

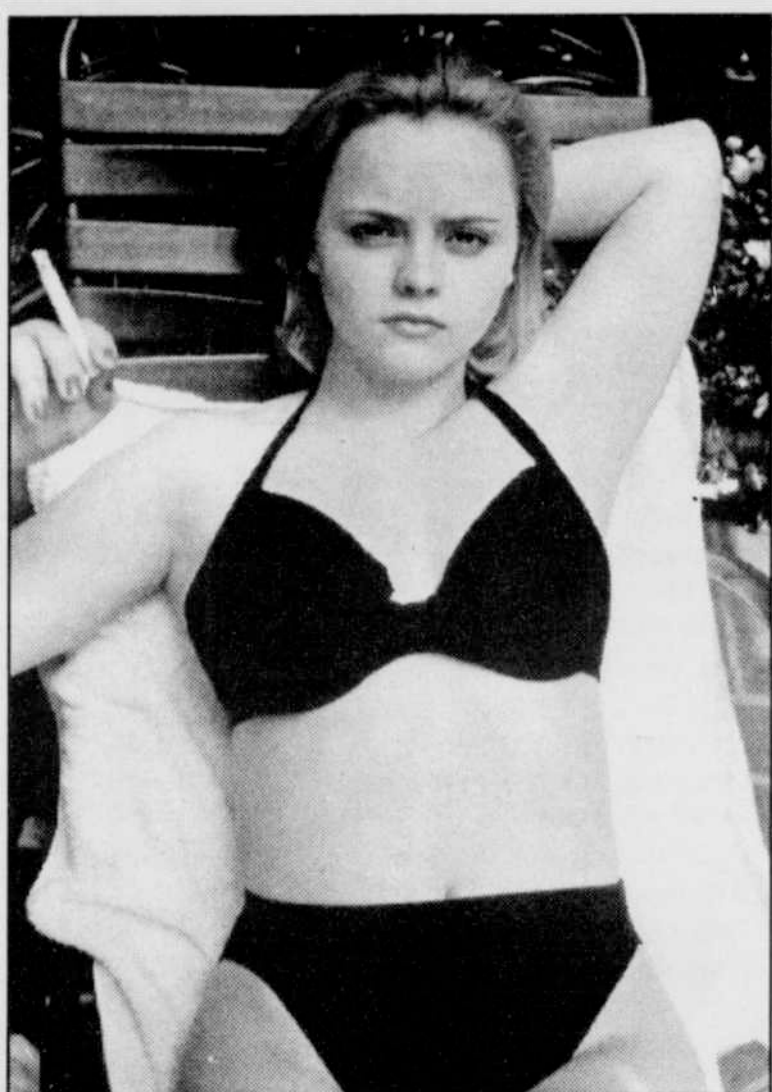
CINEMA

There's a filtration system attached to the first few minutes of *The Opposite of Sex*. It prompts people with delicate sensibilities to leave the theater. Those willing to withstand some offensive lines—in the form of homophobia and AIDS ignorance—are amply rewarded by film's end.

Writer and director Don Roos wrote the offensive lines for the character Dedee Truitt. Christina Ricci as Dedee fills the screen with a vulgar, heartless, unforgivably opportunist, white-trash 16-year-old from a Louisiana bayou. She's wonderful—from a distance.

The other characters in *Sex* don't enjoy the luxury of distance. They have to take a closer look at Dedee once she shows up on gay half brother Bill's affluent Indiana doorstep and commences with her particular brand of havoc.

Bill (Martin Donovan) is welcoming after the estranged Dedee lays on tall tales of mourning following the death of her stepfather and a rift with her mother. One is reminded of the superstition that dictates vampires can only enter one's home if invited: Once

