

IN REVIEW

Mystical fare, mountains

NEW YORK (CNS) — Following are recent capsule reviews issued by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Dungeons & Dragons'

Dull fantasy in which the young empress (Thora Birch) of a mystical land recruits adventurers to find a magical artifact to foil the scheme of evil wizard (Jeremy Irons) to dethrone her. Based on a role-playing game, the action film plods along predictably with one-note characters and ordinary effects. Intermittent violence. 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.

'Proof of Life'

Passable drama about an American engineer (David Morse) kidnapped by Latin American rebels. Wife (Meg Ryan) hires a free-lance hostage negotiator (Russell Crowe) to secure his release. Spectacular scenery and suspenseful moments initially draw the viewer in, but unexceptional narrative and shallow characterizations fail to excite. Intermittent violence, drug use and rough language with fleeting profanity. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Vertical Limit'

Former mountain climber (Chris O'Donnell) leads a rescue team up K2, the world's second-highest peak, where his sister (Robin Tunney) and two others are trapped in a deep crevasse with hours to live. While the script is sometimes ludicrous, its hair-raising series of life-and-death situations proves consistently suspenseful. Intense peril, implied drug abuse, brief sex references, minimal rough language and profanity. 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.

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Children ask profound questions

It's Christmas Again! by Fr. Richard Lewandowski & Michael P. Riccards; Ambassador Books, Inc. 32 pp., \$13.95

Reviewed by Sr. Dolores Monahan, SSJ
Guest contributor

As simple as the question "Why do we celebrate December 25th?" may seem, it is quite profound and cause for much reflection. Father Richard Lewandowski, a parish priest and college chaplain, and Michael Riccards, president of Fitchburg (Mass.) State College, address this question in their easily read children's book *It's Christmas Again*.

They begin their story with a day-long snowfall. As the snow falls, so does the children's favorite question, "How many days until December 25th?" The same question becomes a familiar echo in each of the children's homes.

"On the morning of December 25th when the children awoke and found presents under the trees — gifts from a man named 'Santa' — the big questions started to come. "Mom, why does Santa bring us gifts on December 25th?" "Why on December 25th?" "What's a tradition?"

As the children continued to ask, the questions were passed from parent to parent, to teachers and to grandparents. Adults seemed to have forgotten why people celebrate on December 25th. They had been so busy rushing from store to store buying gifts, stringing lights and putting up trees that their minds were simply checklists.

Still the children persisted in a way only children seem to have mastered.

When some of the children went for a walk, they passed a neighbor's barn and decided to go in. "As they neared the barn door, they heard voices. They entered the barn very quietly to see who was talking. What they saw amazed them. An owl sat high on a rafter talking 'people talk.' The other animals sat very quietly and listened as the owl told a story." The animals knew why December 25th was such a big cele-



By Fr. Richard Lewandowski & Michael P. Riccards

Illustrations by Kathryn H. Delish

bration! The children listened to the story of the first Christmas.

And the little children led them. They went out of the barn and shouted to the adults, "It's Jesus' birthday! It's Jesus' birthday! He is the Son of God!"

Perhaps, *It's Christmas Again!* may not only be a book for children, but also for adults who need to relearn how to ask and reflect on the big questions.

Sister Dolores Monahan, SSJ, directs retreats in Geneva and at Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua; teaches prayer classes at St. Michael School, Newark; does spiritual direction and facilitates prayer program series in Geneva.

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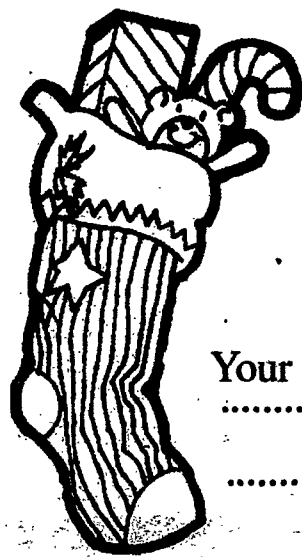
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