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editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Kids' films encourage summer reading

OUR OPINION: The latest batch of summer children's movies helps make kids as idiotic as the on-screen action

You know it's a bad summer when Disney's latest batch of animated fluff and merchandise tie-ins is the best movie available for kids.

The heat of summer has combined with the noise of EMU construction to leave us seeking respite in the air-conditioned shade of local movie theaters. While summer pickings are always slim, this year has seen a particular drought in one big-money genre: children's films.

Consider, for a moment, the most heavily advertised and widely available offerings being served up to the pre-teen crowd. *Hercules*. *Good Burger*. *Wild America*. *George of the Jungle*. And, God help us all, *Air Bud*.

Seizing the cultural high ground, *Hercules* features a reworked Greek myth, made palatable for the average filmgoer. Unfortunately, the new tale, in which Hercules is born of a legitimate coupling between Zeus and Hera, is anything but palatable to someone familiar with the original story.

Placing that artistic atrocity aside for a moment, consider some of the other plots out there. On the far end of the spectrum from *Hercules* is *Good Burger*, which shows every sign of being a regressive reworking of *Amos and Andy* for the 1990s. Equally frightening is *Air Bud*, a film about a basketball playing dog. And we thought Shaq was the worst actor to come out of sports.

More disturbingly, critics have actually been praising some of these films. *George of the Jungle* has received many positive reviews, and *Hercules* has been lauded by some as the best film of the summer. Significantly, a trend has emerged in the critics' responses to bad cinema — bad movies are okay as long as the kids will like them.



A number of critics rate films on separate scales: one for children, and one for the rest of us. While we admit that a particularly elusive film by Lynch or Fellini will probably escape the average youngster — or the average American — this form of split criticism is still a bad idea.

The problem we have with these ratings is the same we have with the current crop of films: they treat kids as though they are idiots. Children, like the rest of us, have a wide range of artistic tastes. Undoubtedly, there is a group of people out there who enjoys the fart jokes and tree smashing of *George of the Jungle*. We're sorry.

Unfortunately, critics and film producers seem to have decided that every kid in

America fits into this category. If we want to sell to children, the logic goes, let's make an idiotic film. And if the film is idiotic, then children must enjoy it.

The mentality of a culture is very often determined by the artistic language it is taught. When PBS is presented as exclusively intellectual, and even PBS dumbs down to its perceived audience, it is little wonder kids would rather watch people roll around in slop than learn about literature and art.

If children were not force-fed utter sludge and told that "high" art is beyond their grasp, those children might show an interest in films that went beyond food fights and flatulence in search of humor.

This could be a wonderful thing for society. Imagine a youth raised to demand class and aesthetic value instead of booger jokes. A youth that would actually prefer to learn, and to learn in an intellectual way, rather than in the prepackaged music video style of PBS and Channel One.

Perhaps the real problem is that the corporations who make children's entertainment have imaged such a world and have decided it would significantly lower their profit margin. Now there's a fantastic myth worth making a movie about.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

READER VOICES

How do you feel about all the construction on campus?



"It really hasn't disrupted me. I notice it, but it hasn't altered my daily routine."

Brian Fitzgerald
Community education



"It's great to improve the campus, but they should do it at night when no one is here."

Jeremy Bucy
Art history



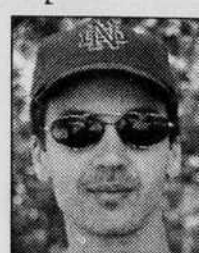
"The noise is definitely a problem, especially in Gerlinger. Is it all necessary?"

Stacey Wolfe
Economics



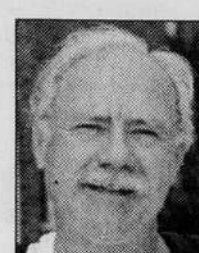
"It's really inconvenient to get through the EMU. I don't like that the food court and the convenience store are gone."

Mayumi Egawa
Pre-journalism



"It's great because they're improving the EMU, and it hasn't affected my entrance to the building."

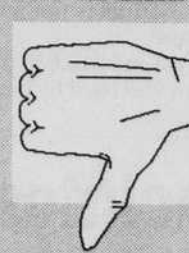
Kirk Johnson
Biochemistry



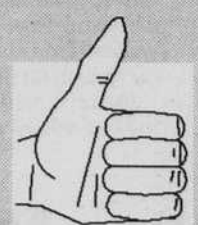
"The construction on campus hasn't bothered me, but the jogging path near Autzen has been graveled over."

Allan Kays
Professor, geology

All thumbs



To coverage of the Versace killing: Not only did the media and police agencies go orgasmic over the event, but coverage too often focused on the gay lifestyle of the suspected killer. NBC went so far as to speculate Cunanan would return to his hometown of San Diego simply because it was Gay Pride weekend.



To saving the tuition tax waiver: Congress has apparently dropped plans to eliminate a waiver currently in place that exempted free tuition from taxes. Such waivers are an important part of a university system necessary for preparing educated voters. Or is that why Congress was upset in the first place?