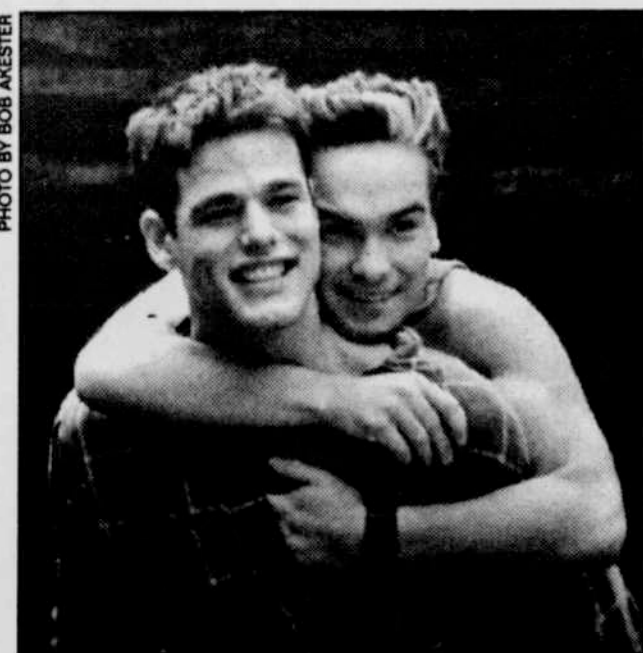


Christina Ricci as Dedee Truitt

Offensive amusement

It starts with a slap, but *The Opposite of Sex* will tickle you thoroughly

BY WILL O'BRYAN



Ivan Sergei (left) and Johnny Galecki

invited, she immediately starts to live off the blood of others. Only Bill's sister-in-law Lucia (Lisa Kudrow), sister of Bill's deceased lover, is leery of Dedee.

Bill's live-in hotty boyfriend Matt (Ivan Sergei), on the other hand, is very trusting. Dedee immediately puts his good nature to good use.

All this, mind you, happens in the first 20 minutes or so. *The Opposite of Sex* doesn't move gracefully, but it sure is fast. It bobs and weaves, twists and turns in surprising, sometimes far-fetched ways. But it holds your interest and, if you get lost, there's always a narrative from Dedee to make sure you haven't fallen off somewhere.

That narrative, Dedee's first person I-know-this-is-a-movie narrative, is a large part of *Sex*'s charm. And those who aren't easily offended and decide to sit still till the closing credits will find that this movie is full of charm. Upon initially meeting the characters, it's easy to think things will end otherwise in this actually very sweet movie.

Lisa Kudrow, for example, is Dedee's bitter

nemesis. Bitter that her brother died; bitter that she's alone; bitter that no one else can see through Dedee's stories. Filling the cynic's shoes grants her the best lines, and she delivers them brilliantly. Neither her small role in *Mother* nor her starring roles in *Romy & Michelle's High School Reunion* and *Clockwatchers* can compare to her presence in *Sex*. Roos' sarcastic humor fits her to a tee.

For all her bitterness, even she falls into the movie's saccharine ending. It's not trite, though. The first three quarters of Roos' film prove that he's no sentimentalist, allowing us to forgive him for pouring it on thickly at the end.

The other actors, especially Donovan, fill out the story, but *Sex* really belongs to Ricci and Kudrow. Each role seems to be a type of metaphor. As Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* used characters as representational icons that now help us perceive a history centuries old, Roos' characters represent certain archetypes that swim through sex and love in our present culture, affected by AIDS, broken families, non-nuclear families, teen pregnancy, right-wing religion and a host of other issues. The pilgrimage represented in *Sex* includes a '90s set of icons: the harlot, the spinster, the pretty boy, etc.

As Donovan is quoted in the movie's promotional materials: "It's really biting satire on America's ignorance, there is a fear of sex and religion—the whole puritanical Calvinistic sexual mish-mash that is '90s America."

Another thing *Sex* can claim to be is very entertaining. Roos' directorial debut, effortlessly carried by his clever, gut-busting script, may be the funniest film this season has to offer.

■ THE OPPOSITE OF SEX opens July 10 at Cinema 21, 616 N.W. 21st Ave. Show times are 7 and 9:10 p.m. nightly, with additional shows at 1, 3 and 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. For more information call 223-4515.

As noir as it gets

A river of lust, pain and betrayal runs through *The Delta*

BY CHRISTOPHER D. CUTTONE

Headlights floating through darkness and the droning sound of tires on pavement; teens and cruisers drifting desperately through the night; a swamp; and a gut-wrenching, pointlessly tragic ending: If you're a fan of Strand Relasing's brand of dark and moody films, you'll dig *The Delta*.

Writer-director Ira Sachs apparently studied at the Jim Jarmusch School of Film. *The Delta* begins disjointedly, with seemingly unrelated scenes setting up the contrasts and conflicts that move the plot. But even after it coalesces, the plot remains largely inscrutable. There is no reason why these things happen. There is little or no commentary encoded in the drama. There is only an uneasiness, a sense of futility.

