

## REVIEWS

## 'Shrek' art, voices excel

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

## 'Shrek'

Captivating animated film in which a cynical ogre (voiced by Mike Myers) and his smart-alecky donkey (voiced by Eddie Murphy) agree to save the princess bride (voiced by Cameron Diaz) of a nasty lord (voiced by John Lithgow) in exchange for the return of the ogre's swamp home. As directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jensen, the sweet but conventional story of self-acceptance reaches new levels of excellence in its animation, and a fine cast of voices further bolsters the film's appeal. Mild crass language and some crude humor. The USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. (DreamWorks)

## 'The Animal'

Mildly amusing comedy about a police cadet (Rob Schneider) who receives animal parts as transplants after a near-fatal car crash in a remote mountain area and soon finds himself taking on the primal traits of these animals. As directed by Luke Greenfield, the silly premise produces a few humorous moments and sight gags, but the muddled ending is forced. Occasional sexual innuendo, fleeting rear nudity and brief crass language. The USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. (Columbia TriStar)

## 'The Golden Bowl'

Dull adaptation of Henry James 1909 novel in which a young woman (Kate Beckinsale) married to an Italian prince (Jeremy Northam) pushes her widowed billionaire father (Nick Nolte) into marriage with a much younger woman (Uma Thurman), unaware of the romantic entanglements between her husband and her new stepmother. Director James Ivory's period piece is an uneven story of jealousy with some superb production values but also more than a few tedious moments and performances. An extramarital sexual encounter. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPA rating is R — restricted. (Trimark)

## 'Legally Blonde'

Determined to dazzle the boyfriend (Luke Wilson) who dumped her for a smarter girl, a flighty sorority coed (Reese Witherspoon) ends up attending Harvard Law School alongside him. As directed by Robert Luketic, Witherspoon makes the predictable, frivolous film stand out even when the light-hearted "dumb blonde" jokes fade. Some mild sexual references with a smattering of crass language and an instance of profanity. The USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. (MGM)

## 'Harry Potter' fine adaption of book

NEW YORK (CNS) — Vividly imaginative, director Chris Columbus' fine adaptation of J.K. Rowling's popular children's novel "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" (Warner Bros.) is likely to please the book's many fans as well as any uninitiated moviegoers.

British author Rowling captured the imagination of millions of kids — and adults — with her amazing stories about Harry Potter, an orphan who discovers he is a wizard. Columbus' fantasy film about magic, villainy and friendship adheres pretty closely to Rowling's words. And where narrative points have been dropped, beguiling visual details and special effects make up for the loss. However, the film overreaches in including so much, and a stronger editing hand should have been used to trim the nearly two-and-a-half-hour film.

For the first 10 years of his life, Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) has lived in a cupboard under the stairs in the house of his awful aunt and uncle. But on his 11th birthday, he receives a mysterious letter from an enormous hulk of a man, Hagrid (Robbie Coltrane), inviting him to study at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry, Hagrid explains, is a wizard whose parents, sorcerers themselves, were murdered by an evil wizard named Voldemort. Unable to eliminate Harry, Voldemort etched the distinctive lightning-bolt scar on Harry's forehead, making Harry known throughout the wizard land as "the boy who lived." Much to his surprise, Harry discovers there are actually two worlds: the dreary world of the Muggles (nonmagic folk) where he's been growing up, while the other, a realm of magic and fantasy, is where his destiny lies.

At Hogwarts, Harry learns to fly on a broomstick, cast spells, and create potions. But more importantly, and for the first time in his life, Harry makes friends. Copper-topped Ron (Rupert Grint), a third-generation Hogwarts student, and know-it-all bookworm Hermione (Emma Watson) join Harry on his amazing adventures. The three first-year students chance upon one of Hogwarts' best-kept secrets: the sorcerer's stone. Guarded by a three-headed dog and many powerful spells and incantations, this powerful jewel gives its possessor the elixir for everlasting life. And Harry is sure that the dreadful Voldemort is after the stone, which means he has to stop him. Luckily, Harry is gifted with an invisibility cloak.

The film's casting is superb. Maggie Smith blends strictness and reserved enthusiasm to near-perfection as headmistress Professor McGonagall. As headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Richard



Warner Bros./CNS

Warwick Davis plays Professor Flitwick at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the movie "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone."

