



Tenenbaums' dysfunctional world is darkly humorous

■ 'The Royal Tenenbaums' will please fans of 'Rushmore' and other such quirky films

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

It takes a special movie to be intelligent without requiring anything from the audience. The year 2001 saw an unusual amount of "smart" movies come out of Hollywood, such as "Memento" and "Vanilla Sky," but watching those films required enduring a few brain freezes to enjoy the sweet, sweet ice cream.

"The Royal Tenenbaums," however, provides all the pleasure and none of the pain.

Writer and Director Wes Anderson has a gift for crafting movies with perfect harmony between reality and fantasy. The movie unfolds as a book (narrated by Alec Baldwin), but despite constant reminders of the film's fiction, it's

easy to step into the Tenenbaums' world enough to start believing it.

Anderson's ability to make the audience identify with his absurd, archetypal characters is nothing short of magic. Each of the eight main figures is introduced with head-on shots of their morning preparations, with their character and actor names superimposed at the bottom. Again, pure fiction. Furthermore, each character has what can loosely be called a costume through the movie — done in some take on 1970s style. But because the movie is less about plot and more about people, the human element underneath the 2-D characters can't be denied.

Royal Tenenbaum (Gene Hackman) is the closest thing to a protagonist found in the movie. His impact on the lives of his wife and three children sets the dysfunctional dynamic of the rest of their lives. Tenenbaum is self-centered and no more than a grown-up kid, very reminiscent of

Bill Murray's character from Anderson's previous film, "Rushmore."

Murray returns in "Tenenbaums," though in a more dramatic role than expected. None of the performances are especially comedic, but the movie is funny — in a dark way. Not enough can be said of the cast's role in this success. Hackman and Murray are still in top form. Ben Stiller and Gwyneth Paltrow also show some new colors as members of the dysfunctional Tenenbaum family.

But the surprise performance award goes to Luke Wilson as Richie, the youngest Tenenbaum. Wilson has worked with Anderson on all three of his films, but this is by far his largest role. Second to Royal, Richie moves the film along through his actions. Soft spoken and sullen, Wilson has a Zen quality in this role.

Anderson's magic is found in Wilson's non-verbal expressions. The magic touch is supported by the look

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