Homeward Bound will appeal to all ages

HOMeward BOUND: THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY
Directed by Donnny Dunham. Screenplay by Carol Anne Thompson and Linda Wawelwicz based upon "The Incredible Journey" by Sheila Burnford. Animal voices provided by Michael J. Fox, Sally Field, and Don Ameche. Lost in a Pond

By Joshua M. Andrews

Although the latest Disney release is clearly intended for a juvenile audience, it is very funny and sophisticated enough to appeal to a much broader base of viewers.

Homeward Bound relates the tale of three pets: Shadow, a golden retriever, Sassy, a Himalayan cat, and Chance, an American bulldog puppy. They are given to a neighbor while their family goes on vacation. When the owners do not return after a week, the animals begin to suspect that there is trouble and decide to escape from the neighbor and travel back home. Their journey through the wilderness is fraught with mishaps and triumphs and they emerge a closer knit "family" of pets, as it were.

This is a healthy dose of anthropomorphism in the movie, but it is not carried to extremes. Wherever possible, the writers attempted to keep the apparent actions of the animals true to the general character of these domesticated pets. The young dog is rambling, chasing squirrels and porcupines, and learning why these are not smart things to do. The cat is aloof, concerned always with cleanliness.

The script is very nicely written, and the interplay among these two characters is truly delightful. Sassy chides Chance for chewing up a shoe. "Want some?" asks Chance. "I'm not into leather," replies Sassy.

The script is not without the coyly clever, one oft finds in Disney films, though. In the course of the movie, the children become accepting of their new foster father, as the movie (unlike the original film version of the book) deals with the family to which the pets belong. The animals even chip in their share of philosophy. Shadow (voice by Don Ameche) explains how to be man's best friend in one of the sillier scenes.

The best parts of Homeward Bound are the shots of the animals in action. The animal trainers started with eight dogs (four for each part), ten cats, and a host of cameramen, producing some amazing footage. Chance navigates the tops of several toppling garbage cans, Sassy flies through the air (landing on all fours, of course), and Shadow faces a mountain lion. The best scene is one in which Sassy falls into the water and is carried downstream while the tries best to stay afloat.

Entertaining dangers, including a ferocious bear, await Chance and his partners as they travel in the wild in Homeward Bound.

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