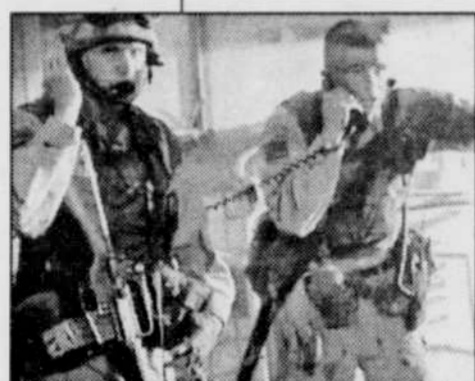




BLACK HAWK DOWN

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!

—Jim Radosta



The hunks are on parade in *Black Hawk Down*

Downstairs at the McCordle country estate when guests arrive with servants in tow. But when Sir William is murdered, whodunit? Stephen Fry is memorable if a bit too bumbling as a police inspector, and Emily Watson is Oscar-worthy as a dexterous maid. There's a rich feminist

theme and a delightful peppering of homo-eroticism, but the whole thing ends a bit too quickly, allowing nice memories but a feeling of being rushed out the door.

—Lisa Bradshaw

40 DAYS AND 40 NIGHTS

A promising premise turns tiresome in this romantic comedy about a sex fiend (Josh Hartnett) who gives up all forms of nookie—including masturbation—for Lent. Glenn Fitzgerald (the "ex-gay" contestant in *Series 7*) plays a conniving co-worker who takes wagers on how long the abstinent addict can hold out. Will he get the girl (captivating newcomer Shannyn Sossamon) in the end? You can bet on it.

—JR

GOSFORD PARK

Subtle metaphor and dry wit carry Robert Altman's 1930s period piece. It's *Upstairs*,

IN THE BEDROOM

Todd Field's dark, stoic drama—misrepresented in Miramax's relentless ad campaign as some sort of stalking thriller—is overhyped, but its flawless execution is unquestionable. Rather than the expected criticism of small-town mores, Field and screenwriter Robert Festinger reveal the disturbing ferocity underlying familial relations with sharply contrasted maternal (Sissy Spacek) and paternal (William Mapother) instincts. Spacek's performance fully warrants her deafening acclaim and almost certain Oscar win.

—Christopher McQuain

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

MONSTER'S BALL

A heartbreaking, incendiary, passionately erotic drama involving a racist cop (Billy Bob Thornton) and the widow (Halle Berry) of a black inmate he helped execute. The unlikely twosome become, through a tortuous chain of events, romantically involved. Some situations and resolutions seem a bit pat and contrived, but under Marc Forster's sharp direction, the pacing and performances are spot-on.

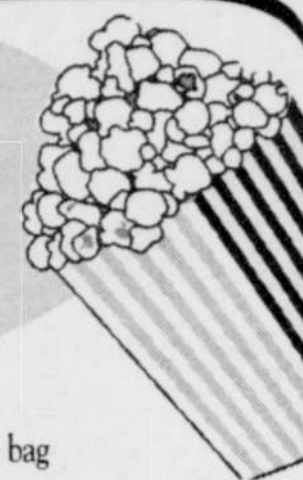
—CM

PANIC ROOM

In the "for what it is" category: For what it is—an action suspense thriller, basically—*Panic Room* is a success. Director David Fincher (*Seven*, *Fight Club*) offers the usual showy, technophilic camera tricks, and it's filmed in his patented slick, dark Dank 'n' Damp-ovision (which actually does benefit the story). We also get to see Jodie Foster display the fiercest

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☹ dud, bottom of the bag

☹☹ only if you're really hungry

☹☹☹ good effort, pass the salt

☹☹☹☹ mmmm, tasty!

☹☹☹☹☹ get the big tub o' corn

maternal instincts this side of Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

—CM

THE SON'S ROOM

Italian auteur Nanni Moretti won the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for this affecting story of a healthy, happy family coping with the inexplicable death of a child. Like *In the Bedroom*, it rises above the family-drama fray through restraint in pacing and performance. Include *You Can Count on Me*, and this sort of perceptive, cheese-free clarity and integrity almost seems like a trend. If so, let's thank the cinema gods and ask them to keep it coming.

—CM



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