Recently a friend teased me about the fact—according to her—that all the movies I watch deal with "issues." I was thinking about that as I sat down to watch *The Delta*, which

purports to examine issues of race, class and sexuality in contemporary U.S. society. This film does not, however, actually deal with any issues in the sense of resolving or critiquing or changing the viewers' understanding. It raises a lot of questions in the mind of an intelligent, active viewer, but mostly it just shows things and leaves the analysis to geeks like me.

The story of *The Delta* is an encounter (the production notes call it a "doomed romance," but there is little traditional romance in evidence) between a school-age, upper-middle-class white boy named—of all things—Lincoln (Shayne Gray) and Minh/John (Thang Chan) the older,



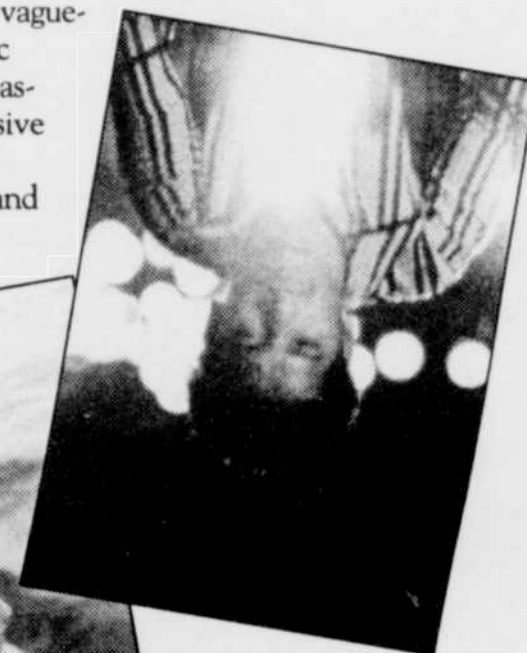
half-Vietnamese-half-African-American guy he picks up late one night at a porn store video arcade. Lincoln is a confused little boy who takes his girlfriend and comfortable wealth for granted; Minh is an utterly disenfranchised immigrant with an attitude problem. The action takes place in Memphis, home of Graceland, reputed bastion of racism, den of iniquity.

Cruising for presumably anonymous sex doesn't suggest romance, but Minh is speaking of love even before he and Lincoln leave the porn shop. He comes across as the clingy leech type, the kind of pickup you hope has an early meeting and can't stay for breakfast. It's unclear what the two men could possibly have in common except a desire for sex, but they neverthe-

less embark on an adventure that could have been the beginning of a relationship if it didn't end so badly.

Minh has been handed the shitty end of the stick all his life. He is a minority in every imaginable way in possibly the worst place one could imagine to be a minority. Furthermore, he commits the worst crime known to (gay) man: He falls in love too easily.

At least he says it's love. One can't help but wonder what his obvious problem is. There's something vaguely psychotic about his passive-aggressive emotional neediness and something



Shayne Gray

cruel about his smile. Lincoln, meanwhile, is exactly the sort of closeted, unformed, malleable naif who would fail to notice the manipulative bent of Minh's professions of love.

One can't help but wonder, too, what Lincoln sees in Minh other than a way out of the closet, for a night at least. Lincoln's cultural capital—his whiteness, youth, good looks, money—is what attracts Minh, but the equation doesn't work in reverse. Minh's differences are exotic and therefore erotic, I suppose, for a rebellious teen. And then there's the sex.

Strangely, it's unclear whether the two actually do it or just talk all night.

Morning finds the star-crossed lovers in a swamp and the story descends into betrayal, violence and desertion. A conflict arises and Lincoln, not surprisingly, runs away to save himself, leaving Minh to get screwed again by the Man. Minh's retaliation, though shocking, is misguided and ineffectual. He turns his rage on an innocent bystander because he cannot reach the object of his anger. Perhaps he has at last learned the ways of the dominant culture.

The Delta presents a world of harsh, white electric lights cutting through blackest night. The tension created by the visual contrast is channelled into the plot but, in this fucked-up modern world, has no place to go until it explodes through the path of least resistance, destroying any sense of justice and obliterating any hope for deliverance.

■ THE DELTA runs at Cinema 21, 616 N.W. 21st Ave., July 8 and 9. Show times are 7, 8:55 and 10:30 p.m. Call 223-4515 for more information.