

# Brazil

Review by  
**Michael Sussman**

*Directed by Terry Gilliam; screenplay by Terry Gilliam, Tom Stoppard, and Charles McKeown; with Jonathan Pryce, Kim Greist, and Robert De Niro.*

You remember, of course, Orwell's vision of 1984. Try to imagine the internal mechanism necessary to support such a society. Picture the vast information network, the endless array of computers, and the hordes of bureaucratic lackeys required to maintain the system. Carefully label everything, then subject it all to military order. Now, add a very strong twist of comic imagination. What you have may resemble *Brazil*.

Be advised that *Brazil* (the movie) has nothing to do with Brazil (the country). The title is a metaphor for a world that doesn't exist—a fantasy land so far from reality that it is found only in escapist dreams. These dreams are the lifeblood of unassuming hero Sam Lowry. They provide his only private retreat from the dismal absurdity of his everyday world. In them, Lowry is transformed from a lowly, unambitious clerk to a shining warrior, a winged savior for a lovely, imprisoned damsel. Lowry's flights of fantasy,

brief as they are, provide him with an unexpected motivation for challenging the ubiquitous system.

Lowry's real world exists "somewhere in the twentieth century." It is a bizarre and ludicrous mesh of incongruous technologies, distorted values, and darkly comic juxtapositions. Consider the Department of Records. It is a beehive of gray flannel paper-shufflers and their preposterous computers. (Well, "computers" may not be the right term. They're manual keyboards attached to tiny black and white TV screens which are fronted by magnifying panels.) Whenever their supervisor turns his back, everyone else tunes into a Marx Brothers movie. This is where Lowry is content to work, until a bug gets into the system.

When a typographical error throws Lowry's boss into a state of extreme anxiety, the clerk volunteers to set things aright. This small act inalterably affects Lowry's life. Soon after, due to meeting the woman of his dreams, he becomes a thoroughly confused and desperate man. Not only must he save himself from the sinister Department of Information Retrieval, but he must protect his lady love. As if that weren't trouble enough, he also suspects that she may be a terrorist bomber.

Director Terry Gilliam has made a completely captivating, often hilarious film of a very gloomy subject. Unlike much of his work with Monty Python, *Brazil* is consistently intelligent

and steady in its fantastic vision. Rather than swerve about madly for gags, Gilliam exposes the status quo of his world as inherently absurd. When kidnappers routinely provide receipts for their victims, where the latest fashion in hats is shoes, any attempt at obvious slapstick would be superfluous. Gilliam rarely chooses that type of humor, allowing us instead to laugh at what is frighteningly credible.

The casting in *Brazil* is excellent. As Sam Lowry, Jonathan Pryce is properly plain and humble. He is content to uphold his end of the system, as long as his dreams remain free. Only when his fantasy is threatened does he turn to audacity. Kim Greist plays the female truck driver who Lowry falls for. She comes across as sincere and compassionate, but never weak. It is her insolence toward the system that makes her the subject of investigation. As the rebellious duct repairman, Robert De Niro is just wonderful. He is self-assured and direct as he performs his clandestine work, supplies a bit of hope, and vanishes into thin air.

*Brazil's* subject matter is not new to film, but it has never been treated with such imagination. The style and scenic design are brilliant. The story is appropriately insane. Even as I reflect on the creativity and wonder of individual scenes, I keep coming back to the sense of the whole, the feeling of a fantastic joy ride through a menacing, mundane hell. I heartily recommend *Brazil*.

## now showing

**Back to the Future:** A boy trips back to the past, and meets the teenagers who'll become his parents. Shows with *White Nights*. Mayflower (345-1022).

**The Best of Times:** Aging football jocks get a second chance at beating their old high school rivals. Stars Robin (Mork) Williams and Kurt Russell. Showing with *Spies Like Us*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Brazil:** An unambitious clerk takes on The System in this controversial, surreal comedy. Directed by Terry Gilliam (*Time Bandits*). Cinema World (342-6536).

