

■ **Movie review**

# Animations in 'Polar Express' prove scary, not dazzling

Detailed renderings capture the lifelike qualities of actors in Zemeckis' latest computer-generated creation

BY DAVID GERMAIN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

People in Hollywood should never work with children or animals, W.C. Fields once said. Maybe that should

be expanded to hyper-realistic computer-generated children and reindeer, too.

As technically dazzling as we're supposed to believe they are, the

creations in Robert Zemeckis' Christmas adventure "The Polar Express" just don't look right. In fact, most of the time, they look plain wrong — the sort of creepy characters more likely to induce nightmares than visions of sugar plums.

With his "Forrest Gump" and "Cast Away" star Tom Hanks providing body movements and voices for

many key characters, Zemeckis set out to create a film that stretches the bounds of computer animation with detailed digital renderings of the actors through a process called performance capture.

Hanks and his co-stars performed on a bare soundstage, their actions captured by infrared cameras keyed to receptors on their faces and bodies. Zemeckis boasts that the expressions and body language are so humanly authentic, the film cannot even be called animation.

Distributor Warner Bros. disagrees, having entered "The Polar Express" in the Academy Awards animated-feature category.

It's questionable whether the creations of "The Polar Express" are more emotive than the fairy-tale beings of "Shrek" or the superhero caricatures of "The Incredibles." When Shrek's pal Donkey cracks a goofy grin, you feel it, and grin right back.

When the nameless children of "The Polar Express" stare you in the face, they're unsettling, stuck in some shadowy zone between flesh and figment. They have lifelike parts, but the pieces fit together rather formlessly, like the indefinite features of the embryonic pod people of "Invasion of the Body Snatchers."

And there's something eerie and dead about these children's eyes,

making them resemble those evil, stic kids of the 1960 horror flick "Village of the Damned."

Screenwriter William Broyles Jr. sticks to the essence of Allsburg's plot: A boy (body by Hanks, voice by Daryl Sabara) lies awake on Christmas Eve, pondering whether he still believes in Santa Claus. Along comes a train, the Polar Express, stopping in front of his house to haul him to the North Pole for Santa's big send-off.

With the help of a self-assured girl (Nona Gaye) and a timid boy (body by Peter Scolari, voice by Jimmy Bennett) who's accustomed to Christmas passing him by, our hero comes to once again embrace Santa and the holiday spirit.

Many of the visuals are truly fantastic: the remarkable detail of the train, wolves prowling the woods, an eagle swooping across mountain peaks.

Yet so much of the action Zemeckis adds to stretch out a thin storybook is in service only of the visuals, not the plot or characters.

The North Pole is a turgid mob scene, with elves so ominous and off-putting all they need are drabber garments and some scars and lesions to fit right into the dark army of Mordor in "The Lord of the Rings."

Maybe the pretty pictures and visual commotion will be enough to satisfy young children.

## Book: Secondary characters contribute little to story line

Continued from page 9

remained just out of his reach.

The Wolf plans mass murder and destruction in major cities around the globe, including New York, Paris and Tel Aviv, unless he is given several billion dollars and imprisoned terrorists are released.

Patterson fails to fully develop any of his characters. The reader knows the Wolf is evil only because he kills his friends and blows up people, not because of any sleek writing by Patterson.

Instead, Patterson introduces myriad secondary characters that do not contribute to the thrust of the story.

His use of dialect is erratic in that it is rarely used as Cross interacts with foreigners, but is occasionally thrown in for spice. For example, the Scotland Yard officer in London screams a British expletive.

There is satisfaction in the outcome of the novel and the cliffhangers throughout. Overall, though, "London Bridges" reads as though Patterson were trying to overcompensate for a higher threshold of fear because of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. As a result, many of the events seem excessive, especially when one considers real-life threats from terrorists.

## Jones: Scenes from book don't make an appearance in movie

Continued from page 8

the book don't appear in the movie.

Thankfully, her mum is still quirky and ridiculous and her father's character is less hopeless in this movie.

"Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason" comes to theaters with well-loved characters and a wonderfully comedic story line. Jealousy, breakups, spying, magic mushrooms and an all-women

Thai prison are found among good friends, great wine and fabulous shagging. And this movie is coming to theaters earlier than anticipated due to tremendous response to the early press and advanced screenings. "Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason" hits theaters Nov. 12 (v.g).


amylichty@dailyemerald.com

www.SquarePegConcerts.com

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

# DE LA SOUL

NEW ALBUM!




This TUES

## THE GRIND DATE

US TOUR  
with Butta Verses

**Tuesday November 16**  
**McDonald Theater**  
1010 Willamette St • 7:00pm Doors • All Ages



# PARTICLE

## Motet & DJ Harry


**Thursday Nov 18**  
**W.O.W. Hall**  
291 West 8th Ave • 7:00pm Doors • All Ages

# GOV'T MULE

Allstar Band Lineup Featuring:  
Warren Haynes (guitar, vocals) Matt Abts (drums)  
Danny Louis (keyboard) and Andy Hess (bass)

## The Déjà Voodoo Tour

**Saturday Nov 20 • McDonald Theater**  
1010 Willamette St • 7:00pm Doors • All Ages Welcome




# BRUCE HORNSBY

**Monday Nov 22 • McDonald Theater**  
1010 Willamette Street • 7:00pm Doors • All Ages

From Marcus Eaton And The Lobby

# MARCUSEATON


&  
**Justin King**  
**Saturday Dec 4**  
**Cafe Paradiso**  
115 West Broadway  
6:30pm Doors • All Ages



# Keller Williams

On Sale **FRIDAY NOV 19** 10:00am

**Sunday Feb 13**  
**McDonald Theater**  
1010 Willamette St  
7:00pm Doors • All Ages



## Mountain Language

By Harold Pinter  
Directed by Sean Andries

The Pocket Playhouse  
Thurs.-Sat. 5:00 pm  
11.11.04-11.13.04  
102 Villard  
\$1 Donation

**More...**  
of everything you desire  
in an adult store!

- TOYS • LINGERIE •
- MAGAZINES •
- VIDEOS •
- DVDs •

**Exclusively adult**

1166 South A • Springfield  
726-6969 • Open 24-7 (Almost)