



IDENTITY

Don't let the presence of John Cusack, Amanda Peet and Rebecca De Mornay make you think this is any more than a typical horror flick with B-movie twists that have no more shock value than a fair episode of *The Twilight Zone*. Sure, an unseen murderer stalks 10 people stranded by a rainstorm at a remote motel, but don't expect a teen slasher movie, which would have at least shown lots more flesh.

—Timothy Krause

LAUREL CANYON

Dyke director Lisa Cholodenko (*High Art*) puts together another beautiful epistle on sexuality, creativity and responsibility. Frances McDormand is surprisingly perfect as a free-spirited mom whose boundaries are tested when she becomes attracted to her son's fiancée whilst simultaneously boffing a young rock 'n' roller. *Laurel Canyon* is awash in natural light, needed humor and a staunch refusal to judge or simplify.

—Lisa Bradshaw

THE MATRIX RELOADED

The first *Matrix* was revolutionary in its special effects and fairly self-contained as a story.

A knowledge of the first film is essential to *Reloaded*, which is full of sound and fury signifying...something. The film is essentially filled with cool FX sequences followed by quasi-philosophical doublespeak infodump, repeated and repeated until the cliffhanger ending. Effects are nice—sometimes even thrilling—though nothing revolutionary. But the theoretical rhetoric will likely have many audience members uttering a Keanu Reevesesque "Huh?"

—Andy Mangels

A MIGHTY WIND

This folk music spoof from writer/director Christopher Guest (*Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show*) misses a ripe oppor-



Victor Vargas (kneeling) prays for relief from his eccentric family

tunity for satire, especially in light of the country's recent resurgence of peaceniks. At least Jennifer Coolidge and Fred Willard keep things interesting, stealing every scene they're in.

—Jim Radosta

RAISING VICTOR VARGAS

Writer/director Peter Sollett's charming indie tells the story of a horny teen-ager from the Lower East Side (Victor Rasuk) pursuing an independent girl (Judy Marte) while enduring the rants of his conservative grandmother from the Dominican Republic (Altagracia Guzman). Well acted, touching and unbearably realistic.

—JR

THE SHAPE OF THINGS

Writer/director Neil LaBute's (*In the Company of Men*) adaptation of this interesting off-Broadway play is a bit rough—as evidenced by long, rather awkward takes—but the four young actors reprise their stage roles beautifully. Nerdy college student Adam (Paul Rudd) falls in love with edgy art major Evelyn (Rachel Weisz) and begins to change in ways that disturb his friends (Gretchen Mol

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

and Frederick Weller). All four, particularly the feminist Evelyn, are complete stereotypes; still, the confusing and constant feeling of dread works perfectly, and the shocking (if abrupt) ending will keep you awake nights.

—LB

X2: X-MEN UNITED

Feared by mankind, the mutant X-Men must go underground when their home is attacked by a crazed military officer with a plan to wipe out all mutants. The various superpowered characters—both heroes and villains—rally to stop him. There's less gay allegory than in the 2000's *X-Men*, but this is an exciting and intelligent action movie with fine performances and special effects. And lots of tight leather costumes!

—AM



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