yacht rescue and the imperiled Andrea Gail is too abrupt. Perhaps such chopiness serves the atmosphere of growing tension; at least in one sense of the word "The Perfect Storm" is a swell movie.

Due to discreet sexual innuendo, some profanity and an instance of rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Pare is director of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Chicken Run' can entertain entire flock at the theater

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — A plucky chicken and her hen pals must escape the cruel clutches of an egg farmer intent on turning them into chicken pies in the delightful clay animation feature "Chicken Run" (DreamWorks).

Not a day goes by that feisty Ginger (voice of Julia Sawalha) does not try to break out of the confining coop at Mrs. Tweedy's egg farm. Together with her feathered friends, Ginger schemes and plans for their freedom, but her ideas always wind her up in solitary confinement, trapped in a garbage bin until she is allowed out.

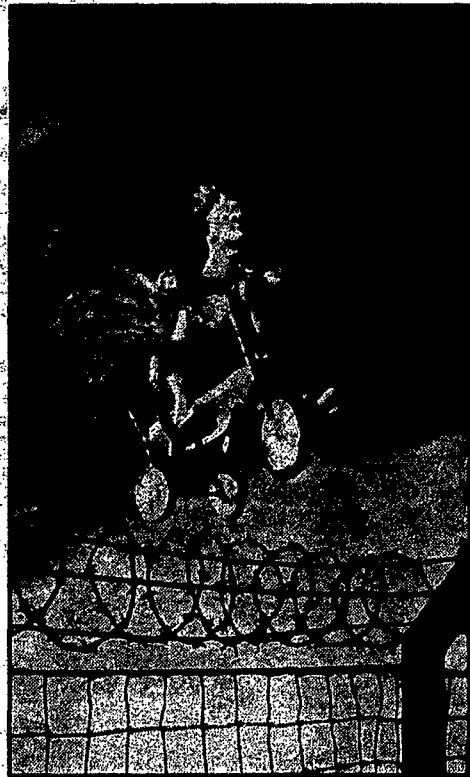
Weary and discouraged, Ginger has run out of strategies. But one evening, looking up in the sky, she sees an astonishing sight: a rooster flying straight over the barbed wire fence and landing in the chicken feed. It's Rocky the Flying Rooster (voice of Mel Gibson), who makes his living being shot out of a circus canon, and is now a fugitive from the greatest show on earth. Believing Rocky can actually fly, Ginger offers him a safe haven. In exchange, he must teach Ginger and the rest of the girls to flap their way to freedom.

However, with the egg count down, the greedy Mrs. Tweedy (voice of Miranda Richardson) has hatched a plan that will make her and her henpecked husband (voice of Tony Haygarth), filthy rich: chicken pies. Can Rocky teach the flock to fly before it is too late?

With "Chicken Run," directors Peter Lord and Nick Park bring their innovative talent in clay animation to their first full-length feature film. Many will recognize them as the creators of the "Wallace & Gromit" shorts and other award-winning short films.

Using their distinctive brand of stop-motion clay figure animation, Lord and Park bring the chickens to life. The clay chickens have as many as 60 interchangeable beaks, each corresponding to a vowel or consonant sound, attesting to the care and time taken to make the hens vivid creatures.

And the proof is in the results. Each one in the flock has a individual look and personality with fantastic anthropomorphized



CNS/DreamWorks Pictures

Rocky sails over the fence of Tweedy's Egg Farm to help his flock in the clay animated feature "Chicken Run."

features. And scenes such as one where rain pours down on the chicken coop — drenching the hens, creating mud, and forming puddles — are truly affecting.

Witty dialogue and a splendid cast of voices add to the quality of the fun film. The directors even manage to bring in a bit of culture clash between the more reserved British chickens and the cocky American rooster.

"Chicken Run" is visually pleasing and amusing. There are a few intense scenes that may momentarily frighten younger ones. However, there is enough excitement and creativity in the 80-plus minutes to make for an entertaining family outing.

The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences.

Navarro is on the staff of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

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