

Autumn at the movies

The next two months offer something for all cinematic tastes, from dark comedy to nonsensical adventure

By Steven Neuman
Freelance Reporter

After braving the wilds of a rocky summer movie season filled with overblown special effects and even more overblown promotions (think "Gigli"), average movie-buffs are now entering what is considered the "artsy" season for movies. Fall is a time when the studios scrape together any remaining shreds of dignity and put out some of the best movies of the year.

Sept. 26

Sofia Coppola's delicate direction of Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson in "Lost in Translation" has already won acclaim on the international film circuit — critics are already calling it Coppola's second coming — and it will be interesting to see whether the art can live up to expectations. The film centers around the chance meeting of a washed-up film actor who is shooting a whiskey commercial, and a photographer's wife in a Tokyo bar. The two immediately bond and go on a deep and apparently humorous adventure of soul searching that spans a weekend.

"Duplex" places Ben Stiller in yet another precariously comedic situation: This time he pairs with Drew Barrymore as one half of a hip New York City couple who stumbles upon the near-perfect duplex in the perfect neighborhood. The only problem is the duplex's other inhabitant, an elderly woman who is anything but sweet. Soon enough, Stiller and Barrymore find themselves trying to kill the neighbor from hell in what is sure to be a comedic paring from heaven.

"Under the Tuscan Sun" is like "The Money Pit," only set in Italy and without all the humor. Okay, so it's nothing like "The Money Pit," but Diane Lane does play an empowered and divorced middle-aged woman who sets out on a vacation to begin a new life, purchasing a run-down villa in Tuscany. As she

Spadde her way to self-fulfillment and fixes up her home, she meets a hunky local played by Raoul Bova and love (presumably) ensues.

"The Rundown" has all the makings of a spectacularly egotistical action/adventure flick. The Rock plays a bounty hunter who takes an assignment that sends him to Helldorado (no, that's not a joke) in the Amazon jungle to capture escaped convict Seann William Scott. As it turns out, the convict is simply an adrenaline-junkie kid looking for riches and a mythical mine that's filled with gold. However, Christopher Walken, once again playing the obligatory local evil character with an accent of ambiguous origin, wants the treasure for himself and plots to thwart the treasure hunters' plans.

Oct. 3

"The School of Rock" has some of the best buzz of any commercial film out this fall. Tenacious D frontman Jack Black plays a musician who gets ousted from his rock band, and out of financial and emotional desperation decides to take a position as a substitute fourth-grade teacher at a stuffy, preppy private school. The plot centers around a battle of the bands competition and how Black learns from his students, as they learn from him, in time to win the top prize. This role seems tailor-made for Black, and it looks to be hilarious.

Denzel Washington takes another stab at the genre that has defined his career in the average thriller-drama "Out of Time." Washington plays a respected chief of police in a small Florida town, who must solve a brutal double homicide before he himself falls under suspicion. The movie becomes a race of one man against his own police force, as he has to run from trusted friends and colleagues while solving the crime. The studio is betting this movie will be huge, but it's going to be hard to top "Training Day's" incredible emotional complexity and intensity.

Oct. 8

In a weekend of the big-director releases, Clint Eastwood pulls some tough punches as director of "Mystic River." Following the death of Jimmy Marcus' (Sean Penn) oldest daughter,

three childhood friends — including Penn, Kevin Bacon and Tim Robbins — reunite. Bacon is a police detective assigned to the case, who soon uncovers some disturbing evidence and is forced to wrangle his friend's rage and pangs for revenge.

The Coen Brothers do romantic comedy? "Intolerable Cruelty" is the story of a hot-shot Los Angeles divorce attorney (George Clooney) who is out to beat his client's ex-wife (Catherine Zeta-Jones) at her own game, while preserving his own client's bank account. The two apparently fall in love and hilarious hijinks and legal conflicts of interest ensue.

David Carradine is Bill, in "Kill Bill: Volume 1." He's the leader of a group of assassins who orders a hit on his top student, Uma Thurman. She takes a bullet in the brain on her wedding day, killing her unborn child. She awakens from a coma five years later, and decides to seek revenge, killing the members of the group and saving Bill for last. "Kill Bill" is split into two separate 90-minute "volumes," which will be released on different dates. Look for stars like Daryl Hannah, Lucy Liu, Vivica A. Fox, Michael Madsen and Samuel L. Jackson. Oh yeah, this little flick's directed by one Mr. Tarantino.

I don't know whether to cry or to cry harder at "Good Boy!" Liam Aiken plays young Owen Baker, who is happy to adopt a dog from the local animal shelter, but is surprised to learn that Hubble, his dog (voiced by Matthew Broderick), is a visitor from space. The dog is on a mission from Sirius — the dog star, get it? — to prepare Earth dogs for a visit from the Great Dane. This movie was, of course, already made, and it was called "Lilo and Stitch."

