

'My Dinosaur Life'

Reviewed by Lindsay Cryer
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

In the opening track of its fourth album, "My Dinosaur Life," Motion City Soundtrack insinuates that it "deserves a gold star" — but the band only merits a silver or bronze this time.



Courtesy of
alternativeaddiction.com

With its newest release, the band — best known for upbeat pop-punk songs such as "The Future Freaks Me Out" and "Everything is Alright" — has issued its desperate attempt to prove its worth.

But its pleading outcry should be silenced sometime near the fourth track and first single of the album, "Disappear," whose clichéd chorus — comparing loneliness to "an angry island, a bitter bee sting" — rings just as hollow as the first three tracks.

The lyrics and instrumentals are reminiscent of almost any pop-punk band circa 2004. Both will bring readers back to the days of Hawthorne Heights' "cut my wrist and black my eyes" — maybe with less eye makeup.

According to Motion City Soundtrack, songs about angst and confusion are back in style.

Perhaps the most outrageous of the tracks is "Delirium," the band's effort to appear mentally unstable — something best executed by Say Anything's front man Max Bemis, not these wannabes — by helplessly stating that they "swim in pharmaceuticals," for lack of better imagery.

The most redeeming song is the lighter "Stand Too Close," which coyly reminds listeners of falling in love after "years of sweet resistance falling overhead."

By the end of the album, listeners will be crossing their fingers for a wholesome acoustic ballad to clinch the album. They'll be let down by "The Weekends," another harder-core song indistinguishable from the rest.

This time around, the guitars strum louder and the beats aren't as friendly as they used to be. Motion City Soundtrack may be trying to climb the ladder of musical popularity, but they have only remained true to the lyrics in "Skin and Bones": "I'm just skin and bones/ there's no mystery... we just grow up to fade away."

Listeners can only hope the fifth album will make everything "alright" again.

Grade: C-
Download: "Her Words Destroyed My Planet," "Stand Too Close"

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A 'Bone' to Pick

Cluttered book adaptation misses the mark

Reviewed by Kristen Karas
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Turning great books into equally great films is a difficult but not impossible task. There is no filmmaker who should understand that better than Peter Jackson, the Oscar-winning director of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Unfortunately, Jackson entirely missed the mark with "The Lovely Bones," a messy and utterly boring adaptation of Alice Sebold's best-selling novel of the same name.

The film not only relies too heavily on computer-generated graphics, but it also ignores some of the novel's key plot elements.

"Bones" follows Susie Salmon (Saoirse Ronan), a young girl who is murdered and narrates the story from a heaven-like world known as the "in-between." Susie watches her family as each member tries to cope with her death, as well as her murderer (Stanley Tucci) as he attempts to cover up his crime.

The film is a mess. Its tone jumps around so frequently — from teenage angst to inappropriate humor to horror-film creepiness — that it never quite stabilizes, leaving it strange and unengaging.

Jackson created a breathtaking and imaginative world with the "in-between," a young girl's fantasy filled with rapidly blooming flowers and giant ships-in-bottles that could rival "Avatar." But as gorgeous as the graphics are, they interrupt the more interesting story taking place on earth and halt the film's plot in awkward places.

Jackson's casting is also hit-and-miss. Some characters were incredible, including Tucci as the murderer neighbor George Harvey, a portrayal that will most

certainly garner him an Oscar nomination. Michael Imperioli of "The Sopranos" is also perfect as the detective assigned to Susie's case, while the chain-smoking, cosmetics-obsessed grandmother could not have been better cast than with Susan Sarandon.

Mark Wahlberg and Rachel Weisz, however, are horribly miscast as Susie's suburban parents. Wahlberg in particular retains his tough-guy persona in a way that dilutes his character's development. While the father's obsessive search for his daughter's killer should seem unusual for his character, it's hard to believe a guy like Wahlberg wouldn't act this way naturally.

Lastly, Ronan's Susie grows irritating over the film's progression. While Ronan is fantastic in the scene just before her death, her dreamy-voiceover is bland and uncomfortable throughout the remainder of the film.

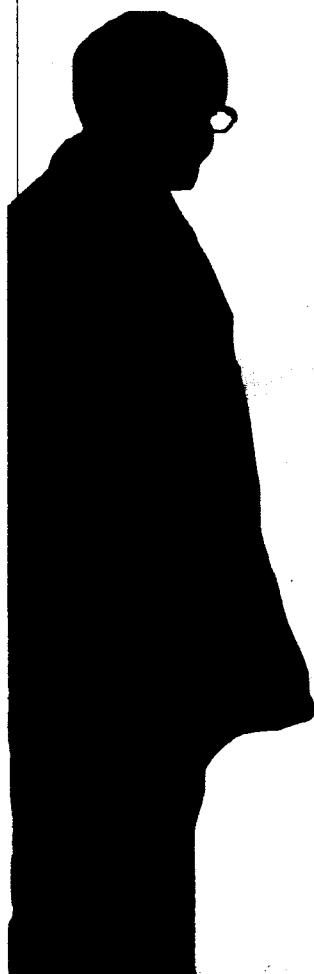
Jackson also fails to include some crucial story aspects from the novel. One storyline involving the mother is completely ignored, taking away from an interesting development of the Salmons' marriage.

The Ruth and Ray characters (Carolyn Dando and Reece Ritchie, respectively) — both classmates of Susie's — are also mismanaged. Their characters are never developed and leave viewers who didn't read the book wondering why they are included at all.

"The Lovely Bones," which had great source material and included a top-notch cast and director, should have been a no-brainer. Instead, it wound up a grave disappointment and one of the most boring films of the year.

