

REVIEWS

Video releases: 1 hit, 2 errors

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each videocassette is available on VHS format. Theatrical movies on video have a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating. All reviews indicate the appropriate age group for the audience.

'Dr. Dolittle 2'

Lackluster talking-animal comedy in which the doctor (Eddie Murphy) moves into a forest to encourage two endangered species bears to mate so the forest can be declared a protected area, safe from greedy developers. Director Steve Carr offers a rehash of the same tawdry wisecracks between Murphy and the critters in a drawn-out, sometimes sweet but often rude sequel. Numerous crude references and potty jokes. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. (Fox Home Video)

'Dumbo'

In this classic Disney animated feature, a baby elephant with oversized ears, the laughingstock of the entire circus troupe to which he belongs, is befriended by a sympathetic mouse. What happens to the diminutive pachyderm shows children how self-respect and self-confidence can be gained by making the most of one's imagination and inventive initiative. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences. (Disney Home Video)

'Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace'

Disappointing prequel to the 'Star Wars' trilogy in which two Jedi Knights (Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor) out to save the planet Naboo from Federation invaders enlist the help of a young boy (Jake Lloyd) who will eventually become the evil Darth Vader. By emphasizing fanatical creatures and myriad special effects, writer-director George Lucas loses the movie's human dimension, reducing it to only visual spectacle. Scifi swordfights and battle sequences. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. (Fox Home Video)

'Monsters, Inc.' is good, scary fun

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Revealing the truth behind those things that go bump in the night, Disney presents the delightful animated comedy "Monsters, Inc."

Once again Pixar Animation Studios, which brought us "Toy Story" and "A Bug's Life," wows viewers with splendid, top-rate animation. Turning on the clever idea of monsters as working stiffs who scare little kids just for a living, the adventure is amusing and witty, but fails to take full advantage of its own concept. And though it doesn't soar to the charming and captivating heights of "Shrek" (some moviegoers may even find it comes up short against Pixar's own prize, "Toy Story"), it is still an imaginative, funny treat as the holiday movie season kicks off.

The story centers around the team of Sulley (voiced by John Goodman) and Mike (voiced by Billy Crystal), the top "scarer" and "scare assistant" in Monstropolis, a city powered by the screams of little children frightened by professional monsters. A horned giant with green and purple-spotted fur, Sulley is actually a pussycat who is encouraged, prodded and provoked by his feisty best friend Mike, a green, opinionated one-eyed motormouth who hopes to break the "scare record." Their only rival is slimy Randall (voiced by Steve Buscemi), a many-armed purple lizard who can instantly become invisible.

The film has great fun setting out the lay of the land. Monstropolis is a bustling city where monsters of every shape and size report daily to the Monsters, Inc. factory to scare little kids. Portable doors magically provide access to children's bedrooms and the resulting scream is bottled in airtight capsules that provide the energy source for the whole city.

Yet, however fearsome they can be when scaring up energy, monsters are terribly afraid of coming into contact with humans. In fact the city has dedicated an entire department, the Child Detection Agency, staffed by emergency personnel sealed in yellow rubber suits to handle such intruders. So Sulley is understandably worried when he accidentally lets a tiny girl named



Walt Disney Pictures/CNS

Monsters Mike Wazowski (left) and James P. "Sully" Sullivan run a scare factory in the city of Monstropolis in the animated film "Monsters, Inc."

Boo (voiced by Mary Gibbs) slip into the monster world.

Knowing what will happen to her if Boo is caught, and quickly discovering that contact with the pint-sized tyke is not really dangerous, Sulley and Mike protect the pigtailed Boo, even growing quite fond of her. The rest of the film is a hide-and-seek adventure interrupted occasionally by the dastardly machinations of Randall.

Unfortunately, the deficiencies in the premise's development are only minimally masked by the creatively drawn characters and witty joking. The cat-and-mouse game played by Sulley and Mike to hide Boo from the rest of Monstropolis all too quickly becomes tiresome, with even Boo's endearing Teletubby-speak wearing thin.

Goodman and Crystal deliver the expected comedic banter with expert timing

and panache. Crystal's vocal range is broader, though, and one can imagine him throwing his whole body into it while recording the dialogue. Inventive supporting characters — such as Mike's snake-haired receptionist girlfriend Celia, voiced by Jennifer Tilly, James Coburn's crablike factory owner and the cranky office manager Roz, voiced by Bob Peterson — are engaging in their roles.

Younger ones may be scared at times, but in an unduly threatening way.

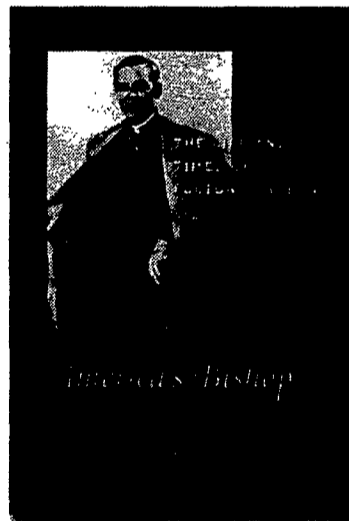
Even when the narrative slows a bit, crisp dialogue and sprightly characters in "Monsters, Inc." keep the audience's attention.

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