

After the monthlong production wrapped, Rodriguez then faced a final challenge: playing artiste at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival. Having never done the "scene" before, she conducted advance research on the Internet, looking for advice. "It was talking about how [Sundance] is all about the art of making films, unlike Hollywood. It isn't just about making money and fashion



Kusama

and all this," Rodriguez says. "But...when I got there, it was like middle-class Hollywood." The attitude of a lot of festivalgoers underimpressed Rodriguez. "I was literally sitting down watching a movie, and... someone's cell phone would ring and they'd get up and say, 'Oh, well this movie's not good anyway,' and just walk out. Total disrespect."

Not, however, for *Girlfight*. The film netted the Directing Award and shared the Grand Jury Prize (with *You Can Count on Me*) and was snapped up by Sony Pictures' Screen Gems banner, which will release it Sept. 29. Rodriguez's performance jump-started critical buzz—and landed her a role in the Spike Lee-produced Showtime flick, *3 AM*. After that, audiences can catch her burning rubber with Paul Walker (*The Skulls*) in Universal's *Street Wars*, about illegal New York City drag races.

Ultimately, she says, she'd like to write and direct also: "Movies that can be adventurous, suspenseful, comedic, and dramatic at the same time, with different ethnicities, backgrounds, lifestyles. It can all be mixed into the ultimate film, and that's my goal," she says. "That's a big goal, isn't it?" Seems like she has a fighting chance. ●●●

HIGH TIMES  
Cusack sets  
quite a few  
records



## FAST FORWARD

upcoming  
releases

VIDEO

### SEPTEMBER

**Black and White**  
[Columbia TriStar, R] Nothing screams "poser" like Anglo dreads, which fall all over James Toback's largely improvised, overly theatrical study of hip-hop's appeal to white wannabes. But a distracting mishmash of celebs (including Ben Stiller, Brooke Shields, and Claudia Schiffer) dulls Toback's satirical point. B-

**Final Destination**  
[New Line, R] If you equate listening to John Denver with a fate worse than death, your fears will be realized in this thought-provoking (much talk about the nature of mortality) but often cheesily executed teen thriller about seven pawns struggling to cheat a determined grim reaper with a thing for "Rocky Mountain High." C+

**High Fidelity**  
[Touchstone, R] In 1989's *Say Anything...* Everyhunk

John Cusack wrote the book on modern teen heartbreak. Here, aided by his *Grosse Pointe Blank* writing team, a rocking soundtrack, and irrepressible costar Jack Black, he revisits that aching realm as a thirtysomething record store owner with an inability to commit. A

### OCTOBER

**American Pimp**  
[MGM, R] Directors Allen and Albert Hughes [*Menace II Society*] fix their cameras on the gutter aristocrats who thrive off the profits of prostitution. Opulently adorned with a funky soundtrack and clips from '70s mack-daddy cinema, this compelling documentary turns all the more unsettling when it lets the ladies tell their war stories. B+

**The Filth and the Fury**  
[New Line, R] "The punks ruined it," claims Sex Pistol provocateur Johnny Rotten of his copycat

fans in Julien Temple's riveting if band-sided doc about the incendiary rise and fall of the group that launched a music revolution. Confessional interviews, vintage concert clips, and seldom-heard-from manager Malcolm McLaren in a bondage mask—God save the anarchists! A

**Pitch Black**  
[Universal, R] Marooned on an arid distant planet, weathered crash survivors (led by Vin Diesel's captivating psycho murderer-prisoner) face off against nocturnal alien raptors in the middle of an eclipse. This is not your father's *Alien*, but it comes impressively close. A-

### NOVEMBER

**Chuck & Buck**  
[Artisan, R] Dawson's Creek writing alumnus Mike White and *American Pie* producer Chris Weitz deftly star in this touching but often creepy Sundance favorite about a wide-

eyed man-child named Buck (White) and his attempt to recapture the "special" friendship he once shared with boyhood pal Charlie [Weitz]. B+

**Mission: Impossible 2**  
[Paramount, PG-13] Who cares if director John Woo surrenders to balletic overindulgence while he tests the limits of Tom Cruise's spy fox with plenty of martial arts, shoot-outs, and motorcycle gymnastics? It's not Mission: Oscar Nomination. Mr. Hunt. It's Mission: Impossible. A-

### X-Men

[Fox, PG-13] Armed with a well-developed back story—courtesy of the wildly popular Marvel comic—director Bryan Singer capably translates the ongoing struggles of two edgy mutant factions to the screen. Considering Hollywood's generally misguided comic-book adaptations, capable is high praise indeed. B+ —Erin Richter