

Kids will like 'Free Willy 2' paint-by-numbers redo

BY PATRICIA HIBBY
AP NEWS FEATURES

"Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home" is a paint-by-numbers film that looks darn good from a distance — but just don't inspect it too closely. What you'll find is a slick, formulaic redux of the original "Free Willy" blockbuster, complete with the heart-stopping image of Willy flying through the air to jump a barrier.

Even with that said, however, this is still a fun summer ride that will have kids squealing in their seats.

After 1993's box-office bonanza of "Free Willy," it was inevitable that studio execs would look to a sequel to milk more from this "boy-meets-whale-and-finds-his-best-friend" story.

But in the first film, Willy, the giant lovable orca, is set free. So the first challenge was to find a way for Jesse (Jason James Richter), the lost boy looking for his biological mother, to meet up with Willy.

The film's director Dwight Little tackles this straight away when the wise old whale watcher Randolph (August Schellenberg) recognizes Willy's eerie cry on a high-tech piece of equipment he keeps on his boat.

With that part of the canvas painted the appropriate shade, Little looks to the next block to color the designated hue. This would be the "coming-of-age" sec-

REVIEW

tion of the film that has Jesse meeting Nadine (Mary Kate Schellhardt), Randolph's cutie-pie granddaughter.

Then there's the New Republican "family values" section that introduces Elvis (Francis Capra), Jesse's hitherto unknown half-brother from New York. Elvis provides the filmmakers with the chance to show that given a "normal" two-parent environment any child can be rehabilitated into a sweet, loving person.

Elvis arrives at the home of Jesse's foster parents, Glen and Annie Greenwood (Michael Madson and Jayne Atkinson), with a Grand Canyon-size chip on his shoulder. He's a little toughie who lies about anything and everything. His father is Al Pacino; his mother was born on an aircraft carrier at sea, he has bungee jumped in the Alps, etc.

The plot remains essentially the same, pitting man's greed against the whales' rights. This time the enemy isn't crafty marine park owners, it's the oil industry and the tankers it uses to transport crude.

But Little also layers in two other plots. One concerns the question of what defines family — is it biological or is it those with whom you live and love? The other is a first-love story between Jesse and Nadine.

It's as if the filmmakers don't trust one, simple story to hold the interest and attention of their young viewers and instead heap on the extra plots for good measure.

This hop-scooting from one plot to another, however, tends to distract and weaken the original story as each subplot sucks the energy out of the other.

But all is not lost. There are still some tremendously entertaining moments that center primarily on the scenes of whale romping. The shots of the majestic mammals breaching the waves still thrill. And watching Jesse and Nadine swim in with the animals in a gentle cove can't help but draw "ooooohhhhs" and "aaahhhhs."

Richter is on his way to becoming a pre-teen idol — if he isn't already — and his performance here won't disappoint. He's sweeter and more mature this time around. Capra, who appeared in Robert De Niro's "A Bronx Tale," proves to be a little scene-stealer as the mischievous Elvis.

The Warner Bros. release was produced by Lauren Shuler-Penner, Jennie Lew Tugend and Richard Donner. It is rated PG. — Parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.



BLIMBY DALE/WM

Family adventure: Jesse (Jason James Richter) happily greets Willy and his brother Littlefoot in Warner Bros.' "Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home."

'Clueless' is a sharp parody about California teenagers

BY DAVID GOODMAN
AP NEWS FEATURES

The poster for "Clueless," a comedy that spoofs the mores of rich teen-agers in Beverly Hills, is a little deceptive.

Three miniskirted girls are shown yapping into cellular phones under the tag line — "Sex, Clothes, Popularity. Is There Problem Here?" That suggests a cheap, schlocky film brimming with underage flesh and crude jokes, something along the lines of that cheesy B-movie "Valley Girls," or anything starring Pauly Shore.

In fact, "Clueless" isn't clueless at all. Writer-director Amy

REVIEW

Heckerling ("Fast Times at Ridgemont High," "Look Who's Talking"), has applied her sharp eye to California ways and come up with a clever parody of teen-age chaos in the 1990s with a genuine nod toward monogamy and family values.

