

# Diversions . . . with M.V. Moorhead

## 'Bridge of Spies' Cold War drama pays off with cinematic eloquence

Opening this week . . .

**Bridge of Spies** — This Cold War drama opens with one of those mesmerizing sequences that the mature Steven Spielberg does so effortlessly, as Soviet spy "Rudolf Abel" (Mark Rylance) is stalked by the Feds through the streets and subways of Brooklyn.

After Abel is captured in 1957, his defense is turned over to a staid Brooklyn insurance lawyer, James B. Donovan (Tom Hanks), who had worked on the prosecution at the Nuremberg Trials.

From there on, *Bridge of Spies*, scripted by Matt Charman and Joel and Ethan Coen, becomes a debate about the meaning of patriotic duty.

Donovan regards it as a point of national pride to provide Abel with a genuine best defense, while everyone from the judge (Dakin Matthews) to his wife (Amy Ryan) to the CIA creep shadowing him (Scott Shepherd) regards his role as a formality in a kangaroo court.

But a few years later, when U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers (Austin Sowell) is shot down and captured by the Soviets, Donovan's spirited advocacy in keeping his client out of the electric chair seems prescient.

He's asked by Allen Dulles (Peter McRobbie) to travel to Berlin, where the wall is just then going up, to unofficially negotiate the swap of Abel for Powers at Glienicke Bridge between Berlin and Potsdam in February of 1962.

## Whether iconic white rabbit or grisly disaster victim, costume designer revels in creative joys, challenges

By M.V. Moorhead

Sometimes it's a talking white rabbit, and sometimes it's a disaster victim. When you're a costume designer, you can never be sure who you'll be asked to dress next.

This sort of challenge is part of what drew Mallory Prucha to the field. The resident faculty in costume design and Costume Shop supervisor at Mesa Community College started out as a traditional artist, but liked the interdisciplinary quality of costuming.

"Originally in undergrad I had studied fine art but I found costume design to be a better application for my art," says Prucha. "It involves engineering, math and a bit of science."

Currently these hard sciences are being applied to one of the craziest of fantasies (though its author was a mathematician). Prucha is designing the costumes for *Alice in Wonderland*, MCC Theater Department's stage version of the Lewis Carroll classic that hit the stage Oct. 16.

"It's the 150th year since Lewis Carroll's text was published," Prucha notes.

Now a Tempe resident, the Omaha native did her undergrad work at University of Nebraska at Omaha, then went on to get her MFA in costume design at the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

She taught at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire and designed for productions ranging from the touring passion play *The Thorn* to *Othello* and *Pericles* for Nebraska Shakespeare.

During her time at UNL, Prucha says she met several students who had come there from MCC.

"I wondered what they were putting in the water out there," she says. "They were the best trained, the most

Hanks is terrific in the sort of Capra-esque hero part for which he's the modern go-to American star —

Spencer Tracy or James Stewart or Henry Fonda would have excelled in it, too. But Hanks makes it his own, giving Donovan a wry perplexity at how those around him don't quite get it; don't grasp that excluding foreigners or alleged enemies from full due process and civil protection is a betrayal of American values.

These issues never seem to go away, alas—Donovan's frustration will be familiar to anyone who ever felt like their head was going to explode in arguments over, say, waterboarding or Abu Grahib.

I'm not historian enough to say to what degree this story has been streamlined and made symmetrical for dramatic purposes.

Plenty, I'd guess. Nor can I say how much the movie's version of Donovan, or any other character, reflects the reality. But as drama, this low-key, sedately paced movie builds quietly, earning its emotional payoffs with both and verbal and cinematic eloquence.

**Goosebumps** — Just in time for Halloween comes this comedy-fantasy riff on the popular series of young-adult horror novels of the '90s.

The work of the insanely prolific R. L. Stine, the formulaic *Goosebumps* yarns featured young protagonists going up against zombies, ghosts, werewolves, blobs, abominable snowmen, giant insects, murderous garden gnomes and just about every other imaginable horror motif

(almost all of them, of course, pillaged from the movies).

Stine is an onscreen character in the film, played by Jack Black as a curmudgeon living in small-town Delaware.

It turns out that Stine's imagination is so potent that his monsters will "literally leap off the page" of the original manuscripts if their locked covers are opened.

Our young hero (Dylan Minette), a new kid in town who is drawn to Stine's daughter (Odeya Rush), inadvertently liberates all of the *Goosebumps* monsters.

Under the leadership of the evil ventriloquist dummy Slappy, they go on the hunt for their author, who they resent for their imprisonment in the books.

The storyline is silly, to be sure, but the script, by Darren Lemke (from a story concocted by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski), is a little wittier than you might expect, and Rob Letterman's direction is exuberant.

Black's short-fused, fussy, vain, self-dramatizing Stine is a study in broad and happy hamming; he seems to be channeling Gale Gordon.

*Goosebumps* is a trifle, certainly, but it's a funny and colorful trifle.

It would probably be a good family option for the season—grown-ups can get a kick out of it, yet on any but the littlest viewers, it's unlikely to raise any serious goosebumps.

*Bridge of Spies* is rated PG-13 and *Goosebumps* is rated PG; both play at Harkins Tempe Marketplace, Arizona Mills and other multiplexes Valleywide.

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inquisitive." So she jumped at the opportunity to join MCC's faculty, and has been in the Valley for three years now.

Says Prucha:  
"I love it."

Prucha has taken to the community so much that she has put her theatrical skills to use in a different arena.

"One of the specialized programs we do is to partner with eight different emergency response units, including Mesa Fire," she says. She and her students provide moulage (the creation of realistic-appearing simulated injuries) as well as video services and actors to play victims for trainings, including TPM ("Total Patient Management" disaster drills).

"There are more traditional ways [to interact with the community]," Prucha admits, "like outreach. But I like to find those strange connections."

Speaking of strange, back to *Alice in Wonderland*. What's her approach to this beloved tale?

"There are about 20 puppets, and about 10 actors that operate them," says Prucha, though some of the characters, like the White Rabbit and Alice herself, are not puppets. "We're doing it sort of steampunk style. It's a challenge to create a sort of neutral costume that speaks to the steampunk aesthetic but allows the actors to be anything from a flamingo to a dodo."

Does she have a favorite among them?

"Well, that's hard," she says, "But I just built the Dormouse and the March Hare puppets, and I think they're pretty adorable."

*Alice in Wonderland* runs Friday, Oct. 16, to Saturday, Oct. 24, at MCC Theatre. Call 480-461-7172 or go to [purplepass.com](http://purplepass.com) for details.