



DEATH TO SMOOCHY

Like previous Danny DeVito films (*Throw Momma from the Train*, *The War of the Roses*), his latest project brims with inspired lunacy, dark humor and inventive situations. Publicly disgraced kiddie show entertainer Robin Williams plots to destroy his successor, Smoochy (Edward Norton, brilliant as always), who meanwhile attempts to reform the corrupt and dangerous world of children's entertainment. Harvey Fierstein's amusing appearance as a charity fund racketeer is not the only "gay theme" here.

—Kevin Moore

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.

—Christopher McQuain

IRIS

Kate Winslet actually seems to channel Iris Murdoch as a young woman despite writer/director Richard Eyre's determination to bland down the eccentric, brilliant bisexual

ual novelist and her writer husband, John Bayley (Jim Broadbent and Hugh Bonneville), into tiresomely "serious" movie subjects. Judi Dench as the older Murdoch is fine but wasted, as Eyre's middlebrow sensibility precludes much of interest in favor of a predictable, Lifetime-movie Alzheimer's storyline.

—CM

KISSING JESSICA STEIN

Two attractive women find love in the personal ads, but can essentially straight girls become gay? What could have been a homophobic embarrassment isn't in this adaptation by Jennifer Westfeldt and Heather Juergensen of their stage play. Fortunately the pair insisted on playing the leads, too, which is largely why this film is so darn endearing.

—Lisa Bradshaw

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.

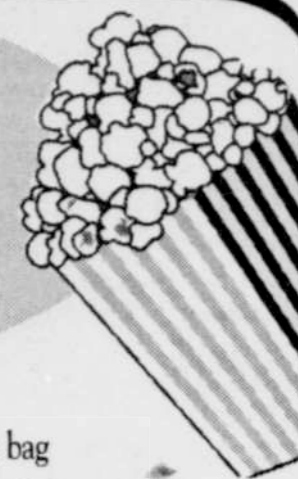
—CM

PANIC ROOM

In the "for what it is" category: For what it is—an action suspense thriller, basically—*Panic*

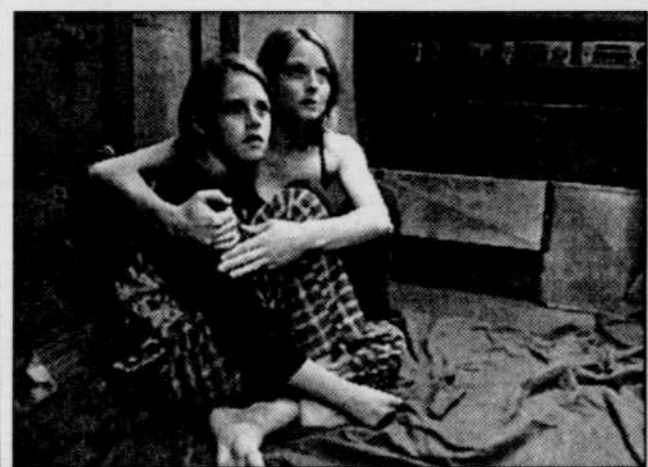
What's Poppin'?

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



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

—CM



Jodie Foster and her baby-dyke daughter kick ass in *Panic Room*

THE SON'S ROOM

Italian auteur Nanni Moretti won the Palme D'Or at 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

- ☹️ dud, bottom of the bag
- ☹️☹️ only if you're really hungry
- ☹️☹️☹️ good effort, pass the salt
- ☹️☹️☹️☹️ mmmm, tasty!
- ☹️☹️☹️☹️☹️ get the big tub o' corn

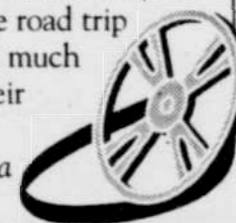
through restraint in pacing and performance. Include *You Can Count on Me*, and this sort of perceptive, cheese-free clarity and integrity almost seems like a trend. If so, let's thank the cinema gods and ask them to keep it coming.

—CM

Y TU MAMA TAMBIEN

Using storytelling quirks similar to those in *Amélie*, director/co-writer Alfonso Cuarón somehow achieves the impossible: A teen sex comedy that actually shows sex. A buddy movie in which one friendship's limits truly are put to the test. A coming-of-age road trip where the characters arrive in a much different place by the end of their journey. Don't miss it.

—Jim Radosta

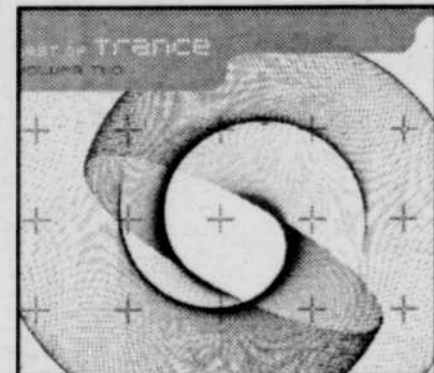


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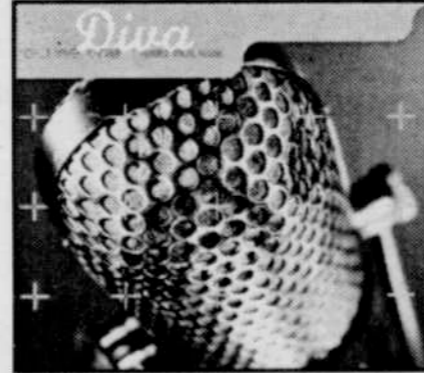
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