**A Chorus Line:** Dancers reveal their desperations and desires at a do-or-die audition. Michael Douglas plays the demanding stage director in this film of Broadway's longest-running musical. Showing with *Runaway Train* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**The Color Purple:** Thirty years of growth for two Southern sisters. Steven Spielberg's cinematic version of Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. National (344-3431).

**Delta Force:** Chuck Norris rescues American hostages again. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Down and Out in Beverly Hills:** A bum in the land of silk and money. With Nick Nolte, Bette Midler, and Richard Dreyfuss. Springfield Quad (726-9073) and West 11th (342-4142).

**F/X:** A special effects (F/X) technician gets involved with murderous intrigue. Cinema World (342-6536).

**I Promise to Remember: The Story of Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers:** Documentary about this early rock and roll group whose music was popular with both black and white audiences. Shows with *Louie Blue*. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

**The Iron Eagle:** A retired Air Force colonel helps a young pilot rescue his father from nasty people. Stars Louis Gossett, Jr. Shows with *Youngblood* at Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Jewel of the Nile:** Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas return with this adventurous sequel to *Romancing the Stone*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**King Solomon's Mines:** Richard Chamberlain looks something like Indiana Jones while searching for African Treasure. Shows with *Young Sherlock Holmes*. Oakway (342-5351).

**Louie Blue:** The story of Howard Armstrong, 76-year-old fiddler, story teller, and living example of the spiritual roots of black American music. Shows with *I Promise to Remember*. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

**Murphy's Romance:** A young divorcee gets interested in a middle-aged pharmacist, but her ex-hubby comes around for a second chance. Stars Sally Field and James Garner, with music by Carole King. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Out of Africa:** Romantic drama about married author Isak Dinesen and the aristocrat she falls in love with. Stars Meryl Streep and Robert Redford. Directed by Sydney Pollack (*Tootsie, The Way We Were*). McDonald (344-4343).

**Quicksilver:** A young investment counselor starts his career over by becoming a bicycle messenger. Stars Kevin Bacon (*Footloose*). West 11th (342-4142).

**The Rocky Horror Picture Show:** Final weekend! ... until next time. Late show through Saturday at the Bijou (686-2458).

**Runaway Train:** High tension on a hurtling locomotive, with two escaped convicts and one unfortunate railroad worker trapped aboard. Not for weak stomachs. Starring Jon Voight (*Coming Home*). Shows with *A Chorus Line* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

**Sheer Madness:** Psychological drama of two women and how their friendship affects their relationships with their husbands. Bijou (686-2458).

**Spies Like Us:** Chevy Chase and Dan Aykroyd bungle their way through international danger. Shows with *The Best of Times*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

**Twice in a Lifetime:** Drama about a married man who leaves his wife for another woman. Very original. This time, Gene Hackman drops Ellen Burstyn for Ann-Margret. Cinema World (342-6536).

**White Nights:** A famous Soviet defector makes an unscheduled landing in Russia. Trouble for dancers Mikhail Baryshnikov and comrade Gregory Hines. Shows with *Back to the Future* at the Mayflower (345-1022).

**Wildcats:** Goldie Hawn as coach of a very rough high school football team. Cinema World (342-6536).

**Youngblood:** The sensitivity of ice hockey in the hands of young adults. Shows with *The Iron Eagle*. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

**Young Sherlock Holmes:** Holmes and Watson on their very first mystery. Shows with *King Solomon's Mines*. Oakway (342-5351). —Sheer Michael Sussman



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—Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun Times

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—Sheila Benson, L.A. Times

## Louie Blue

Oregon Premiere—February 14-20  
Shows Fri. & Sat. 7:30 & 9:15  
Sun. thru Thurs. 7:00 & 8:45  
Sunday Bargain Matinee 4:30  
And All Shows Monday \$3.00  
Louie Blue, the story of 76-year-old black musician, Howard Armstrong, had audiences cheering and critics exclaiming at this year's New York Film Festival. With the award-winning short film, *I Promise to Remember: The Story of Frankie Lyman & The Teenagers*, the first black rock & roll band to cross the color barrier.

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