

■ In my opinion



RYAN NYBURG
BUDGET RACK

Mediocrity the norm in American pop culture

"I thought you didn't like popular stuff."

You would be surprised at how often I hear this. It's the sort of uninformed assumption people make when they haven't bothered to really get to know a person. There are a few easy categorizations that people have, and apparently it's simpler to fit me into one of them than it is to just ask me what my preferences are.

Either people think I'm some kind of pop culture Luddite, bemoaning any music created after 1970 and any film made after 1960, or, even worse, they see me as a artsy hipster, interested only in obscurity and kitsch, believing something only has value if no one else has ever heard of it.

Ugh. I shudder at the image of myself wearing vintage clothing and listening to Italian disco, or whatever wave of obscure is trendy this minute, while I sit at the Indigo District, taking hits of flavored tobacco off my hookah and criticizing Cameron Crowe for being "too Anglo."

I'll be the first to admit I can be a little snobbish about things. But sometimes it's better to be snobbish than it is to be an idiot. I recently began working at a local video store, and let me tell you, nothing will lower your opinion of average Americans more than finding out their rental preferences. Mediocrity is the norm. It often feels like people don't even try to move beyond the familiar. The depression really hits around the eighth phone caller asking if we have any copies of "Hitch" in ("Oh you mean that film about people with perfect lives and their piddly relationship problems? Yeah, we've got some of those.")

But this doesn't mean I don't like things because they're popular. I just don't like things that are boring and stupid. So much of what becomes popular does so by being so inoffensively middle-of-the-road that it appeals to the broadest number of people. Most popular music, popular literature and popular films make me drowsy. I find sitting through the same themes and plots and sounds over and over again to be a rather insufferable act. Popularity is a symptom of mediocrity, not the cause.

If more popular art was exciting and fresh, I might give it more of a chance. But every time I try I find myself vastly disappointed. I can think of maybe a small handful of television shows I find interesting and most of those will probably be canceled by the end of the year. Every time I check to see what's on the Billboard chart I almost gag at what people are buying (Coldplay? People actually like this dull, narcissistic crap? Some millionaire, who's married to a gorgeous actress, sings about how depressing his life is and people think he's sincere? Aggggh! Brain hemorrhage!)

I don't want quality art to be separate from popular art, but that's the way it so often is. Even the best of what's popular doesn't really do much for me. Never could get interested in

NYBURG, page 11

Parties for Potter

Fans and bookstores around town are readying themselves for the July 16 arrival of their favorite wizard, Harry Potter.

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

With pre-order sales already in the millions, the latest installment of J.K. Rowling's phenomenally popular "Harry Potter" series, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince," is expected to be one of the most popular yet. The series has already sold over 259 million copies worldwide, has been translated into 62 languages and three installments have been adapted to film, with another film expected Nov. 18.

The unprecedented success of the books has made each new release a bookselling event, with large chains and independent stores holding parties for customers in anticipation of the July 16 release. The major chain stores in Eugene, Barnes & Noble and Borders, will be holding events the night before the release that will carry on through midnight when the book goes on sale. Both stores will have readings and games and both plan to stay open until 2 a.m. to make sure as many people as possible get a copy of the book.

"We had close to a thousand people here for the release of the last book,"

Barnes & Noble Community Relations Manager Andrew Kim said. "We expect that many or more this year."

The Barnes & Noble party will begin at 8 p.m., and the Borders party will begin at 9 p.m.

The University Bookstore is also planning its own event for the night of the release, with contests, food and games to keep everyone entertained until the release. The bookstore will also be offering a 20 percent discount on all of its general sale books (textbooks are excluded) during the event, which will run from 8 p.m. until 1 a.m.



BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com

■ Forgotten films

From 'Creepers' to 'Cube' some more recent horror films make the bloody cut

"Frailty," "Jeepers Creepers" and "Cube" show that modern horrors are capable of suspense and story

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

I spend so much time lamenting over the state of modern horror cinema that one might get the impression from reading my articles on the subject that there hasn't been a decent horror film since John Carpenter shed this mortal coil. (OK, I know John Carpenter isn't dead, but judging from his recent output he might as well be.)

