



ARARAT

The uniquely talented Atom Egoyan created cool yet moving studies of interpersonal relationships and environment—encompassing queer characters with a rare sensitivity and subtlety—in 1991's *The Adjuster* and 1994's *Exotica*. He attempts the same in *Ararat*, a sprawling ensemble piece involving the production of a film about Turkey's genocide of its Armenian citizens in the early 20th century. Sadly, despite occasional glimmers of inspiration, Egoyan's reach exceeds his grasp here; the film's overcrowded, incoherent feel renders it a noble failure.

—Christopher McQuinn

BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE

What a shame Queen Latifah follows her Oscar-nominated turn in *Chicago* by portraying a convict who loosens up a white lawyer (Steve Martin) while he tries to clear her record. Meanwhile, she has to deal with his filthy colleague (Eugene Levy), racist neighbor (Betty White) and conservative client (Joan Plowright, who gets stoned in one of the film's few amusing moments).

—Jim Radosta

CONFESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND

George Clooney makes a strong directorial debut with this loopy biography of *Gong Show* host Chuck Barris (Sam Rockwell), who says the CIA recruited him as an assassin during

the 1970s. This far-fetched claim is handled with brilliant ambivalence by ultra-creative screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (*Adaptation*).

—JR

THE GURU

This campy comedy—about an Indian immigrant who poses as a spiritual sexpert—has plenty of queer appeal: Adorable star Jimi Mistry played a gay doctor on the U.K. soap *EastEnders*, it was directed by Daisy von Scherler Mayer of *Party Girl* fame, and the musical sequences are jubilantly choreographed. Still, the formulaic script fails to consistently channel all of the potential talent on hand.

—JR



The gorgeous *Russian Ark* was shot in one amazing 90-minute take

RUSSIAN ARK

Director Alexander Sokurov takes us on a dreamy journey through Russian history,

art and the spirit of a long-buried empire's tragic, resilient people. Moving fluidly through time and space to an elegiac conclusion, *Russian Ark* was, with its huge cast and constantly mobile camera, shot in one single, amazing 90-minute take.

—CM

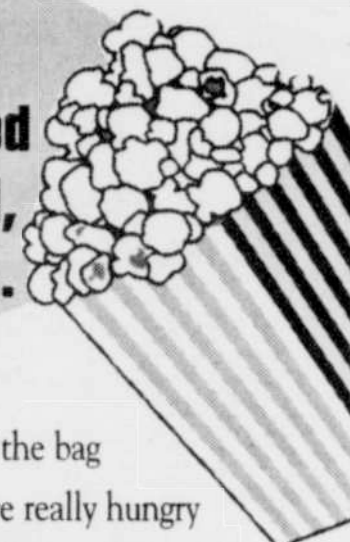
THE SAFETY OF OBJECTS

Queer viewers will be tempted to read the latest from dyke director Rose Troche (*Go Fish*, *Bedrooms and Hallways*) as a cautionary tale about the horrors of heterosexuality. Such a parade of bitter suburban families and their godawful lives you've never seen. Still, the film's episodic style, mostly solid acting and some edgy touches—a boy in love with a doll and a disturbing quasi-molester angle—keep it consistently watchable, even when it's sliding into bathos.

—Gary Morris

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

SPIRITED AWAY

This instant classic by visionary animation director Hayao Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*) follows a young girl who stumbles upon a portal that pulls her into a fantasy world filled with spirits, ghosts and other indescribable creatures. Because the audience experiences this strange land through her innocent eyes, the journey becomes all the more fascinating and unsettling. If this film loses Best Animated Feature to some Disney crap, something is seriously wrong with the Oscars.

—JR



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