

## Disney develops big-screen versions of 3 classic attractions

Pirates of the Caribbean, Country Bears and the Haunted Mansion will become films, ensuring an eager audience.

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LOS ANGELES — Hollywood has a long tradition of looking outside itself for raw material, drawing on sources such as novels and plays, comic books, television shows and video games.

Now come theme parks.

Walt Disney Co. is developing three movies based on classic theme-park attractions, adding a new twist to an idea the company exploited a half century ago.

The movies — *The Country Bears*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Haunted Mansion* — are inspired by the iconic Disney at-

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tractions and will be released this year and next.

The movies mark a new chapter in the history of film and a new strategy for Disney, which until now has modeled its theme-park rides and shows mainly on its own movies, from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to *Lion King*.

Walt Disney built Disneyland in 1955 as a physical home for the cartoon characters he and his animators created on screen.

Walt Disney's idea of synergy or cross promotion, which other media companies now mimic, reaches new heights in the upcoming movies. The titles will already be familiar to millions of Americans who have visited Disney's parks in Orlando and Anaheim, Calif., providing Disney with a ready-made audience at a time when studios are competing fiercely to mar-

ket their movies.

By shining the light back on the company's classic attractions, the movies also will help promote Disney's theme parks.

"This just seemed to be so natural that we'd be crazy not to pursue it," Disney Studios chief

Dick Cook said. "These are Disney icons. They just lend themselves to movies."

Cook should know. The studio executive began his 31-year career at Disney as a ride operator, and his wife once worked at The Country Bears Jamboree show in Anaheim. "These films are the definition of the kind of films we want to do," he said. Disney may produce more such movies if the first three are successful, Cook said.

His experiment comes as Disney is testing new waters to improve its box-office performance with more family-oriented fare tied to the company's roots. Disney, challenged by rival hits such as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *The Lord of the Rings*, is seeking to reclaim its reputation as a leader in family movies.

Disney's new strategy also underscores how movies increasingly are becoming vehicles to market products, from video games to cars, film historians say.

"There's a tremendous paucity of new ideas today," said Rick Jewell, associate dean of the School of Cinema-Television at the University of