



## FILM

## Cartoon with a conscience

Jenny McCartney

DR. SEUSS' THE LORAX |

U | 86 mins | ★★★★★

SEARCHING FOR SUGAR

MAN | 12A | 86 mins | ★★★★★

EL BULLI: COOKING IN

PROGRESS | 12A | 113 mins |

★★★★★

**T**he Lorax, like almost every children's film nowadays, luxuriates in eco-guilt, which can sometimes be painful for the watching adults, although children seem actively to enjoy it: perhaps they are naturally immune to the sting of self-flagellation. For my part, when I hear these perky laments about how we are wrecking our world, I feel like closing the curtains and never going out again.

Still, at least Dr Seuss got in there early: *The Lorax* is adapted from his quirky, dark 1972 story, about a grim, concrete town in which lurks a ruined creature known as The Once-ler, who – as a greedy young aspiring businessman – chopped down a glorious area filled with soft-tufted Truffala Trees in order to make an adaptable garment called a “thneed”. In so doing he aroused the guardian of the trees, or Lorax, a short moustachioed creature who – in the film – looks a bit like a sweeter version of Yosemite Sam, the scourge of Bugs Bunny. But the Lorax (Danny DeVito) could not stop the Once-ler (Ed Helms) from laying waste to the forest, although hope remains in

a single seed.

This version, by the makers of *Despicable Me*, has been padded out with a 12-year-old boy, Ted (Zac Efron) who goes in search of a tree to impress a nature-loving girl (Taylor Swift) and acts as the trigger for the Once-ler's tale. His opponent is a tiny, gangsterish mayor of Thneedville, Aloysious O'Hare (Rob Riggle), who is bent on selling purified air in plastic bottles. It's self-consciously cuter, busier and more obvious than the Seuss story, filled with zesty, forgettable songs, although a pleasing hint of the curly energy of the original drawings remains in the animation. An unnecessary layer of knowing irony has been cast over Seuss's confidently crazy poetry, but I suspect children will enjoy this film nonetheless – even if it does sacrifice a large measure of its strange literary magic to the god of sturdy cinematic entertainment.

Much more unexpected is a little gem of a documentary film called *Searching For Sugar Man*, about the dogged hunt by a couple of South African fans to find out what happened to an American singer of Mexican descent called Sixto Rodriguez, whose album *Cold Fact* was inspirational to white liberal youths protesting in apartheid-era South Africa. Rodriguez – a shy and mysterious figure around Detroit, his high cheekbones habitually

framed by sunglasses – was unaware of his runaway success in South Africa, where he sold an estimated half a million albums. He remained virtually unknown in the US, where his career dwindled and finally ground to a halt, reportedly ending with his suicide on stage.

This film is much better if you come at it knowing nothing – please resist a

ECO  
WARRIOR

Danny DeVito voices the part of moustachioed guardian of the trees, the Lorax

preliminary Google search – and allow yourself to be carried along by the findings of the amateur “musicologist detectives”, two engaging characters called Craig Bartholomew and Stephen “Sugar” Segerman, a Cape Town record-shop owner.

With hindsight, the artful structuring of Malik Bendjelloul's film feels faintly manipulative, but it none the less works well, and the story itself – which combines powerful themes of obsession, disappointment, endurance and reward – is tremendously touching. Certain questions hang in the air, such as where the royalties from Rodriguez's South African sales

disappeared to (the mercurial former head of his record company, Clarence Avant, becomes noticeably irritable on this point) but the broad thrust of the film lies in the charmed territory where hope meets happy accidents.

Gereon Wetzel, the director of *El Bulli: Cooking in Progress*, takes almost as unconventional an approach to the business of documentary-making as his subjects in the famed Catalan restaurant do to the art of cooking. He films *El Bulli* while it is closed, as its creative head chef, Ferran Adrià – in partnership with his team Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch – invents a new menu with which to bamboozle and delight prospective customers.

There is drama, but it is determinedly low-key, and circles doggedly around the nitty-gritty of the proposed menu, such as what Adrià will make of the austere hazelnut oil, water and salt cocktail, first tested by Xatruch.

One has the sense of being allowed a private viewing of Willy Wonka's factory, as Adrià drives his chefs to create “magic” with their unexpected reductions, pastes, and use of nitrogen (foam, once *El Bulli*'s signature mode of delivery, is banned lest it grow stale). At first, I grew a little bored: Wetzel makes no attempt to show us Adrià's life outside the restaurant, save for a trip to a seafood vendor, and one is left in the dark as to whether he ever tucks into simple, hearty peasant dishes at home. But gradually the nuance grew on me, not least the dynamic of Adrià's relationship with his chef Castro, who teases his exacting palate with fresh combinations and weighs success or failure by the subtle motions of Adrià's eloquent brown eyes.

## ON NOW

## 1 The Dark Knight Rises

(12A) Final film in Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy will leave you cold **2 Salute** (PG) Fine Olympic doc about the force for change effected by 1968's 200 metres medallists **3 In Your Hands** (15)

Kristin Scott Thomas gets

Stockholm syndrome **4 The Amazing Spider-Man**

(12A) Andrew Garfield with a performance to Marvel at **5 Magic Mike** (15) Steven Soderbergh gets under skin of male stripping industry

## DVDs

Alan Stanbrook



★★★★★

LA CEREMONIE | 15 | Artificial Eye, £15.99

Claude Chabrol's 1995 adaptation of Ruth Rendell's *A Judgement in Stone* stars Sandrine Bonnaire and Isabelle Huppert in a spine-chilling domestic drama of revenge. Chabrol is on peak form and both actresses are tip-top.



★★★★★

MARGARET | 15 | 20th Century Fox, £19.99

Kenneth Lonergan's film, six years in the making, is released thanks to Martin Scorsese and his editor Thelma Schoonmaker, who powered it when its 150-minute running time put it at risk. Gripping throughout, Anna Paquin, Matthew Broderick and Matt Damon dismantle the self-satisfaction of Bush Jr's America.



★★★★★

EXTREMELY LOUD &amp; INCREDIBLY CLOSE

12 | Warner Bros, £19.99

The title relates to 9/11 as described in Jonathan Safran Foer's 2005 bestseller, but Stephen Daldry's film has no new perspective. It's packed with stars – Tom Hanks, Sandra Bullock and Max von Sydow – and is an attempt to mirror America's reaction. The result is quality film-making without new thought.

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