

## FILM REVIEW

There goes  
the neighborhoodFrom left: Gustaf Skarsgard, Torkel Petersson and Thomas Ljungman star in *Patrik Age 1.5*, directed by Ella Lemhagen.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZEUS INTERNATIONAL

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

*'Patrik Age 1.5'*  
tells an uplifting  
story that won't  
leave a saccharine  
aftertaste

Swedish bureaucracy and middle-class hypocrisy come in for some gentle ribbing in *Patrik 1.5*, in which gay couple Goran and Sven apply to adopt a child and settle into a picture-perfect middle-class neighborhood. They don't have an easy time of it, but surprisingly, director Ella Lemhagen has not had to resort to the considerable armory of hackneyed gay jokes to get laughs, nor does she find it necessary to get mired in the hot, sweaty passions which dominate the "gay interest" films that have such a large presence at alternative film festivals.

Goran and Sven are trying to establish themselves as a couple; properly married with kids, a garden, and maybe even a dog. They want to be open, even if this gives their straight neighbors something of a shock. Goran, a doctor, who refers to Sven as his "husband," is a gentle soul who we gradually discover is the stronger of the two, even though he lacks Sven's aggressive masculinity.

Lemhagen deals with the relationship between Goran and Sven with great sympathy, showing them first as a perfect couple in the face of uncertainty, gaucheness and sometimes outright hostility from those around them. Sven wants to share Goran's dream, but as a former party animal with a barely suppressed addiction to cigarettes and whiskey, and a resentful ex-wife and angry teenage daughter, he finds the difficulties of the adoption process overwhelming, pushing him back towards his old habits.

The film flirts with social realism, but this is a bit of a tease, and *Patrik 1.5* is essentially a feel-good movie in which all the characters, with only one exception, both gay and straight, are treated with sympathy. After a remarkably deft introduction to the gay couple and their new neighbors, *Patrik 1.5* moves into more conventional comedy territory when the couple discovers that because of a typographical error, the child they are to adopt is not a cute one-and-a-half year old, but a 15-year-old social misfit who tells Sven proudly that he once kicked a gay man in the face.

But this homophobic sociopath is shown to be more fearful than frightening, even as he accuses Goran of being a pedophile and tells



the social welfare services he worries he will be raped. It helps that Thomas Ljungman, who plays Patrik, is a dead ringer for an adolescent Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and his sullenness is able to morph into a wary smile of great charm. One of the straight neighbors, in a misguided attempt to make nice with Goran, talks about how he managed to leverage hiring a Polish maid into a summer of cheap sex, suggesting that his neighbors have hit on a pretty good deal themselves.

The script manages the tensions between Patrik and his foster parents well, as Goran and Sven feud over having Patrik in the house. Gustaf Skarsgard plays Goran with great feeling, capturing his vulnerability in the face of verbal barbs and emotional turmoil while still making him convincing as the stronger and more mature member of the relationship. The quality of the acting helps to move the story along at a good pace, providing plenty of emotional depth and making the film seem more substantial than it actually is.

That all will end happily is never really in doubt, for Lemhagen's treatment is far too good natured to allow for a sudden turn into tragedy. Nevertheless, the emotional payoff at the end does not come too easily, and there is a sense of satisfaction when all works out in the end, even though we knew it always would.

## OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

## Salt

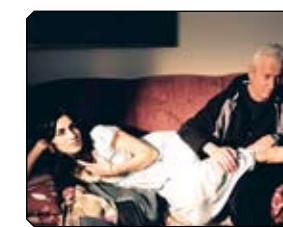
Angelina Jolie shows herself, one again, to be a match for the boys as an action hero. Her Evelyn Salt, CIA agent on the run from, well,



just about everybody, blows Tom Cruise and his ridiculous *Knight and Day* out of the water in terms of solid action, with an emphasis on real stunts that hurt and a minimum of CGI. This is a spy thriller on the lines of a James Bond adventure, with a plot that does not bear close scrutiny, but enough happens on screen that you don't really care. Daniel Craig had better watch his back, because Jolie is close on his heels as the coolest secret agent around.

## Jaffa

Well-crafted version of a perennial love story that goes back to *Romeo and Juliet*. Mali, a young Israeli woman, and Toufik, a Palestinian mechanic who works in her father's garage, fall in love in the town of Jaffa. Mali is an almost invisible member of her family, whose members lavish all their attention on her brother Meir, a sullen, lazy boy who will inherit his father's auto business. Ethnicity, religion, class, as well as a good dose of jealousy and possessiveness, all get in the way of a happy ending. Fine acting by Dana Ivgy as Mali and good support from the rest of the cast give this low-key and rather mournful romance its appeal.



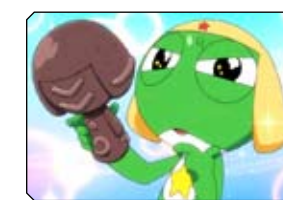
## Piecing Me Back Together (Matataki)

Originally scheduled for last week, *Piecing Me Back Together* is based on a best-selling novel by romance author Ren Kawahara. A story of young love interrupted by the terrible consequences of a traffic accident, the film features established names in the leading roles. For those in search of a good weepy melodrama, this fits the bill.



## Keroro: The Movie 5

More adventures of Sergeant Frog (Keroro), the green frog-like alien, and his earthy companion Fuyuki Hinata, a young lad obsessed with all things paranormal. Japanese girl group SKE48 was brought on board to do some of the voices, and a theme song by J-Pop idol Ayaka Hirahara is expected to bring in fans. In this anime adventure, Hinata finds a carved image that greatly resembles his alien companion Keroro and sets out to discover how it came to be found on Earth. Strictly for fans.



## Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf Desert Trek: The Adventures of the Lost Totem

A feature film version of the Chinese television series for young children that screens on MoMo Kids TV (Momo 親子台). The title says it all. The goats and the wolves are in a constant battle, and the wolves, despite all their evil schemes, always come off worse. For the very young.



## Film Notes

## PATRIK AGE 1.5

DIRECTED BY:  
ELLA LEMHAGENSTARRING:  
GUSTAF SKARSGARD  
(GORAN SKOOGH),  
TORKEL PETERSSON (SVEN SKOOGH),  
THOMAS LJUNGMAN (PATRIK),  
ANNIKA HALLIN (EVA),  
AMANDA DAVIN (ISABELL)LANGUAGE:  
SWEDISH WITH CHINESE SUBTITLESTAIWAN RELEASE:  
TODAY

## FILM REVIEW

## Lunar toons and cookie capers

*Originality takes a backseat to fast-paced storytelling in 'Despicable Me'*

BY A. O. SCOTT

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Is there a meaningful distinction to be drawn between exercising the imagination and just making up a bunch of stuff? When it comes to children at play, probably not: The pleasure of inventiveness matters more than the quality of the particular inventions. But children's entertainment, made by grown-ups at great expense in anticipation of even greater profit, is another matter. The difference between inspired creation and frantic pretending is the difference between magic and mediocrity, between art and junk,

or to cite a conveniently available example, between *Toy Story 3* and *Despicable Me*.

Directed by Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud and produced by Universal Pictures and Illumination Entertainment — a new player in the lucrative and competitive world of feature animation — *Despicable Me* cannot be faulted for lack of trying. If anything, it tries much too hard, stuffing great gobs of second-rate action, secondhand humor and warmed-over sentiment into every nook and cranny of its relentlessly busy 3D frames.

The movie relies on the funny voices of popular television and movie performers (many of them associated with other properties in the NBC Universal corporate family), most notably Steve Carell, who whimsically adopts a quasi-Russian accent in the role of Gru, a supervillain. Gru is equipped

with a disapproving, emotionally distant mother (Julie Andrews); a wisecracking nemesis named Vector (Jason Segel); a grouchy old scientist sidekick (Russell Brand); and a swarm of cute little yellow minions, whose mostly nonverbal chirping and squeaking provide a heavy, derivative dollop of cuteness and merchandising opportunity.

And just in case those industrious little doodads (they look like extra-strength pain-reliever capsules with eyes and limbs) weren't cute enough, the film supplies three adorable orphans with old-lady names who melt Gru's stony heart not long after he adopts them.

Do you want to know why? It has to do with his plan to swipe a shrink-ray gun from Vector and use it to steal the Moon. Vector has a weakness for cookies, and the three little girls — a brainy,

sensible older one named Margo (Miranda Cosgrove), a tomboy named Edith (Dana Gaier) and Agnes (Elsie Fisher), a baby-faced pixie who is crazy for unicorns — sell his favorite kind door-to-door for the benefit of Miss Hattie (Kristen Wiig), the keeper of their Dickensian orphanage.

Are you choked up yet? You might be before the picture is over, but only because the alternative would be the kind of snarling fury that would make you feel bad about yourself. *Despicable Me*, its title notwithstanding, means no harm and tries so hard to be likable that you may hate yourself for hating it. Its vision of evil is a man with a pointy nose, an exotic accent and a turtleneck sweater who wants to snatch the Moon because his mommy never loved him enough. Gru is an underachiever,

a perpetual second-place finisher behind the smug Vector, with his family connections, his track suits, his modernist mansion and his repertory of inane, done-to-death catch phrases ("Boo-yah" and "That's what I'm talkin' about!").

It's difficult not to see some of Gru's inferiority complex reflected in the movie itself, which labors mightily to distinguish itself in a terrain dominated by Pixar and DreamWorks Animation. The tender bond that forms between Gru and his adoptive daughters, cemented with bedtime stories and spontaneous trips to a 3D-maximizing amusement park, strives for a Pixaresque purity of feeling, while the winking, occasionally crude humor and pop-culture allusiveness, as well as Gru's grumpiness, veer toward Shrekland.

Gru's grand criminal scheme,

## Film Notes

## DESPICABLE ME

DIRECTED BY:  
CHRIS RENAUD AND PIERRE COFFINWITH THE VOICES OF:  
STEVE CARELL (GRU), JASON SEGEL  
(VECTOR), RUSSELL BRAND (DR  
NEFARIO), KRISTEN WIIG (MISS HATTIE),  
WILL ARNETT (MR PERKINS), DANNY  
MCBRIDE (FRED MCDADE), JEMAIN  
CLEMENT (JERRY THE MINION),  
MIRANDA COSGROVE (MARGO),  
JACK MCBRYER (CARNIVAL BARKER/  
TOURIST DAD), DANA GAIER (EDITH),  
ELSIE FISHER (AGNES), JULIE ANDREWS  
(GRU'S MOM)RUNNING TIME:  
88 MINUTESTAIWAN RELEASE:  
TODAY

which involves skittering robots baked into the cookies and then ever larger and more elaborate gizmos and flying machines, is as hectic and desperate as *Despicable Me* itself. The filmmakers seem motivated above all by the terror that if things slow or quiet down for even a second, the audience will either fall asleep or throw a tantrum. And so the projectiles (aren't you glad you paid that extra fee for the 3D "experience"?) keep coming, interrupted by wisecracks and snippets of teary sincerity.

The few moments of genuine visual or verbal wit only highlight the paucity of real originality or artistic confidence. So much is going on in this movie that, while there's nothing worth despising, there's not much to remember either.