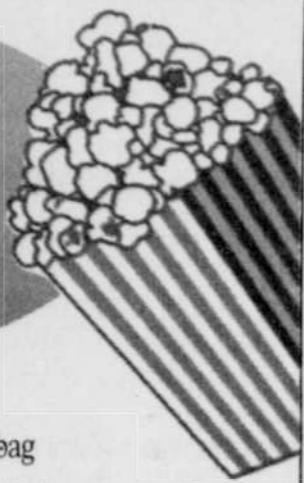




# What's Poppin'?

What's popped and what's flopped, in a theater near you.



ALI

You know what it's like when you return from the video store with the wrong movie? That's how this boxing biopic made me feel. "Wait a minute, I didn't rent *Malcolm X*, *The Hurricane* and *When We Were Kings*!" Yet all three of those movies covered similar material much better than director/co-writer Michael Mann ever could. Great performances are wasted in his narrow yet interminable focus on a life story that has yet to reach its final chapter.

—Jim Radosta

A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Russell Crowe gives another Oscar-worthy performance as a brilliant mathematician who overcomes schizophrenia to win the Nobel Prize. Ed Harris plays a government official who needs to borrow this tortured cranium to crack Commie codes, and Jennifer Connelly is stunning as the supportive wife. Director Ron Howard uses clever techniques to help us understand the couple's suffering.

—JR

BLACK HAWK DOWN

Director Ridley Scott succeeds at convincing us war is hell but fails in providing any context for a botched 1993 mission in Somalia—with the exception of a cigar-chomping warlord and a few explanatory titles. Of course, considering this is a military movie, the hunks are on parade, including Josh Hartnett, Ewan McGregor and Ron Eldard. Attention!

—JR



Geoffrey Rush in *Lantana*—is he or isn't he?

I AM SAM

I really wanted to like this sappy tearjerker, but the entire experience is excruciating: Am I supposed to laugh when Sean Penn (as a mentally challenged father) says something unbelievably moronic? Am I supposed to swoon when he and Michelle Pfeiffer (as his icy lawyer) start flirting with each other, even though he has the mental capacity of a 7-year-old? No, I cringe.

—JR

LANTANA

This late arrival in the Oscar race shouldn't be missed. Director Ray Lawrence orchestrates a complex cast of couples in writer Andrew Bovell's riveting examination of adultery, trust and deception. When thera-

dud, bottom of the bag

only if you're really hungry

good effort, pass the salt

mmmm, tasty!

get the big tub o' corn

pist Barbara Hershey counsels a gay patient, she begins to get second thoughts about her distant husband, Geoffrey Rush. Is he or isn't he?

—JR

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Possibly affected by overhype and ballyhoo, this epic comes off somewhat disappointing. Dialogue is unoriginal, characters are predictable, and three hours is half an hour too much. But as a simple adventure story it mostly delivers. Beautiful, rolling hills; stunning Middle-Earth architecture; scary half-dead guys in black; extraordinarily cute hobbits. And, of course, the effects are mesmerizing (best giant octopus ever). Our friend Sir Ian McKellen is smashing as the wizard Gandolf. If you can get past all the female characters (two) as pale, waifish tokens of goodness and romance, it's worth a matinee.

—Lisa Bradshaw

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

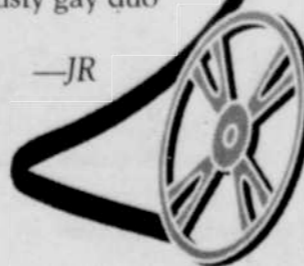
I'm not a big fan of the Coen brothers, so this is high praise. Billy Bob Thornton redeems himself after *Bandits* with a pensive performance as a quiet barber in this quirky film noir. Jon Polito adds comic relief as a "pansy" con artist who makes an inappropriate pass at Thornton.

—JR

OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Director Steven Soderbergh (*Traffic*) continues his winning streak and completes 2001's solid Thief Trilogy: *The Score*, *Heist* and this remake of the 1960 Rat Pack caper. For gay audiences, what could be more appealing than a film united George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon? Also, Elliott Gould plays a fruity con man, and no Vegas flick would be complete without a cameo from the ambiguously gay duo Siegfried & Roy.

—JR



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