

GROUPS

So you want to be a film critic?

Group of guys gab about gay cinema

BY PETER ZUCKERMAN

The men pick up their forks and stab at their food. Facilitator Tom Ruckman sits apart at a table he seems to have converted into a desk. He grabs a piece of paper and reads the ground rules.

"No violence, verbal or physical.... Whenever we disagree, even strongly, we express ourselves with mutual respect."

When he reads this, I scoot forward on my seat. I'm checking out Men's FilmTalk, and we're in a private room at a Portland restaurant.

I scan the place. There's only one exit, partially obstructed.

These men might be flammable. I'm ready to bolt if they get in a fistfight over Rupert Everett.

Ruckman introduces the two panelists du jour: a retired Lewis & Clark professor and a licensed nurse. They summarize the film *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, place it in a historical context, tell us about the actors and the genre, and give a brief review.

Discussion opens to the floor. Conversation twists and turns, swinging from the symbolism of a stallion to the social implications regarding the Vietnam War to "I loved the scene where they held hands."

One man seems more interested in listening. When Ruckman asks his opinion, he replies simply, "I liked it."

Another man chooses his words with tweezers. "You guys are pulling the wings off a butterfly or at least a beautiful moth," he complains, then



La Liz isn't thrilled with the reflections hubby Marlon sees in his golden eyes

elaborates on how great he thinks the film is.

An academic focuses on how *Reflections* compares to the book. Another guy likens it to *Billy Elliot*.

One critic discusses the film on purely emotional terms. Someone else thinks it is too much of a soap opera, and yet another person hasn't seen it and decides now he definitely won't.

At meetings of Men's FilmTalk, "There's no

right or wrong opinion," explains Ruckman, who founded the group. "And I keep it so no one is put down for what he thinks. I'm pleased when we end up with a split where we disagree. That's when FilmTalk really does its job."

Men's FilmTalk functions like a book club. Each man views the movie at his own convenience, then the group discusses it together.

Most attendees have seen only some of the films. Other shows they discuss the night I'm there include

The Sun of Us and *Maurice*.

Among the 20 or so gay men who gather around the table are an English as a second language teacher, an undergraduate biology major and a pianist. Most of them know each other by name, but a few are new to the group.

The laughter, arguments, irrelevant and amusing anecdotes, and civil conversation continue for about two hours. The men discuss two

films for about 45 minutes each then mention and briefly review other movies.

Although such a conversation could become too chaotic and random, Ruckman and the panelists keep it focused by posing questions. He also provides a program giving time guidelines.

For example, each panelist has about three minutes to describe and review the movie. When the group is large, Ruckman breaks the discussion into more intimate groups of three to eight men.

Men's FilmTalk also serves a social function. "It opens up potential for friendships to develop," one regular attendee remarks.

Love relationships might have blossomed within the group, but Men's FilmTalk functions more as a friendly discussion forum than a hookup place. Ruckman says it's a way to get together with people who have something in

common in a nonthreatening, comfortable atmosphere.

You don't have to be a cinema buff or an expert critic to enjoy the discussion. Men's FilmTalk is part of the Speak to

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Your Brothers program of Cascade AIDS Project.

Monthly meetings start 7 p.m. at Old Wives' Tales, 1300 E. Burnside St. Films to be discussed July 12 include *Boys to Men*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Maurice* and *Dog Day Afternoon*. ☐

For more information about MEN'S FILMTALK call 503-220-0618 or e-mail mensfilmtalk@home.com.

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