

AUTHOR DARES TO TACKLE REALITY

BIG LESSONS FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

SORRENTO'S Werner Stejskal has had a very busy three years creating the Oliver and Jumpy picture book series for young children.

"Oliver is a tuxedo-wearing cat and Jumpy is his kangaroo friend," the Austrian-born author said.

"They are best of friends and experience many adventures together.

"Oliver is very self-assured and actually says 'I love myself' quite often, but Jumpy is aware he is only putting up a front. Oliver has a soft heart and will always want to help others."

Stejskal said he was inspired to write the series after watching the movie *The Magic of Belle Isle* on a flight from Europe to Australia.

"In the movie, Morgan Freeman teaches a little girl to have imagination and write her first story," he said.

"This inspired me as well and the first stories with Oliver and Jumpy made their appearance.

"There are lots of fairytales and bedtime stories around and many of them are quite violent and unsuitable for young children.

"This made me decide to write something different."

He said he enjoyed writing for children.

"I like parents telling me how much their little ones enjoy the illustrations and fairly unusual scenarios," he said.

"I try to be very different with the quality of the illustrations and the language used; I believe in using adult language even with small children.

"I also try to incorporate little lessons and touch subjects other picture books may not dare, for example pregnancy and anti-smoking."

Stejskal has 20 books planned for the series, which features the work of five different illustra-



Children's author Werner Stejskal.

Picture: Martin Kennealey

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tors, and will then consider translating them to other languages.

Ultimately, he would like to turn them into a television series.

He is also considering a second series featuring an emu and a koala.

The books are available from www.amazon.com.

NO NEW LOOK THROUGH THE GLASS

THE directorial reins have been handed over but little else has changed in Disney's live action *Alice in Wonderland* franchise.

James Bobin takes over from Tim Burton but you would hardly have noticed, with the same focus on the visual aspect.

Despite all the CGI that money can buy, Bobin, who helped bring Muppets back to the big screen with the delightfully hip and fresh *The Muppets* (2011), fails to bring the same pizzazz.

After a fascinating and intriguing 20-odd minute opening setting up adult Alice (Mia Wasikowska) in a male-driven world of sea exploration and business, and her "anything is possible" beliefs challenged by her traditional mother, it quickly propels into a CGI spectacle in which the story instantly loses its dramatic edge.

Alice's real-life plight is all but forgotten in lieu of her mission to help save her mate the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp), suffering a depressive state over the death of his family years ago, and a slew of time puns and brain-twisting time-travel

logic. Ensuring a "get your money's worth" running time of almost two hours, we are treated to additional back-story for sisters White Queen (Anne Hathaway) and Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter) for dramatic weight.

The bright spark addition to the already abundant quirky and colourful characters is Sacha Baron Cohen as Time, who keeps time and guards the item that Alice needs to go back in time.

Plenty to look at (the designers have worked wonders), but little to engage with or grasp on to dramatically, *Looking Glass* is best described as enjoyably pleasant.

FEATURE FLICK

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS (PG)

★★★

Directed by: James Bobin
Starring: Mia Wasikowska, Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway, Helena Bonham Carter
Screening: from May 26
Reviewed by: Julian Wright



Johnny Depp and Mia Wasikowska.

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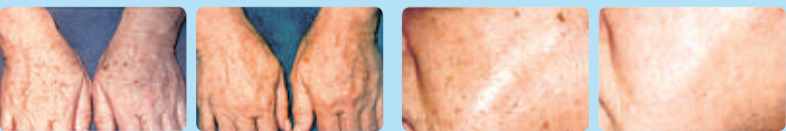
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