

## Monkey business

'Curious George' low on pop-culture jokes to keep spirit of books.

See Page C4



# Go!

Your guide to music, movies, festivals, the arts and anything else that's cool

SECTION C

www.thejournalnet.com



Bank security expert Jack Stanfield (Harrison Ford) gets kidnaped in "Firewall." The movie is rated PG-13.

## Thriller too predictable to produce a sweat

Harrison Ford stars as a bank security expert who gets kidnapped in 'Firewall'

By CARLA MEYER  
SACRAMENTO (CALIF.) BEE

There's a scene early in "Firewall" that's supposed to establish bank security expert Jack Stanfield (Harrison Ford) as a devoted family man. It shows him sharing a moment with his wife (Virginia Madsen) before he heads to work.

An architect who designed the family's house, Beth Stanfield tells her husband of her plans for the day, which include working and dealing with the kids. He jokes that she needs a part-time job and she answers that she has one: taking care of him.

Instead of inspiring warm, fuzzy feelings of family, the sight of Ford, alternately grim and gruff at age 63, opposite Madsen, a fresh-faced 42, makes you wonder how Jack got so lucky.

The cynicism inspired by this scene lasts throughout "Firewall," mostly because the hostage thriller contains so little suspense. But it's also because Ford is too old for his role.

Even in Hollywood, where actors so often play age-inappropriate roles opposite age-inappropriate women, there are unspoken rules. That's why Clint Eastwood now exclusively plays old-timers, and why even the prettiest of senior leading men, Robert Redford, makes attempts to acknowledge his age in his roles.

Paul Bettany is spryer than Ford but never scary enough as Bill, the criminal gang leader who wants Jack to use his computer acumen to skim money from bank customers. The ice-blue-eyed Bettany never approaches the standard bearers for ice-blue-eyed villainy.

The movie does spring to life at a few junctures. An attempt by the family to escape, for instance, produces nail-biting tension, at least for a few moments.

Mary Lynn Rajsakub enlivens every scene she's in as Jack's hipster secretary. Rajsakub's got a weird chemistry going with Ford.

She offsets his gruffness, and he seems more fatherly in scenes with her than he does with the kids at home.

### MOVIE REVIEW

#### 'Firewall'

- **Rating:** PG-13 for intense sequences of violence
- **Stars:** Two out of four

### MOVIE PREVIEW



Rebecca Romijn as Mystique jumps into the air in this scene from the new film "X3." Other stars returning for the third installment of the "X-Men" franchise include Hugh Jackman and Halle Berry. "X3" opens May 26.

## Your mission: Find a top flick in '06

Hollywood aims big with superheros, ordinary guys

By DAVID GERMAIN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### LOS ANGELES

In good years, Hollywood beats its chest and crows. "It's all about the movies!" In bad years, like 2005, Tinsel Town looks for something to blame and whispers, "It's all about the movies."

Studio honchos hope it was just a weak crop of flicks that resulted in a 7 percent drop in movie attendance last year and that doomsayers are wrong in predicting home-entertainment options have eroded the big screen's appeal.

If it really is all about the movies, 2006 stands a chance of turning Hollywood's slump around with a film lineup that — on paper, at least — looks like a winner.

You've got your man of steel and your

### INSIDE

It's true! The crop of promising 2006 movies continues.

Page C5



mutant superheros. You've got your pirates of the high seas and your over-turned luxury liner. You've got your cartoon cars and your talking animals.

You've got your action spectacle from Tom Cruise and your usual load of sequels and remakes, plus a couple of sobering films that will test audiences' tolerance for reliving national tragedy.

Tom Cruise stars as Ethan Hunt in "Mission Impossible III." The movie is set for release May 5.

### CAN'T MISS

#### 'Mission: Impossible III,' May 5

Cruise's third go-round as super secret agent Ethan Hunt pits him against Philip Seymour Hoffman, star of the acclaimed biography "Capote," who plays the bad guy in "M:I III."

#### 'X3,' May 26

The whole crew of those marvelous mutants are back, including Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry and Rebecca Romijn.

This time out, they find themselves being more accepted into a society that feared them as freaks only to face new turmoil when a "cure" is discovered for the mutant condition.

#### 'Superman Returns,' June 30

Admit it. For all the X-Men, Bat guys, Spideys and Fantastic Foursomes prancing around, the Boy Scout from Krypton is still your favorite superhero.

The film's premise: Called away on urgent off-world business, Superman comes back to Earth years later to renew his romantic dance with Lois and save us puny mortals, again.

#### 'Casino Royale,' Nov. 17

Craig, Daniel Craig. Don't let the blond hair fool you. He's James Bond.

Craig becomes the sixth actor to play Britain's super-cool agent 007, with Judi Dench reprising her role as spymaster M.

### SAFE BETS

#### 'The Shaggy Dog,' March 10

Tim Allen's resurrects the Disney franchise as a district attorney mutated into a bushy canine.

