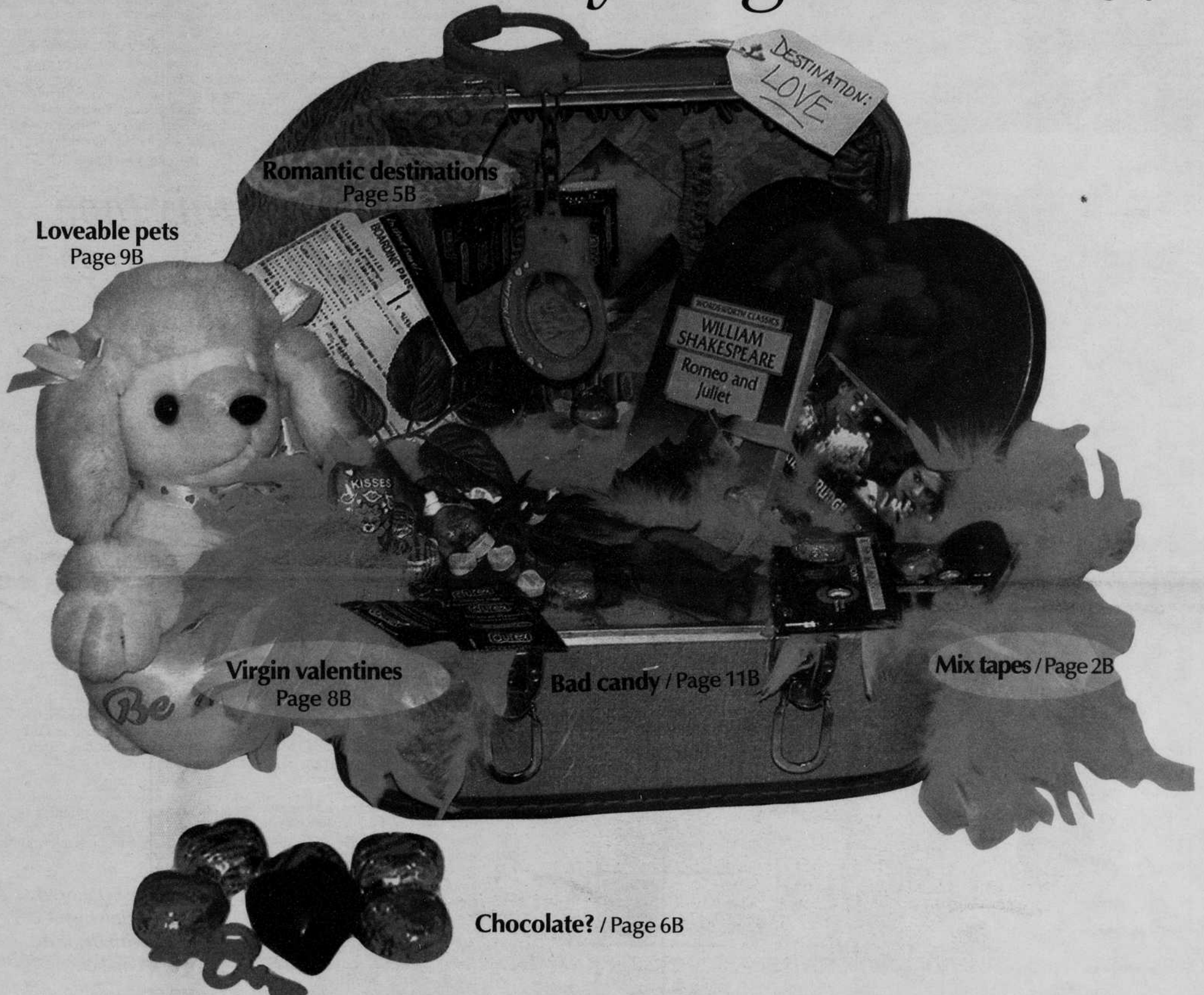


Valentine's Day special

How far would you go for love?



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'Romeo & Juliet': the ultimate love story

Shakespeare's classic play withstands the test of time and modern updates

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Pulse Editor

Whether Valentine's Day conjures up dreamy images of couples kissing or simply induces vomiting, there's no denying that love is in the air — and no twosome represents V-day's glossed-over, idyllic image of "perfect" ardor better than Romeo and Juliet. After all, the star-crossed lovers did go the ultimate distance for romance. They were willing to die — millions of times, on screens and stages all over the world — rather than sacrifice their passion.

Some historians contend the play dates all the way back to the late

1500s. As cheesy and overdone as the William Shakespeare classic has become in recent years, I must admit I'm obsessed with it — even the bastardized versions. Balcony scenes in ballets leave me breathless. Baz Luhrmann's urbanized 1996 movie version practically catapulted me (and thousands of other then-hormonal teens) into rapturous convulsions, much to the dismay of Shakespeare purists everywhere. The moment Romeo and Juliet initially glimpsed each other through a bathroom divider/aquarium set my little heart on fire — and still does. The subsequent elevator kiss sends me reeling every time.

My fixation might be embarrassing, except for the fact I know I'm not alone. Famous film spin-offs, lavish theater productions such as West

Side Story and never-ending references to the tragedy point to an entire culture marinated in sweet, sweet images of Montague and Capulet. Thus, began my Valentine's-inspired quest: To find someone who could understand and explain the iconography of our passion.

The search led to assistant professor of theater arts John Schmor. He seemed a logical discovery, given that he is currently immersed in directing the play, "Romeo and Juliet," which opens April 2 at Lord Leebrick Theatre. Schmor, who has been involved in the theater arts for 30 years, said he has always wanted to work on this production. He has several theories why the doomed lovers have become a cultural mainstay.

"One of (the reasons) is that we

don't have a better rendition of first love than the balcony scene," he said. "I can't think of a scene that does it as well."

He added that a wide range of audiences can relate to the story. "You can read this play at every age level, from a thousand different vantage points," he said.

The heart of this statement clicked on a light bulb in my head. Indeed, Romeo and Juliet memories and fantasies peek through layers of experience at every stage of life. As a child, I envied Juliet's fancy dresses and secret midnight meetings. Adolescence yielded to a different sort of longing: Visions of furtive lips brushing against one another ("O trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again"), the defiance of pesky parents, a secret wedding and, of

course, sex. Adulthood has led to the desire — albeit tainted with cynicism — for a love legitimate enough to warrant death. There's no doubt old age will someday leave me wistfully glancing back to a time when the pair's plight seemed feasible.

I carry the story with me like a child might hang onto an old blanket for comfort, and I think the rest of the Western world does, too. This makes sense, considering Schmor attributed Romeo and Juliet's unrelenting popularity to simple familiarity, saying "it's almost a commodity."

However, he added that this identification can be dangerous for production directors because people arrive with preconceived notions of the tale. Schmor said his take on

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