

# The Daily Eastern News

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will be cloudy with highs in the mid to upper 30s. Friday night will be mostly cloudy with lows in the low 20s. Saturday will be partly sunny with highs in the low to mid 30s.

## 'A Christmas Story'—a surprise under the tree revives spirit

I get a little disgusted when the pre-Christmas promotion gets geared up before Thanksgiving dinner ever hits the leftover stage. In mid-November I'm not thinking of Christmas yet; I usually get my seasonal burst sometime in August when I'm starting to get burnt-out on the summer.

But this year an un auspicious little gift has helped me catch my second wind a little early. I saw *A Christmas Story*.

Made by director Bob Clark, the slob who brought you both *Porky's* and *Porky's II*, *A Christmas Story* could cause prospective viewers to have some reservations. Can you trust a man whose idea of humor elevated voyeurism to a high comic art? Pay to see a movie with no stars in it? Aren't seasonal theme movies a bore?

Ho! Ho! Ho! Wrong on three counts, because *A Christmas Story* is not what one would expect from Clark. The warm retelling of a particularly memorable December in the mid-40s just seems all the better because of the negative expectations it carries with it.

The movie centers on the Parker household, a middle class family leading a normal middle-American life in post-Depression Indiana. We follow the story through Ralphie (Peter Billingsley), a moon-faced 9-year-old in pursuit of the ultimate male child's Christmas toy—a Red Ryder 200 - shot air rifle with a compass and sundial set into its stock.

He's dropping hints all through the house, and envisions defending the family fortress from invading criminals with the gun he's already affectionately dubbed "Ol' Blue." But when he finally brings the subject up at the breakfast table, he's met by the "classic mother BB-gun block."

"You'll shoot your eye out," she says. But that doesn't stop the determined

Ralphie, as he goes about finagling to get that gun under the Christmas tree by any means necessary.

The adult Ralphie narrates the story, reflecting on the child Ralphie's actions like some older and wiser conscience. The voice is that of Jean Shepherd, author of the book "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash," upon which this movie is based. His commentary provides many of the film's wittiest moments as he illuminates the inner workings of Ralphie's mind on subjects common to the Midwestern youngster mentality: school, cuss words, bullies and parents.

When he accidentally says "the queen mother of dirty words" one night, his mother grills him until he tells where he heard it.

"Of course I'd heard my father use it a hundred times over his work," the narrator says, "but I couldn't say that. In my blind panic I said the first name that popped into my head—"

"Schwartz!"

His mother is immediately on the phone to Mrs. Schwartz informing her about what her son had said in front of Ralphie. Then we hear the young Schwartz being beaten and screaming "Whadidldo? Whadidldo?"

With the Norman Rockwell-look given to everything from the snowy street corners to the dining room table settings, *A Christmas Story* dredges up some of the warmest, funniest nostalgia in years. The child's perspective of a visit to Santa and the scenes of the boys getting dressed by their mother can stand alone as gems of genuine satire.

I certainly wouldn't have expected this from Bob Clark, but there isn't even a taint of rip-off to *A Christmas Story*. The lack of box-office names helps us familiarize ourselves with the characters that much sooner, though Melinda



Dillon already has proven herself to be a capable mother in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Peter Billingsley, as Ralphie, is a joy to watch. When he beams innocently at his teacher after presenting her with a fruit-basket the size of the *Nimitz*, his grin is reason enough to laugh. He's better recognized as Messy Marvin on the Hershey's Instant Chocolate commercial, but the benign mayhem he creates in *A Christmas Story* is better than any trouble he's ever caused on TV.

Through the way it is being marketed and kept quiet, *A Christmas Story* will probably slip out of the theaters without much notice. And that is a shame. This is a movie no one will see; it deserves better. It's insightful, funny, and a great boost to the morale of what every Christmas could be. You owe it to yourself to add this to your list—it isn't even in the same league with Hollywood's latest turkeys.

—Steve Sandstrom