

☼☼☼ 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

☼☼☼ HOLLYWOOD ENDING

No surprises here; it's vintage Woody Allen. He's a neurotic New York hypochondriac whose filmmaking career is essentially over. His producer ex-wife (the ravishing Téa Leoni) wants to help him make a comeback with a new script, but, alas and alack, her new fiancée (Treat Williams) runs the studio and can't stand him. The question is, who could? Tired is the notion that beautiful young women would continue to fall for this annoying old man. Still, he's hilarious and so is the film.

—Lisa Bradshaw

☼☼☼ 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.

—LB

☼☼☼ LANTANA

Director Ray Lawrence orchestrates a complex cast of couples in writer Andrew Bovell's riveting examination of adultery, trust and deception. When therapist Barbara Hershey counsels a gay patient, she begins to get second thoughts about her distant husband, Geoffrey Rush. Is he or isn't he?

—Jim Radosta



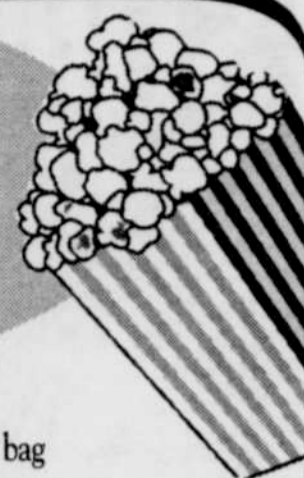
Oh my gosh, an embarrassing social situation! *Hollywood Ending* is vintage Woody.

☼☼☼ PANIC ROOM

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

# What's Poppin'?

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



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

—Christopher McQuain

☼☼☼ TREMBLING BEFORE G-D

Sandi Dubowski's must-see documentary, which runs only through May 5 at Hollywood Theatre, follows the extremely varied lives of a group of lesbian and gay Orthodox Jews, each with a unique experience of the grossly unfair struggle and suffering that occurs when an individual's sexuality is pitted against faith. These stories, in their realness, are as painful as they are compelling; not everyone gets a happy ending, but everyone in front of Dubowski's camera earns our empathy.

—CM

☼☼☼ WORLD TRAVELER

In order to work, an unoriginal idea needs a unique spin. Writer/director Bart Freundlich tries quirky ensemble characters in this film about an unsettled husband and father on a road trip to "find himself," but they're not quirky enough to save

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

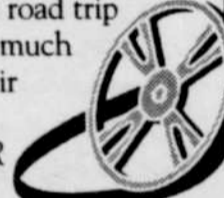
the script. *World Traveler* is predictable, is too long and never works up the sympathy for the protagonist you get the feeling you're supposed to have. Freundlich did cast his lover, the inimitable Julianne Moore, though, which helps—a lot.

—LB

☼☼☼ 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.

—JR



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