Harris' role is small but memorable. Radcliffe, a virtually unknown actor who landed the plum role, mugs a bit more than needed, especially with his surprised looks and ear-to-ear grin, but is endearing nonetheless. Watson's Hermione, though she is supposed to be a goody-two-shoes, is a tad too unlikeable. But the magic wand goes to Alan Rickman. What his Professor Severus Snape lacks in character development, Rickman makes up for with his creepy and intimidating screen presence. Rounding out the cast is the always-good Ian Hart as stuttering Professor Quirell.

The costuming and special effects, though not especially innovative, are wondrous just the same. Hogwarts Academy is first seen at night, an immense castle lit by a million little lights and surrounded by dark waters. In the huge, cathedral-ceilinged hall where the student body gathers for celebrations, lit candles float in the air as sumptuous feasts magically appear. And the strictly-business goblins who run Gringotts Bank are fiendish-looking things with long pointy noses, huge flapping ears and warts and bumps all over.

Disappointingly, some of the clever nuances from the book don't come through in the film. Harry's miserable home life, which was vibrantly written, is forgettable here. Had it been better developed, Harry's final line about Hogwarts being his real home would have resonated more.

Parents concerned about the film's sorcery elements should know that it is unlikely to pose any threat to Catholic beliefs. "Harry Potter" is so obviously innocuous fantasy that its fiction is easily distinguishable from real life. Older children should be able to handle it, although it is too long and intense for younger ones. And the film ends with a very upbeat, positive message about sacrificial love.

For those who didn't read the book, the movie gets sketchy on the details in the end. Still, the movie is still an enjoyable mixture of fantasy and comedy.

Due to some menacing situations and scary images with an instance of crass language, 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.

## 'Shallow Hal' amusing but tedious fare

By Anne Navarro  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Brothers Bobby and Peter Farrelly tap into a gentler vein of humor than their usual gross-out fare in the mildly amusing romantic comedy "Shallow Hal" (20th Century Fox).

Propped up by the far-flung notion of Gwyneth Paltrow playing an obese woman whose svelte charms can be seen only by Jack Black, "Shallow Hal" is a goodhearted lesson in getting beyond superficial values and seeing people's inner beauty. But it is also basically an extended one-joke film, with the audience awaiting each predictable punch line. And the Farrelly brothers take a long time getting there, as the film's two hours easily could have been slimmed down to make it less laborious.

Paltrow plays 300-pound Rosemary, a warmhearted Peace Corps volunteer who starts an unlikely romance with a plumpy, aspiring Lothario named Hal (Black). Hal and his equally immature pal, Mauricio (Jason Alexander), neither of whom are re-

motely hunky, ineptly play the dance club scene and won't consider any woman who is not supermodel-perfect.

Hal has a chance meeting with self-help guru Tony Robbins (playing himself), who uses the power of suggestion to alter Hal's skin-deep perception of women. So when he meets Rosemary, Hal is temporarily blinded to her obesity. All he sees is her inner beauty, a funny gal with a great, toned body. Mauricio, upset over the new Hal, tracks down Robbins and convinces him to de-hypnotize Hal for his own good.

The directors walk a fine line in their humor about female anatomy and fat people. But it is a far cry from the normal crass comedy moviegoers usually get from the Farrellys, such as "Dumb and Dumber."

Intending to be positive, the Farrellys at least have not reduced their film to mean-spirited fat jokes but do use stereotypes to choke laughter out of the premise.

The film also relies too much on the idea of guys consistently playing "out of their league" (as the film puts it) to get laughs. Black and Alexander go a bit over-

board in their renderings of aggressive over-compensators and both would have fared better had they toned it down a bit. Black's regular-guy image is a welcome change of pace for a leading man.

Paltrow captures the character's shy sense of disbelief at being wooed so enthusiastically. Her performance is the key ingredient in making their romance sweet and appealing. Paltrow walks as if she had an extra 200 pounds on her. However, the "fat" makeup is too fake to fool anyone.

Due to an implied sexual encounter, a few sexist wisecracks, fleeting rear nudity and some crass phrases and profanity with an instance of rough language, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops 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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Navarro is on the staff of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.