In the second indie horror chiller released this year — "The House of the Dead" — a group of controlled substance-happy teens sail out to an island near Seattle to attend a massive rave. The drugs take hold, but the flesh-hungry zombies aren't hallucinations, they're the trippy minions of a ghost named Castillo.

Oct. 17

Based on John Grisham's novel, "Runaway Jury" is the tale of the ma-

nipulation of a court trying a wrongful death case involving a major gun manufacturer. John Cusack is the man on the inside and Rachel Weisz plays the woman on the outside in what looks to be a promising fall thriller.

This remake of "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" looks about as interesting as any remake of a classic film: I'd rather take a chainsaw to the head than see this.

Cate Blanchett is "Veronica Guerin," an Irish investigative journalist who heroically risks her life by running a series of controversial stories exposing Dublin's underworld drug dealers. Based on a true story, Blanchett's performance is rumored to have imbued this character with amazing life.

Oct. 24

"Beyond Borders" deals with the romance between a disaster relief worker played by Clive Owen and a philanthropist socialite played by Angelina Jolie that evolves over many years and many locations. Add the Jolie-weirdness as a factor to that luscious and perverse mix, and you have a movie that is such a train wreck that Oliver Stone, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Ralph Finnes all ditched long ago.

Apparently someone sold their soul to the devil to get "Gothika's" cast together. Halle Berry is a criminal psychologist who encounters some mysterious circumstances when she awakens to find herself as a patient in the institution where she works, accused of committing a murder of which she has no memory. Penelope Cruz plays a mental patient and Robert Downey Jr. plays one of Berry's co-workers. On top of it all she has to deal with a vengeful spirit while she tries to piece together her recent past.

The third installment of the trilogy, "Scary Movie 3", spoofs everything from "The Lord of the Rings" to "Harry Potter," but the question remains: Without the Wayanses, will this franchise tank? Probably not, considering Kevin Smith penned a portion of this installation (they're working on No. 4). It looks as though the legacy may be better off without the brothers Grimm.

Turn to **MOVIES**, page 9D

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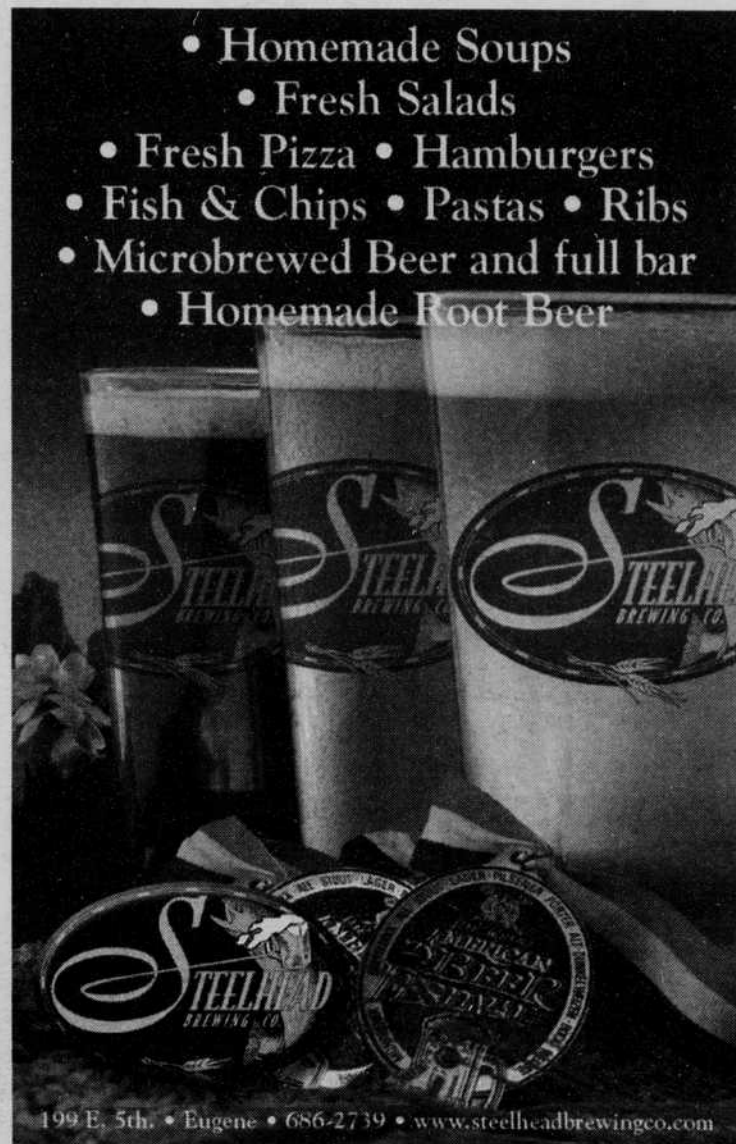
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