

## PULSE

Thursday, July 31, 2003



Jan Tobias Montry  
Unsatisfied customer

## Cast, plot illuminate upcoming film drivel

Ever had the displeasure of meeting one of those unreasonable people who insists on degrading a movie even though it hasn't come out and there are few reviews even available on which to base such drastic accusations?

I am one of those people.

I feel I have the innate ability, however misguided, to look at a movie's premise and its actors — hell, maybe just the movie poster — and make a determinative conclusion about its overall quality.

So, in hopes of annoying as many readers as possible with my cinematic predictions that have no basis, logically or factually, let's get started!

- "Gigli," starring divorce queen J-Lo and former badass B-Aff, is slated to sicken audiences starting in August. The premise is so incredibly terrible that I feel guilty repeating it in print. All you need to know before vomiting ensues is that lesbian assassin Ricki (Jennifer Lopez) is wooed into heterosexuality by big-haired hit man Larry Gigli (Ben Affleck).

OK, Jennifer, let me level with you. Just because I was forced to bite my lip and momentarily shed a tear at the end of "Selena" doesn't mean you can pollute the universe with more movies, especially when you take decent actors down with you. And Ben, you were damn good in "Chasing Amy," "Dogma" and "Good Will Hunting," but were downgraded to "pretty good" status after "Boiler Room." Now, I've put you somewhere between "does not work well with others" and "travesty of humankind."

- "S.W.A.T.," starring Samuel L. Jackson and some other random people, is sure to be a hit among movie fans who dislike substance, continuity and plot. The movie poster features a lone police gunman walking in the foreground while an entire city goes up in flames. That's a little overdramatic, wouldn't you say?

Couple that with the fact that "S.W.A.T." is adapted from an old television series and you have a doomed enterprise destined to be shelved on the discount rack for all eternity with "Charlie's Angels" and "Lost In Space."

- "American Wedding," starring the same old cast members who starred in the first two American Pie movies, will be recycling jokes again next month. Except this time, the creators of this stale trilogy are throwing in some subtle bestiality and a marriage. Mediocrity, start your engines.

But seriously, I admit I was a pretty good sport when I took my girlfriend to see American Pie as a senior in high school, and I even laughed at some of the jokes, overplayed as they were. And I can honestly say I made it through the entirety of American Pie 2, despite the pained grimace on my face as I witnessed the very same jokes that appeared

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# Beat the HEAT



Record temperatures have heat-worn locals looking for relief in cool lakes and air-conditioned malls alike

By Ryan Nyburg  
Freelance Reporter

With daytime temperatures rarely dropping below the mid-80s and often reaching the high 90s — and occasionally the 100s — escaping the heat has become a full-time occupation. Here are a few suggestions for getting out of the sun this summer.

Malls are prime places for escaping the outdoor heat. Both Valley River Center and Gateway Mall are spacious, air conditioned and offer plenty of food and drinks, so patrons don't have to leave until the malls close.

Movie theaters are also a common place to get out of the sun. Cinemark Movies 17 in the Gateway Mall, with its stadium seating and multitude of show times, is a popular choice.

"Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl," the swashbuckling throwback starring Johnny Depp, is one of the summer's most popular films, right behind another ocean-themed film, "Finding Nemo." Both are good ways to keep cool for a couple of hours.

Speaking of the sea, a trip to the coast and a dip in the Pacific Ocean might be in order. The waters off of the Oregon coast are known for their coolness, and almost constant waves make for good surfing, provided you can avoid rocks and a small great white shark population. Only 11 great white attacks have been reported in Oregon since 1929, so that's probably not worth worrying about, however.

A few lakes and rivers in the area are also worth a dip. Triangle Lake is a popular swimming hole, as is the Fern Ridge Reservoir, and rafting down the Willamette or the McKenzie rivers might be a good way to cool off a bit. Get off the Willamette before it reaches Portland, however, as the area has a history of toxic waste dumping.

A few other good lakes and rivers in the Willamette Valley include: Blue River Lake, Cottage Grove Reservoir, Detroit Lake, Dexter Lake, Hill Creek Reservoir and the Santiam River, all which offer boat access.

If the natural water supply holds no appeal, then public pools could be a better choice for water sports. The Sheldon, Echo Hollow and Amazon pools are all great

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## Refreshing 'Victor' honest, unnervingly familiar

By Steven Neuman  
Freelance Reporter

Director Peter Sollett's first feature film, "Raising Victor Vargas," is like taking a dip in the pool on a hot day — cool and refreshing. Yet, somehow, this film is far more satisfying.

The plot focuses on Victor's relentless hunt for the love of the oft-pursued — but chaste — Judy, but is punctuated by the growing distance between Victor and his tight-knit family. This story line is well-tread territory, but the incredible intensity of intimacy this film projects is due mostly to a very young and talented ensemble of unknown actors who are refreshingly devoid of cliché techniques.

Sollett has worked with the characters of Judy (Judy Marte) and Victor (Victor Rasuk) in a previous short film, and he coaxes some impressive performances from the actors. Victor's transformation from overconfident womanizer to exposed teenager comes across completely naturally, and the melting of Judy's reluctance is equally realistic.

Despite the strengths of Marte and Rasuk's performances, it is the supporting cast who tend to steal the scenes with a light humor tough to find in today's cinema. The reluctant love scenes between Victor's best friend Harold (Kevin Rivera) and Judy's best friend Melonie (Melonie

Diaz) convey the essence of youth through a sense of wonder and sexual naiveté that is incredibly charismatic and thoroughly charming. It's not the kind of sexy love scene that big studio films dish out, but Diaz and Rivera capture something dredged up from our collective memory of burgeoning sexuality.

Similarly, the scenes featuring Victor's guardian and eccentric grandma — expertly played the charming Altagracia Guzman — and Victor's sister and brother have a kind of realism that verges on voyeurism, somehow both unnervingly familiar and beautifully honest. This is most personified in a scene where Guzman, in a fit of desperation, comically attempts to hand Victor over to a social worker, only to find that what she was attempting is illegal. Moreover, the blatant self-consciousness of the scene where Victor's good-boy kid brother, Nino (Silvestre Rasuk), asks Victor for advice about girls and masturbation is simultaneously horrifying and hilarious.

"Victor" is not without its flaws, however. Sollett opted to for a certain degree of spontaneity in the project, and actors improvised most of the dialogue on the spot. The results are somewhat spotty; the transition from script to improvisation is often blatant because the scripted lines frequently lack the intimacy that abounds in the rest of the film. However, the momentum created by the rest of the energetic dialogue carries the viewer through these mo-

ments in most instances.

Still, Sollett manages to paint an almost impressionistic image of Victor's less-than-perfect love and family lives in New York City's Lower East Side. He systematically strips the city of the typical blues and grays and replaces them with heated reds and burning orange tones that belie the characters' Dominican Republic roots.

While this type of coloring is often distracting, "Raising Victor" uses it to seemingly transform

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otherwise nondescript ramshackle apartments into a backdrop more conducive to young love.

The camera work and editing is smooth, and despite some moments where the camera shakes like a "Blair Witch Project" scene, the cuts usually flow naturally, and the choice of intense close-ups creates a pristine sense of intimacy that many more experienced directors struggle to achieve.

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### Movie review