

■ In my opinion



RYAN NYBURG
BUDGET RACK

Harry Potter is kids' fluff, not a savior of literature

Summer puts me in a bad mood. Funny, isn't it? I mean humidity and sunburn, what is not to like about that combination?

Maybe this is why I'm feeling particularly resentful toward the "Harry Potter" books right now. Just as a disclaimer, let me say that I have never, in fact, read any of the books beyond a brief skimming and am only aware of the plots through the films, about which my opinions are mixed. But right now every other person in this country is buying a copy of the latest installment, and I feel a need to chime in.

These days criticizing Harry Potter is somewhat akin to dissing Mother Teresa. There is an almost religious zealotry behind the devotion some people have for these books and saying a foul word in their direction could potentially lead to wizard-hat-clad preteens driving car bombs into my apartment. But what the hell.

My initial dislike of these books stems first from the ceaseless insistence from every single person I have ever had a moment's contact with that I must read them all immediately, regardless of whatever else I am doing at the time. ("But I'm right in the middle of this Henry James novel," "It doesn't matter, you HAVE to read these books. They are SO good.") Naturally, I tend to avoid anything that is recommended so emphatically the same way I would avoid plague-ridden vermin. I don't mind a book recommendation every now and then, but I do mind when people get all freaky and crazy-eyed about it. I hate to feel forced.

What really started to put me off about the books was that their astounding rise in popularity among children caused people to praise the series as a sort of literary savior, moving kids away from television, video games and the Internet and back to reading as a popular activity. This movement to make children love reading has a note of self-importance to it that really irritates me. The fact that its proponents are so desperate for some sort of successes that they will cling to anything that rouses kids' interest in the printed word is kind of pathetic. You don't see people talking about the rise in American literacy every time "The Da Vinci Code" sells another million units.

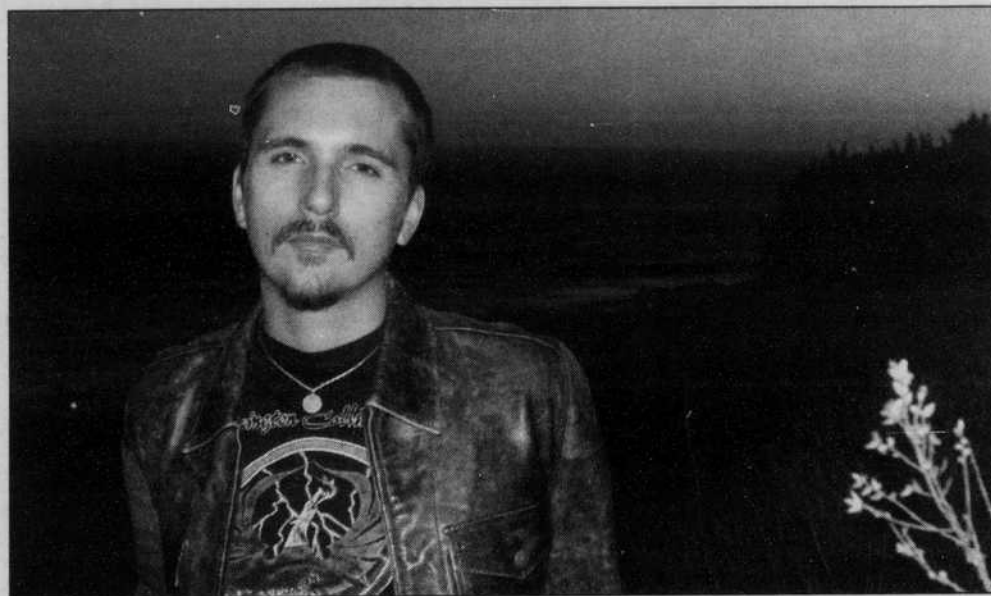
I can already hear people whine, "But the Harry Potter books are actually good."

That may be, but they're still fluff.

I'm not making the tired old "high vs. low" culture argument here; I just like to believe there is an artistic distinction between works that are intellectually stimulating and works that are merely comfortable. "Harry Potter and the Whatever" is comfortable. James Joyce is intellectually stimulating. When kids drop their "Manga" and start picking up copies of "Dubliners" I'll be impressed, but you and I both know that this scenario is not likely to occur.

Reading is not going to save the world, as some of these "magic of reading" jack-offs are fond of saying. Novels have been around for ages, and yet we still have wars, pollution and bundles of human misery to deal with. Reading does not in and of itself make you a better, more intelligent person. Intellectual curiosity does that, from which reading is an offshoot. Thousands of kids have picked up the Harry Potter books, been satisfied

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Los Angeles native, Folk singer/songwriter Shane Alexander recently released his first full-length album "The Middle Way."

