

It's hammy, but enchanting 'Babe' dares to be different

TICKETS PLEASE



JOHN MONAGHAN

When it comes to kids' movies, "Babe" is a different animal. It has arrived on area screens without action figures or McDonald's giveaways. This live-action fable from Australia about a pig who fights his destiny will find loyal fans among kids and adults.

Babe, won in a raffle at the town fair, is the only pig on Hoggett's Sheep Farm. Life after Christmas supper appears pretty dim until a nurturing border collie takes the little pig in and treats it as one of her own.

Soon Babe makes friends with almost all the animals on the farm. Its success with the sheep gives the farmer an idea: train the pig and enter it in the national

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sheep dog competition. The notion doesn't sit well with Rex, the barnyard stud who could have been a contender before his hearing failed.

The movie exists on a farm both out of place and time. Family members arrive at Christmas. Walkmans and fax machines in tow, criticizing the old-fashioned way the farm is run.

The other inhabitants of Hoggett's Farm include a daffy duck who beats the rooster to the morning wake up call; a pampered Persian cat who hates it when other animals invade the farmhouse; and a motherly ewe who can't understand why Babe would want to fraternize with "wolves," her terms for the dogs.

No more peanut butter under the gums to coax these animals to talk. A combination of digital effects and Jim Henson-style ani-

matronics do the trick, with fetching vocal work by Australian and American actors.

Based on the book by Dick King-Smith, "Babe" has been brought to the screen by producer and co-writer George Miller, quite a departure from his work on the "Mad Max" movies. He hands directing chores over to first-timer Chris Noonan, who also co-wrote the script.

Since the title character is seen in almost every shot, some 48 piglets appear throughout the course of the movie. The matches are perfect, right down to a little flock of dark hair atop the head of the otherwise white pig.

The human acting, meanwhile, is delightfully hammy, especially apple-cheeked Magda Szubanski as the farm wife who cheerfully tolerates her husband's dotty ideas. James Cromwell approaches the farmer with quiet resolve, except when he's dancing a jig to help the pig feel better.

The message, about finding your place in a world of conformity and preconceptions, is simple

and heartfelt. Fortunately, the filmmakers don't make a plea for the audience to all become vegetarians, though chances are you'll have trouble looking at a strip of bacon the same way again.

If the enthralled audience I enjoyed "Babe" with is any indica-

tion, the porker's fame will go way beyond the sheepdog trials. It's a movie that deserves a wide audience, sending a message to Hollywood that heart beats hype every time.

"Babe" is rated G.

To leave a message for John Monaghan, dial 953-2047, mailbox number 1866, on a touch-tone phone, fax him at 691-7279, or write him in care of *Entertainment Observer & Eccentric News*, papers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

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"Dangerous Minds"
A drama based on the real-life experiences of Ms. Marie LouAnne Johnson who left behind 10 years in the service to become an inner city high school teacher. Stars Michelle Pfeiffer, George Duhamel, Courtney B. Vance and Robin Bartlett. Rated R.

"A Kid in King Arthur's Court"
A family adventure about a 14-year-old Southern California boy who finds himself transported back in time to medieval Camelot. Stars Thomas Ian Nicholas, Josh Ackland and Katie Winslet. Rated PG.

"A Walk in the Clouds"
A tale of romance, passion, family and

tradition about a young returning GI who after a chance encounter, agrees to pose as a young woman's husband, and help her face her domineering vineyard owner father. Stars Keanu Reeves, Ariane Sanchez-Gil, Anthony Quinn and Giancarlo Giannini. Rated PG-13.

"The Usual Suspects"
An intense and stylish thriller, where the line between policemen and con-men becomes blurred. Stars Stephen Baldwin, Gabriel Byrne, Chazz Palminteri, Kevin Pollak. Directed by Bryan Singer.

OPENING FRIDAY, AUGUST 18

"MORTAL KOMBAT"
Action adventure features a group of fighters, some with superhuman powers, who compete for the title of mankind on a mysterious island. Loosely based on the best-selling home video game. Stars Christopher Lambert, Linden Ashby, Tasia Soto, Robin Shou. Directed by Paul Anderson. Rated PG-13.

"THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB"
Based on the top selling book series by the same name, the story of one summer in the lives of seven younger women in the care of their teenage years, bound by friendship, challenged by adventures, family crises and romantic entanglements. Stars Peter Horton, Ellen Barkin, Brooke Adams and Bruce Davison. Rated PG.

"BEYOND RANDOM"
On a vacation to the Far East to escape a tragic past, a young man embarks on a dangerous "unofficial" tour when her passport is stolen, and learns the true meaning of friendship and courage. Stars Patricia Arquette, Uluogba Kofe, Frances McDormand and Spalding Gray. Rated R.

"LIE DOWN WITH DOGS"
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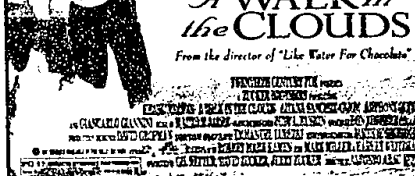
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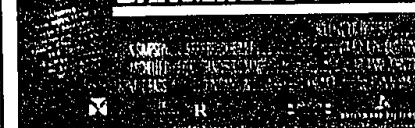


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DANGEROUS MINDS

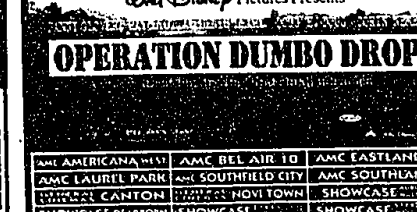
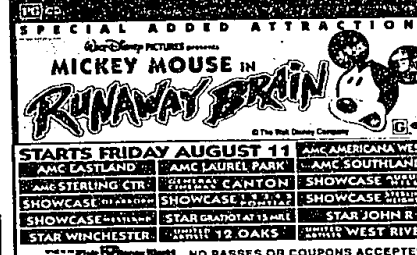
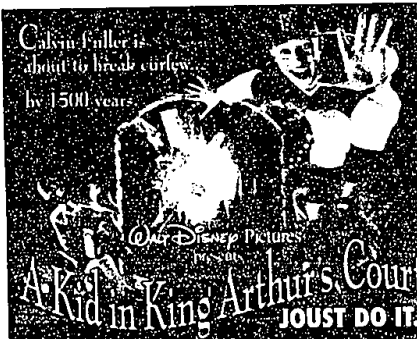


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