Grade: D+

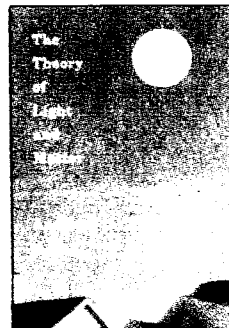
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'The Theory of Light and Matter'

Reviewed by Stephanie Goga
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The short stories in Andrew Porter's "The Theory of Light and Matter" have a special way about them. In each story, it feels as if the reader has dropped in unexpectedly on a stranger. After hearing some of the stranger's innermost secrets, the reader floats easily out of his life at the end of the story, which usually ends as jaggedly as it began.



Courtesy of
andrewporterwriter.com

The 10 stories in Porter's collection may not all be about earth-shattering events, but they each feel that way when they're delivered with Porter's polished

prose and talent for turning the ordinary into the exceptional. Just when the reader dismisses a story line as too simple, Porter pulls the reader back with a zinger.

The book, reissued as a Vintage paperback this month, won the 2007 Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. The honor is much-deserved.

The standout story of Porter's collection is its namesake: "The Theory of Light and Matter." The college student-professor romance is a plot that has been written to death, and at first glance, readers may consider skipping another attempt at capturing a May to December relationship. But Porter somehow creates an utterly believable and memorable ode to the subject. Readers will cheer at this fresh interpretation.

Another brilliant piece is "Skin," a two-page story that is thin on words but thick with emotion. Its haunting undertones and inconclusive ending will linger with the reader throughout the rest of the book — and perhaps even after it's over.

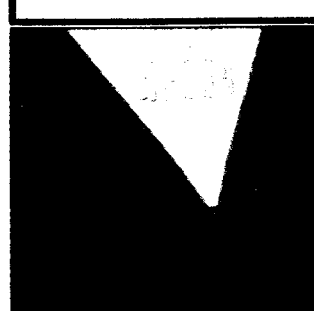
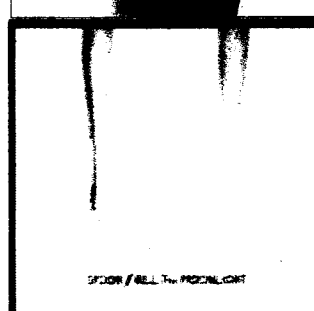
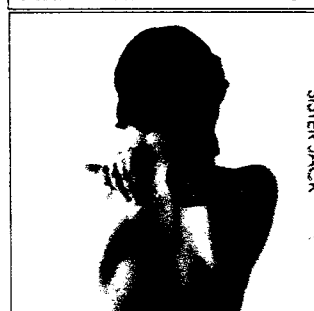
Other stories take the reader on journeys to rural Amish country, suburban neighborhoods and a cottage in New England. Each time, the reader is delightfully welcomed into the action and sated with rich description and sharp looks at interpersonal relationships.

Readers should note that there aren't any feel-good stories in this bunch. Every character seems to be struggling with some insurmountable obstacle, and because of the stories' condensed lengths, they usually don't overcome said struggle. With stories written as beautifully and wisely as these, though, it's easy to forgive Porter.

All 10 of the stories, as fleeting as they are, are completely unforgettable. In just a few pages, Porter invites the reader into the lives — and the hearts — of his flawed but charming characters. Simply by turning the pages, the reader is able to empathize with these vividly written characters and envision the poetic scenery — and learn a lot, too.

Grade: A

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HANDFUL OF SUGAR

Indie band's latest album builds on past successes

By Nick Weingartner
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Make no mistake — Spoon is in the business of making real records.

Along with only a handful of other working artists — namely Radiohead, Green Day and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs — they are making true albums, rather than just collections of songs. A real record stands the test of time because its songs are linked to each other, tied to some central theme or sonic exercise. It's the musical equivalent of a novel, rather than a collection of short stories. Every song is a chapter, and it doesn't make sense unless it's told as a whole.

For too long, the music industry has been busy trying to kill the record, forcing bands to release what end up being Greatest Hits compilations from whatever time period they recorded in. Each song is its own entity and is to be sold as one. See iTunes for an example.

Yet still, Spoon fights. The funky indie-rock outfit has been man-birthing a steady collection of records throughout the majority of its career, but only came into the public light after some of its songs were included in the movie "Stranger Than Paradise."

With "Transference," Spoon crafts its lightest release since 2001's "Girls Can Tell," retaining the pop sensibility the band has cultivated since "Gimme Shelter" and "Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga."

The record emerges from the darkness with "Before Destruction," which sets the tone of the entire album. A steady acoustic guitar leads a lonely acoustic guitar, and a distant frontman Eric Denton sings metaphorically ambiguous lyrics: "Even though you let your eyes close, you're still here — at least."

believe?" The song flows seamlessly into the jumpy "Is Love Forever?" which has Daniel chasing the beat.

Songs like "Written in Reverse" — the album's first single — sound great standing alone, but they're even better in the context of the record. The song hits hard on the piano, which is about two octaves away from being discordant. The guitar and bass get funky, and Daniel screams his soul out, singing "I'm not standing here" as the background harmonies hang above him like a badly printed "Happy New Year" sign, sagging where they should sag but looking perfect for the occasion.

The album embraces its roots in rock — the watermark of great rock would "Pinkerton" sound as good as Rivers Cuomo wasn't on piano. How about "In Utero" — who says that isn't Nirvana at its angst-core?

Though this is nowhere near the purest of diminished quality those two albums, it does contain the same soul. The harmonies are a bit flat, Daniel isn't always on key, but he has his hands on some notes, and the guitar and bass sometimes stumble.

But in doing this, Spoon creates a gem that is almost impossible to

miss. This isn't an album you can skip on iTunes. This is an album you will have to listen to, and you will have to listen to it again, giving up the idea of "I've heard it all" and "I've heard it all" as a result of the band's honest and beautiful music.

Grade: A-