

Roger Rabbit: A real happy movie surprise

By Kathy Amen

Who Framed Roger Rabbit? Directed by Robert Zemeckis; written by Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman; produced by Robert Watts and Frank Marshall for Touchstone. Starring Bob Hoskins, Joanna Cassidy, Christopher Lloyd. Rated PG (some subtle sexual references, some mild vulgarity).

Well, well, well. It would seem that, occasionally, there is something new under the sun. Or, at least, under the theater marquee. *Roger Rabbit* is the most innovative and totally different movie to come out of Hollywood since *Fantasia*. And to the delight of all kinds of moviegoers, it's also one of the best. The Roger of the title is a "Toon"; that is, a cartoon character with a real, independent existence, who interacts freely with humans off-screen. Although he's a rabbit, he's carried to a sultry "human" nightclub singer whose physical endowments could only be drawn, never actually grown.

His jealousy over her rumored affairs has started to affect his work. And when a real human who has been seen in her company turns up

dead, Roger is the main suspect. Down-on-his-luck private eye Eddie Valiant (Hoskins) begins to suspect Roger is innocent, though. Together the human and the "Toon" not only solve the murder case, but unmask a plot against the whole of Toontown.

The technical brilliance of *Roger Rabbit*'s special effects is certainly responsible for a lot of its appeal. Over half of the movie consists of scenes with "Toons "acting" in a real environment. The acting, though, must also take a lot of the credit. Hoskins in particular seems perfectly at ease with the "Toons. Even though we realize that he had to play these scenes without his co-stars, who were drawn in later.

Roger Rabbit's story is based on the most unreal premise imaginable. Its production design, on the other hand, has the gritty, realistic look of *Chinatown*.

The themes of the story -- grief, alcoholism, marital infidelity, high-level corruption -- aren't exactly



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'Cuff him

Maroon Studios' contract star Roger Rabbit (left) is in dire need of down-on-his-luck detective Eddie Valiant's (Bob Hoskins, right) services in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, the first film to be directed by Robert Zemeckis since *Back to the Future*. Presented by Touchstone Pictures and Steven Spielberg in association with Silver Partners III, the movie is produced by Robert Watts and Frank Marshall from a screenplay by Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman based on the book *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?* by Gary K. Wolf.

children's movie fare. But the presence of "Toons like Dumbo, Daffy Duck, etc., bring the look of Saturday morning to the movies.

Being pulled in different directions like this, *Roger Rabbit* would have plenty of excuses to be a failure. That it is an astonishing, delightful success is one of the movie year's happiest surprises.