But things aren't nearly as bleak as I make them out to be. The good, intelligent horror films are there, but sometimes they get lost in the shuffle or filed away with the rest of the reactionary genre crap. Let's take a look at a few modern horror films that, while not perfect, are at least making steps in the right direction.

'Frailty'

Released in 2001 to some acclaim but quickly forgotten soon after, actor Bill Paxton's directorial debut, "Frailty," was one of the best horror films released that year. The film tells the story of a single father and his two sons. The father begins having visions and believes God wants him to rid the world of demons in human form. He drags his two kids along with him as he kidnaps and murders those he believes are demons. The story is told in flashbacks by one of the sons as an adult, who describes the events to



COURTESY

an FBI agent.

The film is well crafted and beautifully simple in the way it lets the story unfold. This sort of dependence on flashbacks could make the narrative a little tricky, but everything rolls along nicely as the almost-gothic atmosphere builds and builds. The only problem is the ending, which erases some of the ambiguity of the premise and wipes out a lot of the psychological depth.

'Jeepers Creepers'

Next up is a series of films that is even harder to make a case for with some people. The two "Jeepers Creepers" films were passed over by the public and most critics as nothing more than bland genre fare. But a closer look at the films reveals some hidden depth. The first film (2001) opened with a perfectly timed sequence in which a pair of college-age siblings drive along a country road holding a banal conversation. Without warning they are suddenly attacked by a large ugly truck that drives them off the road. The sequence is a practically flawless example of building suspense and sustained shocks. The siblings discover that the driver of the truck is a bizarre creature

For people who are looking for a more intimate atmosphere and an earlier event, Books Without Borders will be holding a morning release party on Saturday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Located inside the Strand, a building that also holds Theo's Coffee House and Cozmic Pizza, Books Without Borders decided to hold the event the day of the release instead of the night before because of a scheduling conflict with one of the other tenants.

"Cozmic Pizza had already scheduled an event on the stage for that evening," manager James Squires said. "It doesn't really matter. We think a morning event might work better for people who don't want to bring their kids downtown in the middle of the night."

Books Without Borders is a recent addition to the Eugene booksellers' community and is operated by Squires and Amelia Reising, former employees of the recently closed independent bookstore The Book Mark. For the "Harry Potter" event, the store is planning to have readings, crafts and prizes. The store has already sold about 40 pre-orders and is expecting 75 to 100 people for the event.

The Strand is located on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Charnelton.

EVENTS MOVIES BOOKS MUSIC

s	m	t	w	th	f	s

Tonight
'80s Night
John Henry's
10 p.m., \$3
'80s dress-up and dance

Friday
Aphrodesia
WOW Hall
9 p.m., \$7
World beat

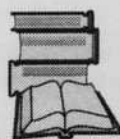
Saturday
Mood Area 52
Sam Bond's Garage
9:30 p.m., \$5
Tango

Sunday
Kung Fu Karaoke
Diablo's/Downtown Lounge
10 p.m., Free
Karaoke and Kung Fu movies



TOP 5 MOVIES

- 1: "Fantastic Four"
- 2: "War of the Worlds"
- 3: "Batman Begins"
- 4: "Dark Water"
- 5: "Mr. & Mrs. Smith"



NEWYORKTIMES BEST-SELLERS

- 1: Janet Evanovich, "Eleven On Top"
- 2: Elizabeth Kostova, "The Historian"
- 3: Danielle Steel, "Miracle"
- 4: Dan Brown, "The Da Vinci Code"
- 5: Su Monk Kidd, "The Mermaid Chair"



BILLBOARD TOP 5

- 1: George Strait, "Somewhere Down in Texas"
- 2: Ying Yang Twins, "U.S.A.: United States of Atlanta"
- 3: Coldplay, "X&Y"
- 4: Mariah Carey, "The Emancipation of Mimi"
- 5: Cassidy, "I'm A Hustla"

ryannyburg@dailyemerald.com