

# ON SCREEN

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women set out to be world-beating track performers in the first place.

It's not hard to figure out why Towne chose the topic, though. Besides the inherent drama in unexplored, taboo territory, the filmmaker obviously has an aesthetic/erotic attraction to these particular women. It's betrayed by his camera's lavish attention to muscles, by one-too-many crotch shots, and by a comment that Moore's character — in Towne's voice, perhaps? — makes to Hemingway. "What do you think of that?" asks Hemingway warily, after learning Moore knows of her lesbian affair.

"I think we both like great-looking girls," he replies.

Michele Kort

## Death Valley

starring Paul Le Mat, Catherine Hicks, Stephen McHattie, written by Richard Rothstein, directed by Dick Richards

**D**eath Valley is not a bad film; it is *four* bad films: a boy's view of his parent's divorce, a conflict between technology and cowboy life, a pseudo-psychological study of twins, and a horror movie. *Death Valley* has been backed by the bucks of Universal, has beautiful cinematography and a not unknown cast, but it fails to achieve even the satisfying campiness of a B movie.

Stephen McHattie plays a set of twins who murder people for no particular reason (there is some vague reference to the fact that their father was a goldminer —?). Vagueness whips through the film like a sandstorm, tearing gaping holes in the plot. There is no basis for the previous marriage of Sally (Catherine Hicks), an airhead country girl, to Paul Stanton (Edward Herrman), a college professor. And their son Billy, the protagonist, turns from boy genius discussing electronics to little brat playing cowboy, even though he hates his mother's boyfriend (Paul Le Mat), he seems to want to please them.

*Death Valley's* only suspense relies on the murders, and the twin(s)' attempt to catch up with Billy, but we don't care about the victims (five slob and slobettes), and there is no reason to chase after Billy since he had no personal interest in the murders. He just wanted to get to the Grand Canyon (they're on vacation, see?). Neither fun, nor campy, nor scary, *Death Valley* is itself a fall down the Grand Canyon: it hits rock bottom.

Jody Eve Grant

## Urgh!

with 30 rock groups, produced by Micheal White, directed by Derek Burbidge

**U**rgh! is to movies what sampler albums are to music: a little taste of many flavors with no garnish, no spicy interviews, no salty social commentary. Just live music, neatly packaged, with minimal production costs.

The groups, in order of appearance (with one song each) are Police, Wall of Voodoo, Toyah Wilcox, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, Chelsea, Oingo Boingo, Echo and the Bunnymen, Jools Holland, XTC, Klaus Nomi, Go-Go's, Dead Kennedys, Steel Pulse, Gary Numan, Joan Jett, Magazine, Surf Punks, Au Pairs, Cramps, Invisible Sex, Pere Ubu, Devo, Alley Cats, Gang of Four, 999, Fleshtones, X, Skafish, UB40, and Police again. Much of the music is simple-minded, some simply awful, with an occasionally fascinating group that stays in the mind long after the movie ends. Klaus Nomi is outrageous, in white face, black lipstick, patent leather tuxedo and bombastic falsetto. My personal favorite. The Cramps, alas, are just ludicrous; the most interesting thing about their performance is wondering whether singer Lux Interior will lose his pants or gag on the microphone.

Unlike most films, *Urgh!* has a practical function: for those who have not yet embraced this

music, *Urgh!* lets them decide which artists they never want to see again, and which ones they'll pursue further.

And besides, it's relatively painless fun; just when I was ready to heave my seat (or my guts) at the screen, along came another group to distract, amuse, enrage or impress.

Judith Sims

## Tag

starring Robert Carradine and Linda Hamilton, and introducing Bruce Abbott. Written and directed by Nick Castle

**A** group of UCLA students embark on another round of extermination by rubber dart. Predictably, one student cracks under the pressure to win the popular campus assassination game and becomes a real murderer — a music major with a cache of decaying bodies in his dorm room. Left at that, *TAG* would be a passable movie of the week, but writer-director Castle adds depth, playing the drama against some very funny material. Hamilton plays a jaded but not yet cynical Beverly Hills cupcake who tries hard to be torchy, practicing steamy stares meant to fry male circuitry. And she succeeds! She is a Chandler female, confounding, pneumatic and vulnerable. Carradine is appealingly awkward with an occasionally stiff delivery.

The fun is that the characterizations aren't taken too seriously. From the game director, who fancies himself a G-man; to the campus news editor, a downy cherub as crusty as Walter Matthau, the laughs are there. Castle does miss on a few minor points. There apparently is not a locked door on the whole of the UCLA campus, a glaring assumption in this security-conscious time. Also, the students have a curious penchant for tossing textbooks into hedges when they are finished with them. His major offense, however, is the romantic clinch following the murderer's grisly death. They find it *arousing*? Better they should hug each other in relief. But despite occasional awkwardness, the film is entertaining, truly suspenseful, genuinely funny.

Darlene Guildner

## Missing

starring Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek, written by Costa-Gavras and Donald Stewart, directed by Costa-Gavras

**C**osta-Gavras' previous political films — *Z*, *Special Section* and *Stage of Siege* — combine the rage and commitment of his political point of view with the wham-bam technique of a cinematic thriller. These three films almost created a genre of their own, based in fact but executed like fiction.

*Missing*, like these earlier films, is based on a true story: as a result of the U.S. CIA's involvement in the 1973 assassination of Chile's Marxist president Allende and the subsequent military coup, an American citizen was killed; his father sued the U.S. government for complicity in his son's death, but the suit was eventually thrown out of court. *Missing* deals with the father's search for his son, and his eventual realization of the circumstances of his death.

Lemmon plays the stalwart America-right-or-wrong businessman who travels to the unidentified Latin country to find his son. The son's wife, Sissy Spacek, is, like her husband, a hippie of sorts, estranged from Lemmon. Most of the film is taken up with useless Lemmon-Spacek arguments and their equally useless attempts to find the son/husband — who is, of course, dead, presumably murdered because he was privy to CIA secrets babbled by an agent in a restaurant.

While I readily concede that it's better to see even this relatively timid (compared to Costa-Gavras' previous credits) expose of our shameful Chilean episode than to see nothing at all, *Missing* is still disappointing. It should have been tougher. It should have hit us with a slam, not a dull thud.

Judith Sims

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