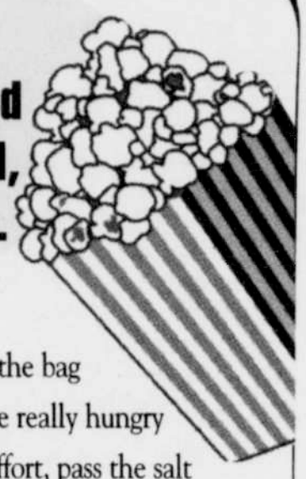
What's Poppin'?

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



dud, bottom of the bag

only if you're really hungry

good effort, pass the salt

mmmm, tasty!

get the big tub o' corn

About Schmidt

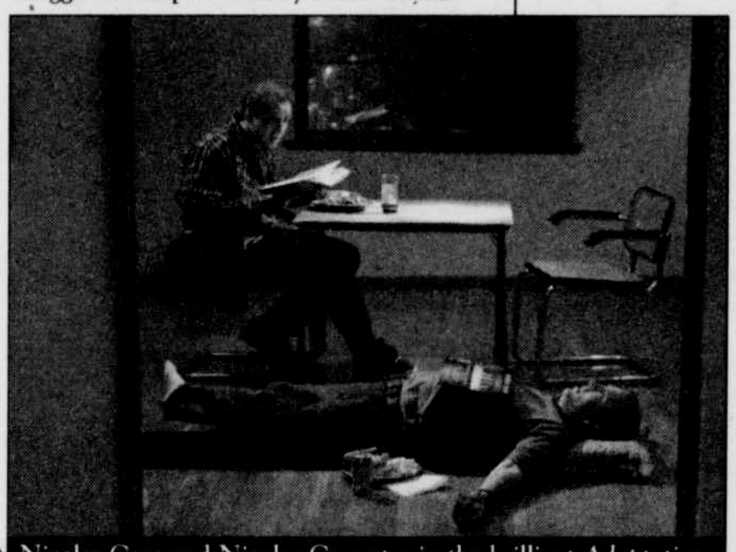
Jack Nicholson turns in another award-worthy performance in this hilarious yet poignant dramedy by writer/director Alexander Payne (*Election*) about a widower who tries to convince his daughter (Hope Davis) not to marry a loser (Dermot Mulroney) while he fights off the advances of the fiancé's hippie mother (Kathy Bates).

—Jim Radosta

Adaptation

The guys behind *Being John Malkovich* have done it again. Nicolas Cage portrays real-life screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who struggles to adapt a book by Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep) about orchid thief John Laroche (Chris Cooper). In steps his twin, Donald, a hack who ruins the script by inserting the lame gimmicks he learns from a belligerent teacher (Brian Cox). Pure genius.

—JR



Nicolas Cage and Nicolas Cage star in the brilliant *Adaptation*

Catch Me if You Can

This breezy biopic tells the fascinating story of '60s con man Frank Abagnale Jr. (Leonardo DiCaprio, mercifully clean-cut after his scruffy appearance in *Gangs of New York*) and the FBI agent he eludes (Tom Hanks, thankfully tapping into his vast talent as a character actor). Director Steven Spielberg seems to have his mojo back; maybe that *Goldmember* cameo did the trick?

—JR

Chicago

It's hard to go wrong when you put Catherine Zeta-Jones, Renée Zellweger and the bold and brassy Queen Latifah in such close proximity. Make the first two smarmy, sultry murderesses and the latter their brassy, busty prison warden, and you've got a hit on your hands even without the perfectly adapted Broadway score and a refreshingly hilarious Richard Gere as the sleazy lawyer. Director Rob Marshall has previously done TV, but this ought to secure his spot in Hollywood.

—Lisa Bradshaw

Narc

Joe Carnahan wrote and directed this tight drama about two morally ambiguous police officers (Jason Patric and Ray Liotta, both excellent) investigating the murder of a fellow cop. Strong performances, shocking twists and uneasy answers keep the familiar territory captivating.

—JR

Nicholas Nickleby

Writer/director Douglas McGrath (*Emma*) whittles the Charles Dickens classic down to a simple two-hour treat about a charming young man (Charlie Hunnam of the U.K. *Queer as Folk*) who befriends a disabled orphan (Jamie Bell of *Billy Elliot*). Homoerotic subtext aside, the cast is full of "family" (Nathan Lane and Alan Cumming) and "friends" (Barry Humphries, aka Dame Edna).

—JR

Scarlet Diva

Asia Argento, daughter of famed goremeister Dario, makes a strong showing as crazed star Anna Battista, dipping in and out of a series of dreamy, sometimes nightmarish, demimondes as she promotes her international epic, *Cleopatra's Death*. A highlight is an unexpected, red-hot lesbian tryst, but don't blink or you'll miss it.

—Gary Morris

25th Hour

Even when he's not directing his own script, old habits die hard for Spike Lee. He injects a series of distractions—obnoxious editing, unnecessary 9/11 references and a racist, homophobic tirade against New Yorkers—in this otherwise disturbing drama about a yuppie drug dealer (Edward Norton) experiencing his last day of freedom before serving a seven-year jail sentence.

—JR

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Pleather Costume Contest
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