

Small Packages

Animation better than real life in this year's Oscar shorts

You could go see this year's crop of Oscar-nominated short films because you want that extra edge on your Oscar-predicting. You could go because the short films are often a launching pad for directors who go on to make feature-length films, and knowing about stuff before everyone else is fun. Or you could go just to see "The Lost Thing," an Australian short created and co-directed by Shaun Tan, the author/illustrator of *The Arrival*, a breathtaking and wordless book that depicts a fantastical, universal immigrant experience.

Tan's knack for creating whimsical yet slightly disturbing creatures — here, they're as likely as not to be part machine — is on gorgeous display in this short film about a boy who finds a lost thing on the beach. An overgrown teakettle with tentacle legs and claw arms strung with bells, the lost thing is an impossibility, a wonderful construction of the imagination that nobody but the boy seems to notice. Perhaps people are just busy with other stuff, the narrator guesses.

"The Lost Thing," co-directed by Andrew Ruhemann, is a quiet, wistful story and a reminder that it takes work to sustain a sense of wonder and possibility in a world too busy putting things in just the right places and doing all the distracting things that need doing each day. With multiple frames, elaborate detail and a world that's just off-kilter from ours, this film begs to be watched more than once.

If there's any justice, "The Lost Thing" will take home an Oscar, but it faces stiff competition. "The Gruffalo," an adaptation of the children's book written by Julia Donaldson (who worked on the screenplay) and illustrated by Axel Scheffler, boasts a brand-name cast of voices that includes



Oscar-nominated animated short "The Lost Thing" screens at DIVA

Helena Bonham Carter and Robbie Coltrane. It's a sweet, sophisticated piece of animation, but the story drags a bit when you can't turn the pages as quickly as you'd like. Pixar's "Day and Night," which ran before *Toy Story 3*, is a charming, playful tale about two cartoon-shaped windows on the world who butt heads, then bond, when they see what the other has to offer. It's as sleek and sharp a short as fans have come to expect from Pixar. The satirical "Let's Pollute" is a touch smug though cleverly put together, and the French "Madagascar, Carnet de Voyage," filmmaker Bastien DuBois' animated postcard about a trip to Madagascar, is a flurry of scrapbook-like images and ever-shifting perspectives, so engrossing you barely need to glimpse at the subtitles. (Two "highly recommended" but not nominated shorts also show.)

On the live-action side, the nominated films start to feel a bit too similar; three of the five are about men pursuing women, in one way or another. "Na Wewe," a compact and effective short about a confrontation in Burundi in 1994, breaks up this theme, as does "The Confession." In "Na Wewe," rebels stop a minivan, demanding that Hutus and Tutsis identify themselves. Identity and connection shift and twist in the tension. Less effective are "The Crush," about a schoolboy in love with his teacher, and "Wish 143," which borders on the too-sentimental but benefits from solid performances from its two leads. The quirky, black-and-white "God of Love" is a promising piece from New York filmmaker Luke Matheny, who casts himself as a hapless romantic, lounge singer and champion dart-thrower

who gets a life-changing package from a mysterious "Olympus Foundation." The longest of the live-action shorts, "The Confession" is a quietly dark story about two kids and the fallout from their attempt to find something for one of them to admit to at his first confession. Elegantly filmed and subtle when it needs to be, "The Confession" begins to grow unsettling but never gains quite enough momentum, pulling up just short of the mark. **EW**

DIVA presents the Oscar-Nominated Short Films over two weekends at the UO Baker Center, 325 E. 10th Ave.
Live action: 7 pm Friday, Feb. 18; 5 pm & 9 pm Saturday, Feb. 19; 1 pm Sunday, Feb. 20; : 7 pm Friday, Feb. 25; 5 pm & 9 pm Saturday, Feb. 26; and 1 pm Sunday, Feb. 27. **Animated:** 5 pm & 9:15 pm Friday, Feb. 18; 7:15 pm Saturday, Feb. 19; 3:15 pm Sunday, Feb. 20; 5 pm & 9:15 pm Friday, Feb. 25; 7:15 pm Saturday, Feb. 26; and 3:15 pm Sunday, Feb. 27. \$7 per screening, \$6 students.



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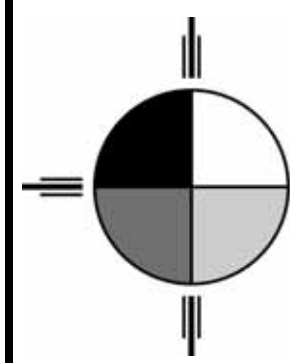


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