COURTESY

Survival of the songwriter

Up-and-coming folk artist Shane Alexander will share his "strong melodies" tonight at Luckey's in Eugene

BY JASON DRONKOWSKI
FREELANCE REPORTER

The music "cult" enamored with folk and the personality of the singer/songwriter has survived through decades of contradicting pop music; everyone can recall the songs by Simon & Garfunkel and Bob Dylan that once ruled radio airwaves so long ago.

Presently, it may be apparent to the general listener of the Top 40 countdown that folk music is dead and the

singer/songwriter is scarce. This is a misconception. Right now, folk music and singer/songwriters are conquering indie audiences everywhere under names such as Iron & Wine and Irish sensation Damien Rice. Among this crowd of new folk artists lies an up-and-coming singer/songwriter from Los Angeles, Calif. His name is Shane Alexander, and he has recently released his first full-length album "The Middle Way."

Shane Alexander's musical talent

and singer/songwriter career were born from several relocations with his father, who was in the army. Being a stranger in a new place and having to cope with family drama, Alexander remembers turning to music.

"I kind of hid in my room and listened to whatever records were in the house. (My father's) record collection was really, really good... I grew up with really good input from the Moody Blues, Fleetwood Mac, Harry Chapin and Zeppelin and Sabbath. I became really musically well-balanced," Alexander said.

Alexander now refers to his

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■ Movie review



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTO EDITOR

Director Tim Burton's remake of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" is currently playing in three theaters at Cinemark 17 in the Gateway Mall in Springfield.

Depp's performance steals the show in Burton's flawed remake

Willy Wonka and the movie's visuals overshadow the other characters in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

Tim Burton has created some of the most distinct and fascinating images of recent film history and has crafted some of the most interesting characters to fill them. Pee Wee and his strange inventions, Edward Scissorhands and his dark castle, Jack Skellington and his Halloween world; these characters and images all stem from the same imagination. Now Burton has given us one of his most visually complex worlds and, with Johnny Depp, managed to place within it a character stranger than any of the bizarre visuals. Unfortunately this

comes at the expense of well-paced plotting and depth.

"Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" is one of the most eagerly anticipated, not to mention useless, remakes of the year (following only Peter Jackson's superfluous remake of "King Kong," though that looks rather exciting as well). While the original film hardly required improvement, Burton has created something very engaging out of the material. Candy entrepreneur Willy Wonka (Depp), whose factory has been closed for years, sends out five golden tickets hidden in candy bars and will allow those who find them to have a one-day tour of his

factory. The five eventual winners include four rotten little brats and Charlie (Freddie Highmore), a wide-eyed and impossibly sincere young lad who lives just down the street from the factory.

Things move along pleasantly enough for the first 20 minutes or so, and then Depp appears in full. As Wonka, Depp has created another of his delightfully eccentric characters. The performance is almost intoxicating to watch as he guides the children and their parents through the factory, acting like a man so wrapped up in what he has created that he can't understand why anyone else might not find it interesting. His clothing, his voice and his mannerisms all point to the old adage

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EVENTS MOVIES BOOKS MUSIC

s	m	t	w	th	f	s

Today
Need New Body
WOW Hall
8 p.m., \$8
Rock

Friday
Lo Nuestro
Luna
9:30 p.m., \$6
Latin dance

Saturday
Yeltsin
Sam Bond's Garage
9 p.m., Free
Rock

Sunday
Faun Hables
John Henry's
7:30 p.m., \$5
Singer/songwriter



TOP 5 MOVIES

- Top five films**
1. "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"
 2. "Wedding Crashers"
 3. "Fantastic Four"
 4. "War of the Worlds"
 5. "Batman Begins"



NEWYORKTIMES BEST-SELLERS

1. Janet Evanovich, "Eleven On Top"
2. Elizabeth Kostova, "The Historian"
3. Dan Brown, "The Da Vinci Code"
4. Danielle Steel, "Miracle"
5. Su Monk Kidd, "The Mermaid Chair"



BILLBOARD TOP 5

1. R. Kelly, "TP3 Reloaded"
2. Missy Elliott, "The Cookbook"
3. Coldplay, "X&Y"
4. Mariah Carey, "The Emancipation of Mimi"
5. Ying Yang Twins, "U.S.A.: United States of Atlanta"