

FILMS

The tribe has spoken

Fascinating documentary profiles a real man-eater



Tobias Schneebaum (inset) revisits his tribal ways

KEEP THE RIVER ON YOUR RIGHT

Arising star in the 1950s New York art scene, Tobias Schneebaum decided to leave society and its trappings behind him. Journeying to Peru in 1955, he eventually found his way down a river to a tribe of natives known as the Amerikain. Although he always felt like the tribe was keeping him as some kind of mascot, he nonetheless felt at home in the primitive culture, until one hunting party turned into something deadlier.

When his "friends" attacked another tribe and slaughtered their men, Schneebaum knew he had crossed a threshold, but it wouldn't be his last. After taking part in a cannibalistic dinner, he stole out of the village, intending never to return.

The amateur anthropologist still didn't feel at ease in polite society, however, so he departed for New Guinea (now Indonesia) in the 1970s. There, he was adopted by another tribe—this one noncannibalistic—and discovered homosexuality was not just accepted but commonplace. Although he found a lover for a time, he eventually left the Asmat as well, returning to the "civilized" world.

Keep the River on Your Right (playing through April 26 at Cinema 21) is the award-winning documentary about Schneebaum's latest journeys into the wilds. The frail 78-year-old lectures at museums and on tourist cruise ships that travel to Indonesia.

The filmmakers (brother and sister David

Shapiro and Laurie Gwen Shapiro) press Schneebaum to return to the land of the Asmat, where he is reunited with his former lover. Later, against his protestations, the crew wheedles the artist into returning to Peru to face the ghosts of his memories.

As presented in the film, Schneebaum is a fascinating study in contrasts. As clips from old programs such as *The Mike Douglas Show* reveal, he was as candid about his homosexuality as he was about his brief cannibalism. Having written several books about his experiences—including a children's book!—he is comfortable with his story in front of the camera; it is when forced by the filmmakers to reunite with his past lovers and tribespeople that the resolve and disarming practiced patter disappear.

Keep the River on Your Right is a well-produced documentary that peels back the cover on one man's fascinating life. It allows Schneebaum—and the audience—to feel the love that transcends race, class and culture and to confront the nightmares of past actions. In total, it proves the old saying "You can never go home again" is untrue; he returns to "our" world and his life, but the cultural experiences of his past always will be with him. —Andy Mangels

NICO AND DANI

From the moment teen-age Nico (Jordi Vilches) comes on screen, his limbs impossibly skinny, his chest concave—hell, he makes Calista Flockhart look fat—he is off-putting. He unsuccessfully tries to charm an older woman on the train to a small Spanish village where his friend Dani (Fernando Ramallo, looking like a much-younger Ryan Phillippe) lives, then brags to Dani that his large Adam's apple shows women he's well-endowed.

Dani goes along with Nico's strutting attempts to get laid before his 17th birthday (that's right, both boys are 16 and look it), but it soon becomes clear that Dani isn't interested in either of the two local girls Nico tries to romance. Dani is more interested in "krampack," the original title of the film, meaning mutual masturbation, and he ups the ante one evening with oral sex.

As the lazy summer moves on, Dani becomes more and more obsessed with keeping Nico for himself. When his attempts to undermine his friend's first heterosexual

encounter fail, Dani instead sets his sights on a gay writer friend of his father's.

To put it bluntly, *Nico and Dani* (playing April 27 to May 3 at Cinema 21) often made my skin crawl, largely because of its awkwardly young cast. Although I'm not blind to the idea that teen boys are experimenting with each other all over the world, seeing that experimentation on screen—with the skeletal Nico as part of it—was not something I ever wanted in my frame of vision. Much jest has been made in the media about twentysomethings playing teens on *Dawson's Creek* and other shows, but let me just say that seeing actual teens with their hormones raging felt uncomfortably like kiddie porn (even without much on-screen nudity).

As a film, *Nico and Dani* has no obvious flaws.