#### 'Miami Vice,' July 28

Michael Mann oversaw the TV cop show that helped define hip '80s style and music. Now he's got Jamie Foxx and Colin Farrell as his smooth new undercover cops as they take on Miami drug runners.

#### 'Charlotte's Web,' Dec. 20

The live-action adaptation the classic children's tale features Dakota Fanning and the voices of Julia Roberts, John Cleese, Oprah Winfrey, Robert Redford and Cedric the Entertainer.

## Downloads give choice of single servings

Some musicians offer option on their Web sites

By MARK BROWN  
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

If iTunes has changed anything in the music world, it has been a return to a singles-friendly era.

In the CD era "you had an incredibly cynical attempt by a very small number of publicly traded corporations to just leech every possible dollar out of music consumers," says Michael Bracy, policy director for the Future of Music Coalition.

Bracy refers to the fact that record labels raised the price of albums when they changed to the CD format, though CDs cost less to produce than vinyl albums.

Fans are still angry: three-quarters of music fans say CDs are too expensive, according to a poll conducted for The Associated Press and Rolling Stone magazine.

"You were forced into this package which isn't exactly the choice you wanted," says Paul Resnikoff, founder and editor of DigitalMusicNews.com, referring to CDs. "Maybe you just really wanted the three songs. The '80s mix tapes were all the rage but also a sign of rebellion — people listening to what they want to listen to."

"In the digital age they can make any mix they want. In fact they can have thousands of songs with a crazy playlist mix. It's all of a sudden infinite choice and a total solution to something that has been bothering people for decades," he says.

Artists such as Prince have taken to offering MP3 singles through their Web sites, bypassing the usual business model. Big Head Todd & the Monsters have taken it a step further — giving away nearly an album's worth of new music, one song at a time, free through their Web site, www.bigheadtodd.com.

"We took a long hard look at what to do with what is the next album," said Big Head Todd manager Mark Bliesener. The band had several offers from record companies to put out a traditional CD, but "what does it really do for their career?"

Unless a band sells hundreds of

(SEE SINGLE, PAGE C4)



Prince, pictured presenting the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 2005, is selling MP3 singles through his Web site, npgmusicclub.com

ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES PHOTO

## New cast members play impact roles in terminal existence of longrunning 'SNL'

Head writer Tina Fey says show is in generational shift

By JAKE COYLE  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### NEW YORK

"Saturday Night Live," like rock 'n' roll, is perpetually dying.

Throughout the 31 seasons of the NBC sketch comedy show, on a near annual basis, critics have written off "SNL" for not being what it once was.

When the immensely popular Chevy Chase left the show early in the second season, his replacement was derided. Three decades later, Bill Murray remains one of our most celebrated comics.

"It's been dying since the second season," says Lorne Michaels, the creator and executive producer of the long-run-



"Saturday Night Live" cast members, from left, Amy Poehler, Bill Hader and Andy Samberg appear during the show's Weekend Update segment. Hader and Samberg are among four newcomers who have made noteworthy contributions to the comedy show this season.

ning show. "It's always about reinvention."

In the four years since Will Ferrell was a cast member and two years since Jimmy Fallon departed, the present incarnation of "SNL" has been one,

Michaels says, of transition.

But the newest crop of cast members has helped energize this season of "Saturday Night Live." This year's four newbies — Bill Hader, Kristen Wiig,

Andy Samberg and Jason Sudeikis — have all made notable contributions.

"I think you're seeing the wave of the future," says Michaels, 61.

Tina Fey, who co-anchors "Weekend Update" with Amy Poehler and who is one of "SNL's" three head writers, agrees.

"I think there's a generational shift happening now," she says. "I feel, for sure, like a senior and there's a lot of great, exciting freshmen that are coming in."

The shaggy-haired Samberg has lately become immediately recognizable to viewers. His mock hip-hop video with Chris Parnell about cupcakes and "The Chronicles of Narnia," called "Lazy Sunday," was a huge hit online, where it was linked by blogs like Gawker.com.

Hader has proven himself with savvy impressions, including a hysterical, spacy Al Pacino. He's also experienced a few typical first-year roles, including playing a man frozen in a coma in one sketch.

"It got a laugh," Hader cheerfully defends his performance. "I've done speaking parts and not gotten a laugh."

Wiig already has a recurring character, a checkout lady at Target who couldn't be happier with her job, who races away from her register and off to the shelves to pick up each new product she spots.

Sudeikis, who was a writer for two seasons before entering the cast, has proven capable in carrying a skit himself, as he did in a virtual one-man sketch where he gradually descends from shopping for a wedding ring to trying to steal one.

If there is a star of "SNL" right now, it might be Poehler, who sees more screen time than anyone else. But it may be too early to proclaim whose generation this is.

"You only find out in retrospect that it was the 'Eddie Murphy Years' and the 'Will Ferrell Years,'" Fey says.