

'Indian in Cupboard' is thoughtful family fare

BY DAVID GOODMAN
AP News Features

In the hot summer months still to come, vacation-weary parents have a choice. You can take the kids to a film like "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" where they might learn to do a really nasty karate kick while watching something virtually indistinguishable from most television cartoon fare.

But then there is "The Indian in the Cupboard," where kids will learn about values, responsibility and compassion while getting 96 minutes of high entertainment in the bargain.

The grownups will like it, too. It's one of those rare children's movies that will captivate adults because the themes are powerful and the performances top-notch.

The movie starts in the middle of a birthday party for a 9-year-old New York boy named Omri (Hal Scardino). His presents include an old wooden cupboard and a miniature plastic figure of an American Indian.

Later, his mother (Lindsay Crouse) rummages around for a key to fit the lock. It's the last thing her mother gave her before she died.

Before he goes to bed, Omri locks the little Indian in the cupboard for safe keeping. Then the

magic begins.

In the morning, he opens the cupboard to find a living, breathing man, just about three inches (7.5 cm) high. He's a genuine Iroquois warrior from 1767 named Little Bear. Played by American Indian rap artist Littlefoot, Little Bear thinks he's in the Land of the Gods and Omri a "Great Spirit."

At first, the uses for the cupboard seem limitless and risk free. Omri raids his toy chest and brings several more figures to life: Darth Vader, Robocop, a dinosaur. But when he sees them engaged in real combat, he hurriedly turns everything back.

And when Omri brings back an elderly man who dies from the shock, he realizes the extent of his new responsibility.

Omri hides Little Bear from his family, but mistakenly shares the secret with his best friend, Patrick (Rishi Bhat).

Patrick ignores the warnings and puts a plastic cowboy on horseback into the cupboard. Out comes Boone (David Keith) a gun-toting, weepy 19th-century cowboy, who warns Omri, "Watch out that savage don't scalp you in your sleep."

Now the youngsters have to

play peacekeeper.

The special effects wizards at Industrial Light and Magic seamlessly blend together the miniature and normal.

Screenwriter Melissa Mathison ("E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial," "The Black Stallion") has created a terrific script from the award-winning 1981 novel by Lynne Reid Banks.

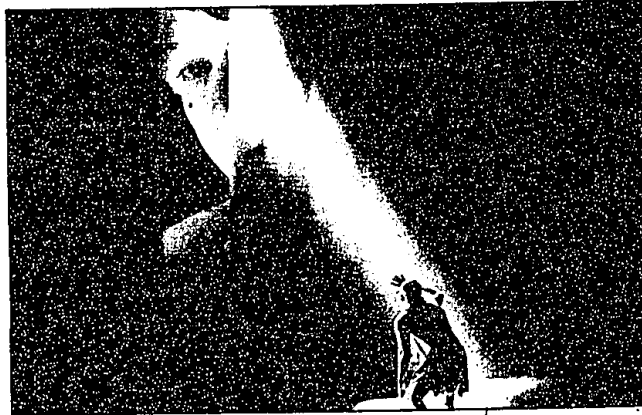
Mathison is particularly adept at creating the world of the child, a subculture with its own rules and demons. It's a place where the real excitement is in your room and with your friends in secret "kids' haunts."

And director Frank Oz ("Little Shop of Horrors," "The Muppet Take Manhattan") never allows the special effects to drown out the narrative.

In the movie's most memorable sequence, the kids introduce Boone and Little Bear to television. After a few shots of gyrating bodies on MTV, Omri switches over to an old Western.

Boone and Little Bear had been getting along just fine. But they are suddenly swept up by the on-screen bloodbath into their own passionate battle.

The movie comes on a little strong with the notion of "noble warrior." But as he learns about life in the 18th century, Omri tactfully refrains from telling Lit-



PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Fantasy: A fantastic adventure begins for Omri (Hal Scardino) after a three-inch-tall Indian named Little Bear emerges from the old wooden cupboard in "The Indian in the Cupboard."

tle Bear about his people's future in the United States, even when he plaintively asks, "Are we al-

ways a great people?"

The Paramount Pictures release is produced by Kathleen

Kennedy, Frank Marshall and Jane Startz. Running time: 96 minutes.

NOW SHOWING



PHIL BLAY

Romantic comedy: Hugh Grant is Samuel and Julianne Moore is Rebecca in "Nine Months," now playing at metro Detroit movie theaters.

NOW SHOWING

"THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY"

A traveling photographer passes through a small town in rural Iowa and falls into a brief, but passionate affair. The brief affair leaves deep and lasting memories for them both. Stars Clint Eastwood and Mary Streep. Rated PG-13.

"FIRST KNIGHT"

The classic tale of King Arthur told from a different perspective, from that of the roguish knight Lancelot, whose love for the beautiful Lady Guinevere clouds his judgment and seals his fate. Stars Sean Connery, Richard Gere and Julia Ormond. Rated PG-13.

"ONE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE"

Detective John McClane is back in the thick of things, this time working to thwart a mad bomber. Stars Bruce Wil-

ls, Samuel Jackson and Jeremy Irons. Rated R.

"THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD"

Adapted from the award-winning children's novel, this fantasy adventure is a key he can magically bring to life his three-inch toy Indian he placed in an old cupboard. Rated PG.

"CLUELESS"

A romantic comedy about a Beverly Hills high student who tried to arrange every-one else's romantic lives but discovers she may have completely misjudged her own. Rated PG-13.

"SPECIES"

A science-fiction thriller about a genetically engineered alien hidden in the body of a gorgeous female whose purpose is to procreate and breed other aliens. Rated R.

"JUDGE DREDD"

An action thriller about a futuristic law enforcer who maintains order in a crime-ridden society by acting as a judge, jury and executioner all at once. Rated R.

"APOLLO 13"

A historical drama centering on the ill-fated NASA mission whose trip to the moon in 1970 was interrupted by a deep space explosion. Rated PG.

"POCAHONTAS"

An animated musical based on the story of Pocahontas, the daughter of a Powhatan chief and her love for English settler John Smith. Rated G.

"CONDO"

Based on the Michael Crichton best-seller, a group of explorers go to Africa in search of a diamond-rich lost city, only to find themselves trapped by an intelligent breed of gorillas who turn

man into endangered species in this action-adventure. Rated PG-13.

COMING SOON

"VIRTUOSITY"

A futuristic thriller set in Los Angeles about an ex-cop who hunts a murderous computer-generated personality who has brought himself to life. Stars Denzel Washington, Kelly Lynch, Russell Crowe, Stephen Spinella. Rated R.

"BABE"

A live-action comedy based on the children's book, "Babe, the Gallant Pig" blends state-of-the-art special effects with performances by animal actors. Stars Maggie Sotnick, James Cromwell, Jack Thompson, Sandy Gore. Rated G.

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- Janet Maslin, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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- Richard Corliss, TIME MAGAZINE

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- Jodi Siegel, GOOD MORNING AMERICA

"TWO THUMBS UP!"

- SKEET & EBERT

WHEN YOU WEIGH FOUR TONS,
IT'S HARD TO BE A SECRET WEAPON.



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