Nico (left) and Dani—growing up is hard to do

Technically, it's well-made, and several of the actors acquit themselves nicely (although the subtitles distract from the acting). Lots of exceptional vistas take advantage of the rural Spanish countryside. And the final message of the film is positive and doesn't seem likely for any U.S. film.

However, for me, the positives in the film were far outweighed by the negatives. *Nico and Dani* might appeal to some audiences, but I'm not sure I'd be comfortable ever seeing it again. —AM

HIT AND RUNWAY

Christopher Livingston's *Hit and Runway* (scheduled to open April 27) works the tried and true *Odd Couple* formula, throwing together a stereotypically macho but dumb Italian guy and a stereotypically smart but nerdy Jewish gay man who never would've had anything to do with each other were it not for

the coincidences and ulterior motives that lead them to collaborate on a screenplay.

Alex Andero (Michael Parucci) is a twentysomething who works at his family's deli and dreams of writing a hit movie. He flounders at his screenwriting night class, where the teacher sneers at his incoherent action film ideas. Elliot Springer (Peter Jacobsen) is a struggling thirtysomething playwright who has an overpowering crush on young 'n' sexy Joey (Kerr Smith of *Dawson's Creek*), an actor who works at the deli.

Horn-rimmed, underconfident Elliot somehow musters the chutzpah to present a copy of his play, *Chicken of the Sea*, to Joey in hopes of getting the cutie to star in it and maybe "collaborate" with its author. Joey couldn't care less, but when Alex is called upon to develop *Hit and Runway*, an action script set in the modeling world that he's pitched but can't possibly flesh out, he comes across *Chicken of the Sea* and picks Elliot, sight unseen, to be his writing partner.

Alex overcomes intellectual Elliot's aversion to his idiocy by hooking him up with Joey, who as it turns out has a fetish for Jewish men.

A twisting and turning series of mishaps and heartbreaks ensue; at the end, everyone is happier, wiser, more enlightened and not much the worse for wear.

Livingston and co-writer Jaffe Cohen clearly intended to create a sweet, humorous story demonstrating that straight guys and gay guys can overcome inherent differences and get along, finding romantic and career fulfillment in their own ways. Unfortunately, the film rides so high on its anti-stereotype, anti-Hollywood horse, all the while indulging in easy profiling—Alex could be a minor, hapless *Sopranos* character, while Elliot is written as a superficial, hand-wringing Woody Allen clone—and simple-minded story contrivances, it's hard not to be disappointed with its frequent hypocrisy.

An added burden is the stilted way many of the scenes play, as if they'd been blocked with a laugh track in mind. The film could've been better enjoyed without the pretensions. Although superior to its most immediate predecessor, 1997's *Kiss Me, Guido*, Livingston and Cohen obviously consider it a serio-comic work of art with *Annie Hall* aspirations, when in reality it's more on par with a passable *Friends* episode. —Christopher McQuain

ANDY MANGELS is a longtime Portland entertainment writer who finds it humorously ironic that aged men discussing their cannibalistic past is more interesting than preteen sexuality. You can write him at AMangelsSW@aol.com.

CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Portland-based writer and tireless observer of pop culture.

Acapulco's Gold NW
Portland's BEST Margarita
Over 30 Tequilas!

2610 NW Vaughn St.
503-220-0283
ample parking

FUSION Join the Blend
Restaurant • Retail
eclectic food, wine,
& furnishings
4100 S.E. Division • 233-6950

5:30 to 9 pm Tues-Thurs
5:30pm-10pm Fri-Sat
Lounge open late
Fri & Sat

Chameleon
RESTAURANT & BAR

2000 NE 40th (2 blocks North of Sandy)
503/460-2682 Private parties & catering available

An Eclectic Menu
Ranging from Italian to Thai

Springwater Grill

1/2 Off
Entree w/ purchase of
equal or greater value

RibEye Steak • Pesto Chicken
Bowtie • Pork Loin Medallions
Ellensburg Lamb Rack • Crab Cakes
Pan Seared Salmon • Oven Roasted Chicken

Reservations & Coupons Required
6716 SE Milwaukie Ave • 503.232.2442