As in "Fast Times" life centers around school and the mall. But while "Fast Times" focused on the kids who stocked the T-shirts and turned the burgers, "Clueless" deals with teens who go threesto max out Dad's credit card. The movie is not without its

problems. The cartoonish first half comes close to celebrating the wealthy superficiality of the fashion slavs at which it also pokes fun.

Heckerling has filled the screenplay with snappy and perceptive comments on today's pop culture. And she's confident enough in her actors and script to avoid including the usual gratuitous sex scenes.

The movie features Cher (Alicia Silverstone), an almost 16-year-old girl who doesn't mind hanging on to her virginity. Dad is a wealthy lawyer. Mom died in a "fluoride accident during a routine

liposuction." Cher's a princess who has everything — even a computer program to help sort her designer wardrobe.

With their perfect looks and perfect outfits Cher, and equally pampered best friend Dionne (Stacey Dash), are "way popular," the Queen Bees at snobbish Beverly Hills High.

But instead of lordling her power, like the sadistic characters in "Dazed and Confused," Cher is filled with sweet-spirited beneficence.

In her first comic role, Silverstone, best known for her work in "The Crush" and three

Aerosmith videos, gives real dimension to what could be a cardboard character.

Cher adopts and makes over the "clueless" Tai (Brittany Murphy), a new girl in school, who wears shapeless clothes and sings along to TV commercials.

Meanwhile, she is busy orchestrating a romance between two of her frumpy 40-ish teachers, partly because "old people can be so cute" and partly because if they are on cloud nine, it will be easier to "negotiate" for higher grades.

But Cher can't keep control of everything. Tai takes over as most

popular girl in class, and Cher can't figure out why she's unable to make a new boy fall head over heels in love with her.

Back home she's met her match, too. Former stepbrother Josh (Paul Rudd) moves into the mansion. He's a UCLA student who wears Amnesty International T-shirts, watches CNN and listens to "complaint rock."

The Paramount Pictures release is rated PG-13. "Clueless" is produced by Robert Lawrence and Scott Rudin. Co-Producers are Adam Schroeder and Barry Berg.

"SPELLBINDING: THE BEST MOVIE OF 1995."
DAN GUN, CHICAGO DAILY HERALD

"★★★★★ THE SUMMER'S MOST
"THRILLING MOVIE ADVENTURE."
MICHAEL WHEELER, NEW YORK POST

"TWO ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP!"
JIM KILLIP, USA

"★★★★★ A NOVEL AND MAGNIFICENT MOVIE.
It's one glorious ride for the audience."
JIM KILLIP, THE DETROIT NEWS

HANES, EASON, TAYLOR, SHERIDAN
APOLLO 13

AMC ARREY 8 AMC AMERICANA WEST AMC BEL AIR 10 AMC LAUREL PARK
AMC SOUTHWEST CITY AMC STERLING CTR. 10 BEACON EAST 21 CANYON
21 CANYON
SHOWCASE 5 5 5 5
STAR LINCOLN PARK 89 STAR ROOSTER HILLS
CALL 774-7477 FOR THEATRE & SHOWTIMES

"A HEART-STOPPING
THRILLER IN THE
TRADITION OF 'ALIENS'
BUT FAR
SUPERIOR!"
- PAUL WHEELER, NEW YORK POST

"THE SCI-FI
EVENT OF THE
YEAR... IS HERE!"
- THE NEW YORK TIMES

"THE SUMMER'S
MOST THRILLING
TWO HOURS!"
- THE NEW YORK TIMES

S P E C I E S
OUR TIME IS UP

AMC ARREY 8 AMC AMERICANA WEST AMC BEL AIR 10 AMC LAUREL PARK
AMC SOUTHWEST CITY AMC STERLING CTR. 10 BEACON EAST 21 CANYON
21 CANYON
SHOWCASE 5 5 5 5
STAR LINCOLN PARK 89 STAR ROOSTER HILLS
CALL 774-7477 FOR THEATRE & SHOWTIMES